

# S. Korea criticizes North's human rights record

Hostile rivals spar over words, rights; 'N. Korea doesn't like to be ignored'

Wed., March. 5, 2008

SEOUL, South Korea - South Korea's new conservative government is already making good on its promise to take a tougher line on North Korea by calling on Pyongyang to improve its widely criticized human rights policies.

The remark was just a single sentence in a speech by a South Korean diplomat at a meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva on Monday. But it represented a major change after a decade in which South Korea largely refrained from criticism of its nuclear neighbor, fearful of upsetting reconciliation efforts.

The South Korean government "calls upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to take appropriate measures to address the international community's concern that the human rights situation in the DPRK has not improved," Park In-kook, Seoul's deputy foreign minister in charge of international organizations and global issues, said in the speech. He referred to North Korea by its formal name.

North Korea struck back the next day, saying Pyongyang had "strong doubt" whether the South remained committed to agreements between the two Koreas from summits in 2000 and 2007.

"South Korea must be held responsible for all the consequences arising out of these irresponsible remarks, which will have negative repercussions on the inter-Korean relations," said Choe Myung Nam, a counselor at the North's diplomatic mission in Geneva.

## **Bitter, deadly rivalry**

The statement in Geneva was welcomed by human rights observers. Kay Seok, Seoul-based researcher for Human Rights Watch, praised the new government's stance and said she hoped it would continue to press the North for change.

The two Koreas have remained technically at war since 1953, when their three-year conflict ended in an armistice that has never been replaced by a peace treaty.

In the decades that followed, the rivalry was bitter and deadly. North Korea tried several times to assassinate South Korean leaders. Propaganda blared from loudspeakers across the no man's land dividing the peninsula, which is patrolled by hundreds of thousands of troops.

But the animosity softened in the late 1990s under the liberal government of Kim Dae-jung, who won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2000 for staging the first summit between the Koreas. His successor, Roh Moo-hyun, followed the same line and met North Korean leader Kim Jong Il in October.

### **Shifting political winds**

But since conservative President Lee Myung-bak took office last week, cooler winds already have started to blow — with the South Korean statement in Geneva the most prominent sign so far.

Lee had wanted to close the Unification Ministry, the main agency handling policy on North Korea that is often criticized by conservatives as too willing to coddle Pyongyang. He was forced to back down in the face of liberal parliament opposition.

Before his Feb. 25 inauguration, Lee also spurned a North Korean offer for talks between officials from both countries, a news report said Wednesday. The North backed off after Lee demanded to know what the meeting would be about, the Dong-a Ilbo newspaper reported.

Even in the realm of sports, the two sides are locked in a dispute over a World Cup qualifying match scheduled this month in Pyongyang, where the North has refused to allow the South Koreans to play their national anthem or fly their country's flag. Seoul says that would violate rules set by international soccer body FIFA, and has asked it to mediate.

### **'North Korea doesn't like to be ignored'**

The moves show South Korea is no longer treating the North as a special case like it previously did, said Michael Breen, a longtime Korea watcher and author of "The Koreans."

"This government sees the North Korea issue as a foreign policy issue — and not even the most important one," he said.

That stance can be expected to provoke a snubbed North Korea to seek ways of getting attention, Breen said. For example, he said Pyongyang could create difficulties at joint tourism or business projects between the Koreas, or even spark small clashes along the countries' borders.

"I think we should brace ourselves because North Korea doesn't like to be ignored," Breen said.

# U.S.: N. Korea agrees to disable nuke programs

*Nation offers first timeline for negotiation, chief U.S. negotiator says*

Mon., Sept. 3, 2007

GENEVA - North Korea agreed Sunday to account for and disable its atomic programs by the end of the year, offering its first timeline for a process long sought by nuclear negotiators, the chief U.S. envoy said.

Kim Gye Gwan, head of the North Korean delegation, said separately his country's willingness to cooperate was clear — in return for “political and economic compensation” — but he mentioned no dates.

