

## THE CHRISTIAN POST

# North Korea more afraid of Christians than nuclear weapons, says formerly imprisoned pastor

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Panelists speak in the Senate Dirksen building on Capitol Hill about conditions in North Korea on July 18, 2019. | Photo: The Christian Post

WASHINGTON — A new short documentary film exposes the challenges North Korean Christians have endured in a nation where millions have never even heard the name of Jesus. Despite severely repressive conditions, pastors and scholars are envisioning a new future for the repressed nation.

As the State Department's Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom was held just miles away, the film "[Humanity Denied: Religious Freedom in North Korea](#)" <sup>(14)</sup> from the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission was shown for the first time at the Senate Dirksen building

Thursday. Following the film, a panel of experts spoke on the situation in the Far East country.

"The situation in North Korea is absolutely dire," said Olivia Enos, a policy analyst in Asian studies at the Heritage Foundation, noting that credible reports consistently rank North Korea as the worst place in the world for Christians and anyone of any faith in terms of oppression and human rights violations.

The 2014 Commission of Inquiry Report by the U.N., she noted, explains that North Koreans who escaped to China yet were repatriated were asked two questions, namely, if they had any contact with South Koreans or if they interacted with any Christian missionaries. If they answered yes to either of those questions they faced severe repercussions like torture and imprisonment.

"This is emblematic of what it's like to be a Christian inside North Korea." she said, adding that "it's very telling how the Kim regime conceives of religion in general."

Communist governments are right to fear religion, she added, citing how peaceful religious movements toppled communist regimes in decades past as in Eastern Europe.

"The Kim regime sees religion as potentially threatening to its leadership."

Kenneth Bae, a Korean-American pastor, who was held hostage in North Korea from 2012 to 2014, explained that when North Korean authorities arrested him and found out that he was a missionary, he was told that he was trying to overthrow the North Korean government. For years, Bae had been leading teams into North Korea so they could visit as tourists but pray and worship while in the land.

The North Koreans also told him that if one person came back and started an orphanage and 10 children became Christians, they will only multiply from there and present a threat to the nation.

"They said 'we are not afraid of nuclear weapons ... we are afraid of someone like you bringing religion into our country and use it against us and then everybody will turn to God and this will become God's country and we will fall,'" Bae told the dozens gathered

at the event.

Bae was informed that he was probably the most dangerous American criminal they had ever had since the Korean War. He was sentenced to 15 years of hard labor, and was then sent to a North Korean labor camp. He was ultimately released in 2014.

Pyongyang was once known as the "Jerusalem of the Far East" and had a strong Christian presence, he explained. But today, except for the faith of those few who have been forced underground, most North Koreans have never heard the name of Jesus. In all the hundreds of refugees that he has met, Bae recounted that he never met a single escapee who fled North Korea that had heard of Jesus.

When Bae would talk about Jesus with North Koreans they would ask him if Jesus lives in Korea or China.

"North Korea is not a country where Christians are being persecuted; it is a country [where] Christianity has been eliminated, the total elimination taking place. And if you're Christians, they'll kill you, they'll kill your parents."

The official creed of the North Korean regime is called Juche, which means "self-reliance."

When this philosophy was instituted in the 1960s they deliberately erased the name of Jesus from everything in culture; the reason they did this, Bae surmised, is because the Bible says in John 14 that Jesus is the Way, Truth, and the Life, that no one comes to the Father but through Him. Without Jesus no one can find the truth, the way, or receive life, he said.

The Korean-American pastor is the author of the 2016 memoir *Not Forgotten: The True Story of My Imprisonment in North Korea*<sup>(15)</sup>. Today he leads the Nehemiah One Million Prayer Petition Campaign, an effort to mobilize intercession for the North Korean people.

During his time in the labor camp and after he got to know the prison guards he realized that despite the deep brainwashing they had endured, they were not so different from him. They just happened to have been born in North Korea.

Conservative estimates hold that approximately 80,000 to 120,000 people are presently held in labor and political prison camps inside North Korea, according to Enos.

"Individuals can be sent to these prison camps for something as simple as having read the Bible, having watched a South Korean drama, listened to K-pop. These are average, ordinary things that we as Americans take for granted," she said.

No definitive estimates exist on how many people have died inside North Korean political camps but some believe the number ranges from 400,000 to many millions, Enos elaborated.

Everywhere Bae now goes he encounters people who tell him how they prayed for him while he was in captivity.

"People remembered; you and I had not forgotten you while you were in North Korea and I've not forgotten the people, the 25 million people who have never heard the name Jesus. I will restore them, I will reveal them as my people once again," he said, recounting the words God impressed upon him.

Bae's work involves sending aid and Bibles in bottles of rice sent down the river into North Korea and helping North Koreans escape, including those trapped in sex slavery in China.

"We need to get ready when North Korea opens up. If the North Korean regime suddenly falls, are we ready to have enough Bibles to let them know what is truth and how they can find truth?" he said.


One of his goals is to print 1 million Bibles and get them into North Korea before it collapses, with the aim of distributing a Bible to every single household in Pyongyang, so that it might serve as a blueprint for the rebuilding of their society.

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