

**STATEMENT OF SUN-OK LEE, FORMER PRISON AND CAMP
SURVIVOR**

Ms. LEE. Chairman Leach, my name is Lee Sun-Ok, who escaped North Korea in search of freedom into South Korea with my son, Choi Dong Chul. Today, I have an opportunity to provide testimony to your Committee, and I thank you very much for such an opportunity.

Before I report to you of my own personal experiences, I wish to cover in summary to help your understanding of the current status of human rights violations in North Korea.

If I describe in one word the status of North Korean human rights, the best concept for Westerners would be that such thing does not exist. The people of North Korea do not even have the term "human rights." And even if they did, they wouldn't know the basis of human rights. They do not understand human rights.

Kim Jong-Il's regime is neither socialism nor communism. Its political system is Kim Jong-Il's own one person, one party political system. In order to maintain his dictatorial regime, he has established numerous political prisons and camps. When the international organizations demand those political prisoners to be freed from those camps and prisons, North Korea's answer is provided in a lie that there are no political prisons or camps.

There are political prison camps in 12 different regions in North Korea. They euphemistically call these political prisons or camps to be reform institutes or reform facilities. And in one facility, one institute, there could be from 6,000 prisoners up to 10,000 prisoners. The biggest one would even have 30,000. The dictatorial regime of Kim Jong-Il unconditionally imprisons those who are critical of his dictatorship. Those who are in the political prisons or the reform institutes number nearly 200,000.

Those who are held at the reform institute or facility are deprived of even the very basic rights as a human being. And they are excluded from demographic statistics in North Korea. So they could be called inhuman human beings. Those who are held in the reform institute or the facility are not free to even talk to each other. And in the case of women, they are prohibited to give birth to babies.

In North Korea, even today, guilt by association is applied and it's a crime. If one member of the family is determined to be put into reform institute, the entire family has to follow him or her to the reform institute. That applied to myself also. Once I was taken to the reform institute, my family, including my husband and son, were expelled from the positions they were holding and put into the camp for forced labor.

Right now, currently, horrible things are taking place in North Korean reform institutes or political prisons and camps unimaginable by the people in the West. In North Korea there is an annual pre-plan for how many people have to be taken into those political prisons and camps. In order to achieve such a quota, innocent people are tortured to make false confessions.

In my case, also, I suffered. I was an innocent person, but I had to suffer 14 months in a secret underground torture room. At that time, I was working as a head of a local material supply center. And my crime was that as the person in charge I was neglectful

of properly dispensing the material under my charge. But Kim Jong-Il was responsible and he was unable to give me the material for my distribution for the local residents.

Suffering these various types of tortures, I lost left side teeth, eight of them. And also on the left side of my face, I still have the facial paralysis as the after effect of the torture.

In the reform institute in Kaechon where I was held, there were 200 women housewives as prisoners. In the case of these women, if any is pregnant, the baby would be killed. If a baby's mom was a political criminal, inside her the baby is the same political criminal. So the seed of a political criminal should not be allowed to be born. That's why the baby was killed inside of her.

I have seen the true scenes of killing babies inside and those babies could be 7-, 8-, 9-months-old. Despite all this, if a baby was strong enough to live on, I saw a medical officer stepping on the baby's neck with his boots once he or she was born. If the mom would cry for help to save her child, it was an expression of dissatisfaction against the party. So such a woman would be dragged out of the building and put to public execution by firing squad.

The North Korean dictator, Kim Jong-Il, is not interested in acquiring any foodstuffs for the people. But he is busy producing ammunition on a huge scale, too much ammunition, that will be used to kill his own people.

At this public execution by firing squad of a weak woman, she was tied to a iron post. There were six in the firing squad and each had three rounds of ammunition, firing at the weak woman's chest. So she was shot by 18 rounds in her chest. While the mom was watching, the baby was killed, taken out, put in a bucket, and taken to the laboratory for experimentation.

I have seen so many people put to death at Kaechon during my 7 years in the reform institute. Things that should not be done by a human being are being done.

Not a laboratory rat, but a live human body is being used for experimentation.