Hill, a U.S. assistant secretary of state, said two days of talks between the United States and North Korea in Geneva had been “very good and very substantive” and would help improve chances of a successful meeting later this month with Japan, Russia, South Korea and China in six-nation talks aimed at ending the North's nuclear weapons program and improving relations between North Korea and other countries.

“One thing that we agreed on is that the DPRK will provide a full declaration of all of their nuclear programs and will disable their nuclear programs by the end of this year, 2007,” Hill told reporters, using the initials for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Hill said the declaration will also include uranium enrichment programs, which the United States fears could be used to make nuclear weapons.

“When we say all nuclear programs, we mean all,” he said.

## **North Korea 'happy' with talks**

He said later in response to a question from The Associated Press that it was the first time that North Korea had ever offered a timeline for declaring and disabling its nuclear program.

Kim said, “We agreed a lot of things between the United States and the DPRK. We are happy with the way the peace talks went.”

“We made it clear, we showed clear willingness to declare and dismantle all nuclear facilities,” he said.

The agreement is “very significant, for sure,” said Patricia Lewis, director of the U.N. Institute for Disarmament Research in Geneva, noting that North Korea had allowed U.N. inspectors back into the country and that they could verify what is declared.

“Confidence can increase and we can see whether or not it’s really being shut down,” Lewis said.

Hill declined to say whether the agreement would include more than the plutonium-producing nuclear reactor in Yongbyon, which North Korea shut down in July.

“We have to work out some of the details on that,” Hill told reporters. “We will have a declaration in time to disable what needs to be disabled,” he said, adding that “for example the Yongbyon reactor would have to be included.”

He said he and Kim had discussed a range of issues in their two days of talks at the U.S. and North Korean missions to U.N. offices in Geneva.

Kim said one of those was North Korea’s demand to be removed from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism.

“In return for this we will receive political and economic compensation,” he said. “We wouldn’t be an enemy country anymore.”

Hill said earlier Sunday that improving U.S. relations with North Korea will depend on other progress in the talks, saying it “is a relationship that we will continue to try to build step by step with the understanding that we’re not going to have a normalized relationship until we have a denuclearized North Korea.”

### **Next step comes mid-month**

He said he expected the next full session of the six-nation talks in mid-September would produce a “more detailed implementation plan for ‘disablement.’”

The meeting in Geneva was part of a flurry of “working group” sessions called for in February’s six-nation accord in which North Korea agreed to disable its plutonium-producing nuclear reactor and declare and eventually dismantle all its nuclear activities.

In exchange, the economically struggling North will receive oil and other aid. The U.S., as part of the agreement, promised to begin the process of removing the country from the terrorism list and work toward full diplomatic relations.

Daniel Pinkston, who heads the East Asia Nonproliferation Program at the Monterey, Calif.-based Center for Nonproliferation Studies, said, “I believe they’re going to do it.”

But he said it was important that North Korea declare all the uranium enrichment and plutonium stocks.

Years of tension and deadlock over North Korea’s nuclear program — which peaked with the country’s nuclear test last October — have started to ease in recent months as the talks have made progress.

# N. Korea public executions reportedly on rise

*S. Korean aid group says one man was killed with 150,000 watching*

Mon., Nov. 26, 2007

SEOUL, South Korea - North Korea has resumed frequent public executions, among them a factory chief accused of making international phone calls who was shot in a stadium before 150,000 spectators, a South Korean aid group said Monday.

Public executions had declined since 2000 amid international criticism but have been increasing, targeting officials accused of drug trafficking, embezzlement and other crimes, the Good Friends aid agency said in a report on the North's human rights.

In October, the North executed the head of a factory in South Pyongan province for making international calls on 13 phones he installed in a factory basement, the aid group said. He was executed by a firing squad in a stadium before a crowd of 150,000.

Six people were crushed to death and 34 others injured in an apparent stampede as they left the stadium afterward, the aid group said.

Most North Koreans are banned from communicating with the outside world, part of the regime's authoritarian policies seeking to prevent any challenge to the iron-fisted rule of Kim Jong Il.

The North has carried out four other similar public executions by firing squad against regional officials and heads of factories in recent months, said the aid group.

"It is aimed at educating (North Koreans) to control society and prevent crimes," Good Friends head Venerable Pomnyun said at a news conference.

## **International condemnation**

Good Friends, which did not say how it obtained the information, gave no exact figures of the public executions this year. Some of the group's previous reports of what was happening inside the North have later been confirmed.

The report came a week after a U.N. General Assembly committee adopted a draft resolution expressing "very serious concern" at reports of widespread human rights violations in North Korea, including public executions.

The resolution, co-sponsored by more than 50 countries including the United States and many other Western nations, was sent to the 192-member General Assembly for a final vote.

The North has condemned the draft, saying it was inaccurate and biased.

The communist country insists it does not violate human rights, but it has long been accused of imposing the death penalty for political reasons, holding thousands in prison camps, torturing border-crossers and severely restricting freedom of expression and religion.

# North Korea warns over U.S. drills

Mon March 3, 2008

**SEOUL, South Korea (AP)** -- North Korea threatened to bolster its nuclear deterrent Monday in response to U.S.-South Korean war games, striking a discordant note after a week of cultural diplomacy that raised hopes of warmer ties between Washington and Pyongyang.

"We will explore necessary countermeasures, including further strengthening all deterrents," the North's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. The North, which successfully tested a nuclear bomb in 2006, commonly uses the word "deterrent" to refer to its nuclear weapons program.

While the North's military had previously condemned the war games, which began Sunday and involve tens of thousands of South Korean and American troops, the Foreign Ministry comment represents the highest form of official communication from Pyongyang's reclusive government.

In the statement, carried by the state-run Korean Central News Agency, the ministry said the military maneuvers demonstrate that Washington "is seeking a hostile policy to stifle our republic by force."

The North claims the U.S. wants to invade the communist country, an accusation Washington has repeatedly denied.

The angry reaction followed a week of cultural diplomacy that saw the New York Philharmonic stage an unprecedented concert in Pyongyang -- an event that was billed as a possible means to better relations between the two sides.

But the U.S. has cautioned against overestimating the impact of the performance, saying warmer ties will depend on whether the North keeps its commitments under a nuclear disarmament deal struck last year.

Washington has accused Pyongyang of not fully disclosing its nuclear programs under the agreement reached with the U.S. and other regional partners.

"Nuclear blackmail will not work on us and only put a brake on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula," North Korea said Monday.

The U.S.-South Korean military exercises, scheduled to run through Friday, involve computer-simulated war games and field drills.

About 27,000 American troops, the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier and an undisclosed number of South Korean soldiers were taking part, according to the U.S. and South Korean militaries.

About 28,500 U.S. troops are based in South Korea, a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean War. The conflict ended in a cease-fire, not a peace treaty, leaving the two Koreas technically still at war.

# Radio gives hope to North and South Koreans

Wed February 27, 2008

**SEOUL, South Korea (CNN)** -- It broadcasts only three hours a day. Its on-air reporters use fake names. And its operators don't know for sure whether their target audience is listening.

Free North Korea Radio, based in Seoul, South Korea, broadcasts news of the outside world across the border. It's illegal for North Koreans to listen to anything other than state-run radio, and all legal radios are fixed so they can play only channels approved by the government. But the founder of Free North Korea Radio, Kim Seong Min, believes that more and more North Koreans are secretly tuning in.

Kim is also a defector. A former propagandist for the North Korean army, Kim says he collected an illegal radio on one of his patrols. He was curious, so he tuned in to a South Korean broadcast.

The program centered on the leader of North Korea, Kim Jong Il. He says it was meant to dispel the myths surrounding the leader, including the story of Kim Jong Il's birth. North Koreans were taught to believe that Kim Jong Il was born on Mount Paekdu, considered sacred in Korean history. But the radio program Kim heard that day said Kim Jong Il was born in the Soviet Union. Kim started to doubt everything he was taught to believe, and the more he listened, the more he was convinced that he had to leave the country.

In 1996, Kim says he made a perilous escape by crossing the North Korean-Chinese border, only to be caught by North Korean soldiers while trying to board a ship to South Korea. He was sent back to North Korea but escaped once again by jumping off a train.