The worst kind of political criminal in North Korea is considered to be one who believes in God or Heaven rather than the great leader god of North Korea. I have seen hundreds who suffered pain all their lives and were finally killed at the Kaechon reform institute only because they said they believed in God.

The family members of those were imprisoned, even a 3-year old granddaughter or grandson, only because their grandfather was a Christian. They were all put in together in the family camp. In 1990 I had an opportunity to go and see Kaechon political camp, which was next to where I was at, the Kaechon reform institute. That's where I saw the children isolated in their own children's camp and mothers are isolated away from their children in mothers' camp.

Those children who stayed there for more than 10 years, for example, would not be able to recognize their mother's face. I have spent 7 years in a political reform institute and I have seen horrors and tragedies of the worst kind. And I wish to ask the international community if such a regime in North Korea could ever be forgivable?

In my case, my loving husband and son, only because they were members of my family, had to live so long in such a painful place. I believe the international community, including the Republic of Korea, is being cheated by the Kim Jong-Il regime. As I sit in front of you to provide testimony, I'm full of honor and a sense of duty that I should continue on sitting here and work until the day the North Korean political system crumbles down and, thanks to the international community's public opinion, those horrible political prisons and camps are disestablished.

I only wish for all of us who are sitting here to imagine that each and every member of our family is suffering in that political prison. And with such a consistent and long-lasting interest I hope the North Korean people will be helped. The population of 23 million people in North Korea is only a pawn held by Kim Jong-Il.

In the 1980s North Korea was not open to the rest of the world or to the international community, but it is open because Kim Jong-Il is asking for economic and food aid. He is asking for help. North Korea's Kim Jong-Il comments on South Korea's Sunshine policy are:

“South Korea's Sunshine policy was successful to make South Koreans take off their jacket, but not the coat I'm wearing.”

I have lived through almost 50 years in North Korea with all these pains under such a harsh dictatorship. And I know the system so well, therefore, my disappointment is greater. In talking to North Korea the priority the international community should be set on, to include South Korea, is not dialogue with North Korea. It should be the international community's demand by public opinion that improvement in human rights in North Korea should proceed in order to have any dialogue.

All the support and aid given to North Korea from the international community, including South Korea, was successful in only in the aspect that it prolonged Kim Jong-Il's regime. Since the North Korean regime is having its own people in their own country starved, naturally, there will be many who escape away from home to China, to South Korea, since they couldn't make a living in their own country. And now they are homeless wanderers and starving, asking for food.

A person like me, guilty of having been born in North Korea was forced to leave home, North Korea. Those who left North Korea and escaped to other countries are not taken care of by the international community. I escaped North Korea, went to Beijing and found the South Korean Embassy in Beijing. Holding my son's hand, I entered the South Korean Embassy in Beijing and asked for political asylum.

The South Korean Embassy in Beijing coldly rejected and expelled us out of the facility, myself and my son. This has happened not only to me, but also to many, many people who run away from North Korea. Currently, today, there are these people who do not have their own nation, who are not attended to by the international community, and they are living a beggar's life.

It is high time for the international community, including South Korea, to hold Kim Jong-Il responsible. I do not believe there could be such a ruler who could rule his or her people while unable to

feed them. I believe the one leader who could not be held responsible for his own people should be expelled out of the international community.

Eighty percent of the annual budget of North Korea is used for manufacturing and in the sales of weapons systems for war.

Out of a sense of duty, I wrote a book about the cruel realities taking place in North Korean political prisons and reform institutes. I am with you, Chairman, at the U.S. Congress as a witness to provide testimony for the third time today. I am a Korean but I cannot work for the Korean people—for the human rights of the North Korean people in Korea. Every time I appear before you I am full of a sense of shame.

South Korea is looking the other way as if the problem of human rights in North Korea is a thing happening in a far, far away land. I do recognize and believe in the importance of economic exchange and mutual dialogue. But without any progress in the human rights area, everything else will not succeed, will not prevail.

I wish to ask you in greatest sincerity once again to all who are present here today, I wish to ask you. Perhaps it is out of place to make such a request because it's such a difficult and big request. In order to see any progress in the North Korean human rights violations and North Korean repression of human rights, our efforts should not be a one-time political issue. But I would ask you now to continue on until the day the problem of human rights in North Korea would end.

Chairman, thank you so much for allowing me to talk for a quite lengthy time.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Lee follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SUN-OK LEE, FORMER PRISON AND CAMP SURVIVOR

I was a normal gullible North Korean citizen, loyal to Leader and Party, and believed that North Korea was a people's paradise. I was the Director of the Government Supply Office for party cadres for 14 years when I was arrested in 1984 under the false charge of embezzlement of state property. I was subjected to severe torture during a 14-month preliminary investigation until I was forced to admit to the false charges against her. Eventually, I received a term of 13 years in prison at a kangaroo court. I had served 5 years and two months in prison when I was released in 1992 under a surprise amnesty.

During the first six months in the prison, I had worked briefly at all of the factories in the prison before I was finally assigned accounting work due to my background as an accountant. My routine responsibilities included updating prisoners' list by deleting the dead from it and adding new arrivals to it, allocation of meals and work quotas, updating work accomplished, collecting daily work reports, carrying new work instructions to all work sites, and so on.

Thus, I had access to records of numbers of inmates and production plans, etc., and was privileged to daily visit all factories in the prison in both men's and women's sectors. I survived her over five years of ordeal because of the opportunity to walk to all the work sites every day which other prisoners could not and because I had relatively easy work in an office as an accountant with the prison officials.

I surrendered to South Korea in December 1995 with my son Dong-chul Choi. I published a book, *The Bright Eyes of the Tailless Beasts in Seoul* in December 1996 to inform the world of these crimes against humanity by the North Korean government. With the help of a volunteer art student, I has produced the following illustrations to show the world the reality of the North Korean crimes against humanity.

In addition to the detention settlements for political prisoners, there are two or three secret political prisons. Prisoners accused of violating policies of the party are imprisoned here through kangaroo court. I was a prisoner at one of these political prisons.

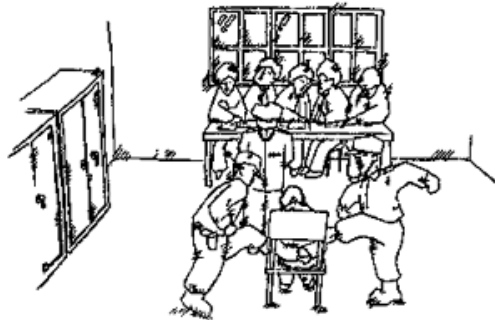
I recollects life in the North Korean prison:

“A prisoner has no right to talk, laugh, sing or look in a mirror. Prisoners must kneel down on the ground and keep their heads down deeply whenever called by a guard, they can say nothing except to answer questions asked. Women prisoners’ babies are killed on delivery. Prisoners have to work as slaves for 18 hours daily. Repeated failure to meet the work quotas means a week’s time in a punishment cell. A prisoner must give up her human worth. When I was released, some 6,000 prisoners, both men and women, were crying and pleading with me in their hearts to let the outside world know of their suffering. How can I ever forget their eyes, the eyes of the tailless beasts?”

After release, I could have lived peacefully in North Korea and enjoyed my previous status as a senior party member because people all knew that I was innocent. However, I decided to risk my own life to inform the world of the Kim Jung II’s crimes against humanity. I testify that most of the 6,000 prisoners who were there when I arrived in 1987 had quietly perished under the harsh prison conditions by the time I was released in 1992. This shows that about 1,000 prisoners died each year and a fresh supply of new prisoners was obtained each year in order to meet the production quotas! I recall that I was the only prisoner released during the term of my imprisonment. The only exception I can recall is a group of some 250 prisoners, Koreans from Japan. They had arrived there from Yodok detention settlement, I was told, several months before my arrival. On the day of the 30th anniversary of the signing of agreement between North Korea and Japan for returning Korean residents from Japan to North Korea (shortly after her arrival at the prison), they were sent to an unknown location.

North Korean Kangaroo Court

EXPERIENCED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



The preliminary trial was for 10:00 am at my former office, where I worked for 17 years as a loyal party member. I asked for my husband before entering the court. “Your husband is not here. Don’t ever try to meet anybody else, understand?” was the reply. Don’t I even get to see my husband on the day of my trial?