For days, Kim says, he hid in the Chinese countryside, eating roots and grass to survive before finally settling in a nearby town. Three years later, he says he made his way to South Korea, where he started Free North Korea Radio in 2004.

"North Koreans need food, but they also need food for their minds, otherwise they will continue to have deformed children, and they will be people with deformed minds," Kim said.

The radio program is three hours, but Kim hopes to expand to five hours daily, broadcasting during the evenings and late at night, when he believes that most North Koreans are able to tune in. But running a radio station is expensive, and FNK Radio relies on donations from South Korean citizens as well as an annual grant indirectly from Washington, through the National Endowment for Democracy.

Though funding is sometimes a struggle, they believe that the broadcast is vital to North Korea because the South Korean government stopped its own radio broadcasts into the country under the "Sunshine Policy" instituted by former President Kim Dae Jung in 1988.

Kim Seong Min is the only North Korean on staff at the radio station who uses his real name. Three of the 15 staffers at FNK Radio are South Korean; the rest are defectors. They use pseudonyms to protect their families who are still living in the North.

One defector who calls himself Kim Dae Sung says he bought a radio on the black market and listened under the covers at night. He didn't want to risk being heard by his family or any neighbors, because they would be required by law to report him to the police.

Kim Dae Sung says that although he was nervous about listening to the radio illegally, he also looked forward every night to being able to hear news of the outside world. He also says he began to realize that everything he was taught was a lie and decided to escape.

He believes that the work he does at FNK radio is helping other North Koreans hear the truth about the world.

"My family is important, but what I'm doing here at the radio station is even more important," he said.

There's no way to determine how many North Koreans are actually listening to FNK Radio, but Kim Seong Min says he receives letters and phone calls almost daily from defectors who say they were able to hear his program through radios bought on the black market.

"When we started, I thought, if just one person, just one North Korean was listening, that would be good enough," Kim said. "But it's not just one person."

Kim believes the North Koreans try to jam their radio signal into North Korea, and says the North Koreans have called him a traitor. If he were ever to go back to his homeland, Kim says, he would receive "the highest punishment" for his work. But he and the other staffers at FNK Radio all believe that it is worth the risk.

That's why, when they receive the messages from defectors, Kim says, they often grab each other and cry.

# U.S. and North Korean negotiators hold nuclear talks

Mar 13, 2008

GENEVA (Reuters) - The United States said on Thursday it was critical to make progress in negotiations on North Korea's nuclear program, which the secretive communist state agreed to abandon under a 2005 deal.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill said he would seek a "complete and correct" declaration disclosing all elements of Pyongyang's nuclear activities during talks with his North Korean counterpart Kim Kwe-Gwan.

"What we are going to try to have is a thorough discussion of the declaration," Hill told reporters ahead of the talks, which began just after midday (1100 GMT) at the U.S. diplomatic mission in the Swiss city.

The United States is offering aid and the easing of U.S. sanctions in return for full cooperation from North Korea which had agreed to abandon its nuclear programs under a September 2005 deal, U.S. officials said ahead of the meeting.

The disarmament-for-aid deal has been stalled by Pyongyang's failure to produce a detailed declaration of its nuclear programs by the end of last year.

"It is pretty critical to get moving on this now. We are 10 weeks late already," Hill told reporters.

Washington wants North Korea to give up its atomic activities, any weapons and related materials before U.S. President George W. Bush leaves office next January.

Its demands for full and accurate disclosure have clashed with Pyongyang's reluctance to discuss any transfers of nuclear technology to other nations, notably Syria, as well as its suspected pursuit of uranium enrichment.

## FLEXIBLE ON FORMAT

"We can be flexible on format but we cannot be flexible on that fact that we need a complete and correct declaration -- we need all the elements there and we need them to be expressed correctly," Hill said.

A senior U.S. official said earlier this week that he believed North Korea would be comfortable with disclosing the proliferation and uranium-related activities in a separate, secret document.

Analysts say this formula could help North Korea save face and advance the stalled talks.