I met my lawyer for the first time in the courtroom. The court consisted of a judge, prosecutor, lawyer and a two-member “jury.” My interrogator was there also. The judge made a few remarks about the charges against me and asked me if I accepted the charge.

I had promised the interrogators earlier that I would accept the charge, but I simply could not control myself at that moment. “Your Honor, I have neither embezzled government property nor violated any of the party policy. Never, never! I am innocent. Please allow me a fair investigation.” The two guards at my sides shouted, “You must be crazy!” and started to kick me in the knees. At that moment, the judge declared the preliminary trial closed. The trial lasted less than 15 minutes!

It was very cold on November 9, 1987, my trial day. In the morning, the interrogators repeated their warning, “You better be careful what you say in court or your husband and son will be in serious trouble. Remember that!” (I did not know that my husband, in fact, had already been exiled internally!) However, I was firmly determined to do what I could to prove my innocence to the party officials and my husband. I was still so naive and excited by the idea of meeting my husband and telling him loudly, in the court room, all about my sufferings.

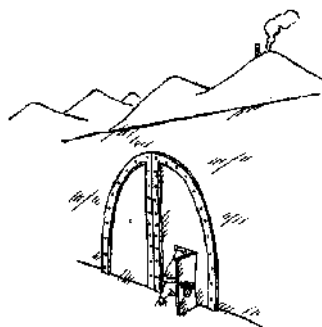
After the preliminary trial which lasted less than 15 minutes, I was detained at the police cell for the formal trial until five o’clock in the afternoon. I was given no water and food. The interrogators persistently harassed me with the same threat,

“What about your husband and son? If you accept the charge in court, they will be safe. Otherwise, you know what’s going to happen to them.”

At court in the afternoon, I had to say yes when the judge asked me, “Do you accept the charges against you?” There was no evidence produced nor any witnesses against me. The judge made no reference to the absence of evidence and witnesses and committed me to a 13-year imprisonment in violation of the government commercial policy and state property embezzlement. The lawyer remained silent throughout the entire court proceeding. The mere formality to send me to prison was thus over under the pretext of a trial.

Underground Emergency Execution Chamber

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, A FORMER FEMALE PRISONER



Near the prison gate, there is a huge iron gate that leads to the underground tunnels. Guards often remind the prisoners that their lives are considered disposable and that they can be collectively annihilated at any time in the underground tunnels. The tunnels, of course, can be blasted at any time, leaving no traces of massacre. It is said that the underground space is so large that it can accommodate several thousand prisoners at one time. The male prisoners’ sector has a huge underground factory for the production of ammunition and weapons. I have never been to the underground weapon factory myself but I have frequently heard prison officials talking about it. I do not know whether the underground tunnels in the women’s sector are connected to the men’s underground factory.

I often saw fumes coming from a distant chimney atop a nearby hill. I was told that the chimney is one of the ventilators of the underground tunnels.

Meals for Prisoners

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON

Salt soup

100 grams of broken corn, full meal

80 grams of broken corn, reduced for punishment

60 grams of broken corn, reduced for punishment

Prisoners’ Sleeping Conditions

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



Some eighty to ninety prisoners sleep in a flea-infested chamber about six meters long by five meters wide (about 19 feet by 16 feet). Some eighty percent of the prisoners are housewives. The prison chamber is so congested that sleeping there is itself a torture. Prisoners sleep on the floor, squeezed together, head and feet alternating. So, prisoners sleep with the stinking feet of other prisoners right under their nose. They roll up their clothes for pillows.

During the winter, prisoners share body heat against the cold wind coming under the floor. However, during the summer, it is so stuffy with the sweat and stink of the prisoners that they prefer sleeping at the work site even though it means more work.

Two prisoners must stand on night duty for one-hour shifts. The following morning, prisoners on night duty must report to the prison authorities all the details of their duty including the sleep talking of other prisoners. They get their duty hour extended if caught sleeping.

Evening Roll Call

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



The prisoners are divided into units and teams and must always act collectively by group under the slogan, "All Actions by Unit and Team!" Prisoners get up, line up for roll call, proceed to work, take meals, go to the toilet, finish work and go to bed collectively and at the mercy of the prison authorities.

At the end of the day's grueling work, the prisoners are so tired and exhausted that many of them experience physical problems returning to the prison chamber promptly. This means that the other prisoners in the same unit have to wait and sleep less. Every night, it is a hellish experience that lasts for an hour or even longer: the calling of prisoners for others, or repeated roll calls, and prisoners desperate to go to sleep as soon as possible.

The Kaechon Women's Prison comprises the following eleven work units: miscellaneous factory, export factory, shoe-making factory, leather/rubber factory, clothing factory, fabric-cutting factory, work preparation unit, maintenance unit, drop-out punishment unit, farm unit and kitchen unit.

The prisoners must always keep their heads down at work and avoid other movement unnecessary for work. More than half of the female prisoners have lumps on their head or shoulders and are hunchbacks or crippled. Most female prisoners working in the shoe factory are baldheaded.

The entire unit is responsible for the mistakes of any one prisoner in the team. As a result, newcomers are not welcome because the entire unit will have to work more and go to bed later because of the newcomer's failure to move and work fast enough.

Prisoners and Prison Guards

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



At all the factories, there are glass boxes for prison guards to sit in while supervising prisoners at work. The glass walls enable them to watch the prisoners at work while avoiding their terrible stench. In addition, the prison guards always wear masks and keep some distance from the prisoners because of the bad smell.

As standard practice, a prisoner must run to the official and sit down on her knees with her head down whenever she is called. The prisoner can only answer the questions asked and cannot say anything else. Prisoners are very often kicked in the face or breast for slow answers or movement. The prisoners are severely punished for raising their heads or stretching their bodies.

Punishment Cells, Chambers of Death

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



The punishment cell is one of the most dreaded punishments for all prisoners. The cells are usually 60 cm wide and 110 cm high. Therefore, the prisoners have no room to stand up, stretch their legs or lie down. They cannot even lean against the walls because they are too jagged. There are twenty such cells for female prisoners and 58 cells for male prisoners. They are usually detained for seven to ten days as punishment for certain offenses, such as leaving an oily mark on clothes, failing to memorize the president's New Year message or repeated failure to meet work quotas.

When the prisoners are released from the cells, their legs are badly bent, with frostbite in the winter, and so they can hardly walk. Many victims are permanently crippled from the lack of adequate exercise and eventually died as a result of the work resumed immediately after the release. The prisoners call the punishment cell "Chilsong Chamber," meaning a black angel's chamber of death.

In November 1989, I was detained in the punishment cell for a week for attempting to cover-up a faulty piece of shirt made by a 20 yearold girl. The young girl was sent to the torture chamber and never seen again. Among other things, the freezing cold wind from the toilet hole made the experience extremely painful. During the summer, the prisoners struggle to brush thousands of maggots back into the toilet hole.

After being released, I had problems walking for 15 days but I was able to recover because my job gave me the needed opportunity to walk to all corners of the prison with work instructions.

They say it is a day of great fortune if a prisoner finds a rat creeping up from the bottom of the toilet hole. The prisoners catch it with their bare hands and de-

your it raw, as rats are the only source of meat in the prison. They say the wonderful taste of a raw rat is unforgettable. If they are caught eating a rat, however, the punishment is extended. So they have to be very careful when catching and eating a rat.

Prisoners Can Use Communal Toilets Only Twice a Day

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



There is one collective toilet, one meter wide and two meters long, for every 300 prisoners. Five or six prisoners use the toilet together at the same time. The first group leaves work for the toilet with a wooden pass. Then, they return to work with the pass. The next group is then allowed to visit the toilet collectively with the pass. In this way, the prisoners use the toilet only twice a day in group shifts, not when they need to. The prisoners squat on a slope and evacuate onto a sloped floor. There is only one hole at the end of the toilet.

Please note the toilet duty prisoner holding a wooden pass in the above drawing. The prisoner on toilet duty must stay inside the toilet for 17–18 hours a day. They are normally old and crippled women who are not fit to work. They look horrible with faces swollen and yellow from the stench. Some prisoners prefer the job because of the guarantee of a full ration meal, but they normally die within a year.