Hill said Washington was prepared to adjust the format "with the understanding that flexibility on format doesn't mean flexibility on getting a complete and correct declaration."

The United States has questions about any possible North Korean role in a suspected Syrian covert nuclear site that was bombed by Israel in September. Syria has denied having a nuclear program but the case remains murky.

A highly enriched uranium program would give North Korea a second source of nuclear-bomb making fissile material in addition to its plutonium-based nuclear facilities.

Under the so-called second phase of the denuclearization agreement, North Korea committed to disable its nuclear facility at Yongbyon, where it has produced plutonium, and to make the "complete and correct" declaration.

The other parties to the pact reached among the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States agreed to provide up to 1 million metric tons of heavy fuel oil or its equivalent.

There has been significant progress in disabling Yongbyon but North Korea has slowed down the process in recent months, arguing the others have delayed keeping their end of the deal.

Hill noted on Thursday that North Korea would have to submit the declaration to the chairman of the six-party talks, China.

# U.S. and North Korean officials to meet on Thursday

Mar 11, 2008

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. and North Korean officials will meet in Geneva on Thursday to try to revive a deal for Pyongyang to disclose its nuclear activities in return for aid and the easing of U.S. sanctions, U.S. officials said.

If Pyongyang were to provide an accurate declaration, the United States could act "in a matter of days" to drop North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism and to ease sanctions under the U.S. Trading with the Enemy Act, said a senior U.S. official who spoke on condition he not be named.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Chris Hill will meet his North Korean counterpart Kim Kye-Gwan to discuss a 2005 deal under which Pyongyang agreed to abandon its nuclear programs, U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters.

The deal, which suffered a severe setback when Pyongyang tested a nuclear device in October 2006, has been bogged down more recently by North Korea's failure to produce a promised declaration of its nuclear programs by the end of last year.

"They are going to be discussing ways to move that process forward. ... We need to try to push forward," McCormack told reporters of the Geneva meeting, saying he did not know if an agreement on the document would emerge after the talks.

A sticking point of the declaration had been Pyongyang's reluctance to discuss any transfers of nuclear technology to other nations, notably Syria, as well as its suspected pursuit of uranium enrichment.

The United States has questions about any possible North Korean role in a suspected Syrian covert nuclear site that was bombed by Israel in September. Syria has denied having a nuclear program but the case remains murky.

A highly enriched uranium (HEU) program would give North Korea a second source of fissile material with which it could produce nuclear weapons in addition to its plutonium-based nuclear facilities.

The senior U.S. official, who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the negotiations, said he believed North Korea is comfortable with disclosing the proliferation and uranium-related activities in a separate, secret document.

"If the North provides what they need to in terms of a complete and correct declaration and what is required on HEU and proliferation, our actions (on sanctions) can occur very much at the same time," he said.

He also said Washington -- which wants Pyongyang to give up its atomic activities, any weapons and related materials before U.S. President George W. Bush leaves office in January -- was heartened by North Korea agreeing to the Geneva talks.

Under the so-called second phase of the denuclearization agreement, North Korea committed to disable its nuclear facility at Yongbyon, where it has produced plutonium, and to make the "complete and correct" declaration.

In return, the other parties to the accord reached among the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States, agreed to provide up to 1 million tonnes of heavy fuel oil or its equivalent.

There has been significant progress in disabling Yongbyon -- U.S. officials say 8 of 11 tasks are completed -- but North Korea has slowed down the process in recent months, arguing that the others have delayed keeping their end of the bargain.

The senior U.S. official said there had been no effort by the other five to delay deliveries of fuel oil or other aid.

The Chinese are giving North Korea coking coal, the South Koreans have provided steel plates to reinforce mine roofs and both countries are providing basic parts for power plants and mines.

"You will find on the South Korean and Chinese side that the (materials) will start to move very quickly now," he said. "The contracts have been let and things are beginning to flow into a pipeline of materials moving to the North."

News of the Geneva meeting came as the United States released its annual human rights report in which North Korea was listed among the worst offenders.

The State Department cited extrajudicial killings, disappearances and arbitrary detention, including of political prisoners, and called North Korea's regime "repressive."