Prisoners Die After Spending Time in Punishment Cell

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON

Hun-sik Kim was the principal of Pyongyang Light Engineering College. She was sentenced to a 5-year imprisonment for suggesting to the City Education Board that her students' labor responsibility be reduced so that they could spend more time studying.

In prison, she was assigned the work of measuring fabric to produce jackets, which were to be given as gifts to workers outside by the President on his birthday. One time, she miscalculated the imported nylon fabric but immediately corrected the error and no fabric was wasted. However, she was detained in the punishment cell for ten days for "attempting sabotage." She was crippled and partly paralyzed when she was released from the punishment cell. On a very hot summer day in August, the camp doctors burned her bottom with heated stones to see if she could feel pain. Just before she died a few weeks later, she whispered to me, with a twittered tongue and tears in her eyes, "I want to see the blue sky. You know my children are waiting for me."

When she was released from the punishment cell, she needed two prisoners to help her walk to the work site and back. The camp officials claimed that she was feigning injury, and yelled,

"You bitch! Who do you think you are fooling?"

She was kicked around like a soccer ball by the guards but withstood the insults and beatings for about a month. She suffered injuries all over her body while pulling herself up. The sores began to badly suppurate from the infections. She often fainted. She was sent to the sick room but she had to continue her work in the sick room. I was in the same room because I was a paratyphoid patient. One day in August, the camp doctors burned her with heated stones to see if she could feel pain.

I could smell flesh burning, and felt like vomiting and fainting. I remembered what the camp official told me when I first arrived at the camp, "You must give up all your rights as a human!" She never felt any pain when her flesh was burning.

From that day on, she could not control urination and evacuation. I was suffering from a high fever myself but tried my best to caress her burnt wounds with the dirty cloth the doctors gave me. She said to me, with a twittered tongue and tears in her eyes,

"I want to see the blue sky. You know my children are waiting for me."

The next few days, I felt very sick and was unconscious myself, so nobody looked after her as she kept moaning.

A few days later, I came to myself, crawled to her and removed the cloth from her wound. I was shocked to see the wound full of maggots! She died that night. I shouted to a guard through the small door hole,

"Sir, somebody died here."

The reply was,

"So what? You bitch! Don't panic. Wait until morning!"

I found the floor full of maggots the following morning. I had to brush the floor with my bare hands and pick up the maggots into a vinyl bag. I told myself, "You must not die like this. You must survive and tell the whole world about it."

Patients Left to Die under Quarantine

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



I was sequestered in a patient room and left there to die twice, in 1989 and 1992. Paratyphoid spread among the prisoners in May 1989. Many prisoners complained of pain in the abdomen and high fever before fainting. The prison doctor ordered them quarantined in a small room. Some fifty patients were put into a tiny room, so small that patients were placed on top of one another. Those who were conscious reached out their hands for help; those who were unconscious simply remained underneath and died.

Yong-hi, a 19 year-old girl, was brought to the prison with her mother. She called her mom in a feeble voice for an apple and a little water before she died under the other patients. Her mother was working at the miscellaneous factory and did not know that her daughter perished there.

One day, I woke up to hear the voice of Shin-ok Kim, the prisoner/nurse. "How is it that you are still alive? Everybody else died. Get out from there." I was among the few lucky patients who survived the ordeal. When I somehow recovered from the disease, I was sent to report to the medical room. On this occasion, I witnessed the killing of babies in the medical room.

So Much Punishment and Loss of Life to Meet Export Deadline

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON

To meet the deadlines for export, the prisoners often worked until one o'clock in the morning or, for many months, the prisoners slept two to four hours at the work site. They ate, worked and slept in the same place. The standard export items all year around were clothing and different kinds of brushes. They were for markets in Europe, Japan and Hong Kong.

On an ad hoc basis, prisoners produced rose decorations of various colors, each prisoner producing 60 pieces an hour or 1,000 pieces a day, for export to France (September 1990 to February, 1991). They produced some 900,000 pieces of bras-

sieres for export to Russia for \$2 a piece (May to November 1988), and countless pieces of sweaters to Japan (February to August, 1991).

There were big water pans for the prisoners to wash their hands clean frequently. Each prisoner was given a piece of white cloth to cover their dirty laps and keep the products clean. The finished products were beautifully packed and shipped for export.

The prisoners often fall asleep while working and wake up when their fingers are injured by the sewing machine. They apply sewing machine oil on the wound and continue to work. They have to hide their bleeding fingers for fear of punishment for sleeping. So much punishment and loss of life for the sake of meeting the export deadline! I was informed that the foreign exchange earned was spent to supply imported television sets and refrigerators for the security and police officers.

Dead Prisoners Buried under Fruit trees

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



Many prisoners died from hard work, poor treatment, and beatings. The dead bodies were often buried under the fruit trees in the prison orchard. The fruits (apples, pears, peaches, and plums) from the Kaechon orchard have earned a reputation for their large size and sweet taste. They are reserved for senior party and police officials.

On one occasion, 150 corpses were rolled up in straw mats and buried under the fruit trees. The families were never informed and the bodies can no longer be identified.

I remember some of the victims who disappeared under the trees. Kwang-ok Cho, a 62-year old housewife from Shinuiju city, who was arrested for trying to obtain a blanket in the black market for her daughter's wedding gift; In-suk Kim, a middle-aged housewife whose husband died in a mine accident and who often cried out in her dreams the names of her three children left behind at home; Dok-sun Kim, a middle-aged housewife from Chongjin city who was terribly worried about her old parents; Sa-won Kim, a housewife from Kosong-kun, whose handicapped husband badly needed her; Jong-shim Lee, a 19 year-old girl. Once, a group of dead prisoners were buried collectively at a location near the chestnut forest outside the prison.

Freezing Torture

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON

One winter night in 1987 when I was under investigation at the Chongjin Police Station, the interrogator yelled, "Bitch! You've been spoiled by the warmth in the interrogation room. I'm gonna teach you a lesson!" He made me sit outside wearing my underclothes only. It was freezing cold outside. I was showered with a bucket of cold water and left on my knees for an hour. It was here where I saw other prisoners for the first time. There were some ten prisoners on their knees before me on the ground looking like grotesque boulders. The freezing torture was repeated every night throughout the winter. Six prisoners died from this torture.

There were some ten prisoners on their knees before me on the ground. I was told to sit in the front. I walked through the other prisoners to the front. It was so cold that the guard went right back into the office. I heard a low voice, "Hey, Comrade Soon-ok, it's me here!" It was Younghwan Choi, the Supply Manager of Hweryung

District! Soon, I was able to recognize the familiar faces of five former colleagues. They had all been arrested under the same false charges that I was. They all realized that if they died from the torture, they would be perishing under false charges. So they all displayed strong will power to overcome the torture and survive.

However, I witnessed a total of 6 prisoners die from this freezing torture during the winter. The cold was very painful on my hands, legs and ears for the first 20 to 30 minutes. But after that, I felt nothing at all. When we were told after one hour to get up, we were literally frozen and could not stand up. We all fell several times before we somehow managed to rise and stumble back into our cold cells.

Soon, I had large swollen ears. My feet were so swollen that I could not put on my shoes. Water was running from the sores in my swollen legs. When I finally left the interrogation center and arrived at the prison, a prison official told me to apply pine resin from the shoe-making factory. The resin melted all my flesh and I could see some of the bones in my feet. However, because of the resin, fresh flesh began to cover the bones and, after six months, I had normal feet again. I cannot remember when my swollen ears recovered.

Water Torture

EXPERIENCED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



One day in early March 1997, I was taken into a torture chamber that I had never been in before. I saw a big kettle on a small table and a low wooden table with straps, about 20 centimeters high. By surprise, one of the two interrogators tripped me with his leg. They strapped me on to the table and forced the kettle spout into my mouth. The spout was made so that it forced my throat wide open and I could not control the water running into my body. Close to suffocation, I had to breathe through my nose. My mouth was full of water and it overflowed from my nose. As I began to faint from the pain and suffocation, I could not see anything but felt sort of afloat in the air. I had been through all kinds of torture, such as whippings, beatings with rubber bands or hard sticks, or hand twisting with wooden sticks between my ten fingers, but this was worse.

I do not remember how long it lasted but when I woke up I felt two interrogators jumping on a board which was laid on my swollen stomach to force water back out of my body. I suddenly vomited and kept vomiting with terrible pain.

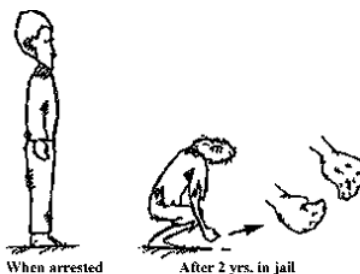
I had no idea how much water ran into my body but I felt like the cells in my body were full of water and water was running out of my body through my mouth, nose, anus and vagina.

I faintly heard somebody saying, "Why doesn't this bitch wake up. Did she die?" I could not get up so I was dragged to my cell that day. From that day on, I suffered from high fever and often fainted. My whole body was so swollen that I could not open my eyes. I could only urinate a few drops of milk-like liquid with blood and felt a severe pain in my bladder. I was able to get up and walk again in about two week's time.

I can not explain how I could have survived such an ordeal. I would have died if that had happened to me in my ordinary life. I must have developed a mysterious super power to sustain myself under an emergency situation.

School Principal, a Torture Victim

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



In 1987, a school principal in Chongjin city found two female teachers murdered the previous night in the night duty chamber of the school. He immediately reported the murders to the police. When the police made little progress in the investigation, they arrested him for murder. He was subject to all kinds of severe torture for two years and forced into confessing the murder.

When I saw him in the police jail, both his ears were gone with only ear holes in their place. I have no idea how it happened but his fingers were cut short and clustered together. He was badly crippled, one leg shorter than the other, and unable to walk. His mouth was slanted and he could not control his lips, which made it very difficult to understand what he said. He was a tall and handsome person before he was arrested but became as short as a ten year-old boy in the two years in the police jail.

He was the principal of Subok Girls' high school in Chongjin City, North Hamkyong Province. He devoted his entire life to education as a career teacher.

He pleaded innocent throughout the severe tortures. Two years later, two criminals were arrested for robbery and confessed that they had snuck into the school to steal an organ, found two women teachers, and murdered them after an unsuccessful attempt at rape.

Nobody was punished or held responsible for arresting the wrong person. There was no apology. Rather, the provincial police forced him to sign a statement that he would never disclose that he had been tortured. He was completely disabled and received no compensation. He died shortly after his release.

This incident shows how incompetent the normal North Korean police investigators are and, as a result, how they commonly torture innocent victims to extract false confessions.

Prisoners Beaten Cruelly

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



One common form of torture was to tie a prisoner against iron bars, spread-eagle by hands and legs and beat him all over the body with a rubber or cow skin whip. Just the pain from hanging by your body weight makes the ordeal unbearable. From the beatings, the skin becomes torn all over, blood splashes and the prisoners begin to feel that their skin isn't human any more. When a prisoner is released from the iron bar, his whole body is so swollen that he cannot bend his back or knees. The prisoner must evacuate and urinate standing.

In the Nongpo Police Detention Center, there were three torture chambers and all kinds of torture were routinely practiced on inmates. I was 39 years old at that time. They subjected me to all kinds of torture there.

Once I resisted when they tried to undress me. One of the torturers punched me in my face so hard that I fainted to the floor. Sometime later, I woke up to find my mouth full of something. They were my broken teeth. Obviously, I bled terribly because the floor was full of my blood. My face was so badly swollen that I could hardly open my eyes. I spit out the broken teeth only after holding up my lips with my fingers. Four teeth from the upper jaw were gone. I began to feel terrible pain in my other teeth. Usually, I was taken to the torture chamber at five o'clock in the morning and remained there until midnight.

Tearing Off the Ears of a Prisoner

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



The Comptroller of the Seamen's Club of Chongjin City was an old man, 60 years old. He could no longer withstand the tortures that continued daily. When the investigators tore off one of his ears and began tearing off the other, he decided to please the investigators by claiming to be a big thief—the bigger the better. So, he told them that he stole a locomotive from the city railway station. He acquired the nickname, "locomotive head" from the police investigators and officers.

Prisoners Used for Martial Art Practice

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF POLITICAL PRISON

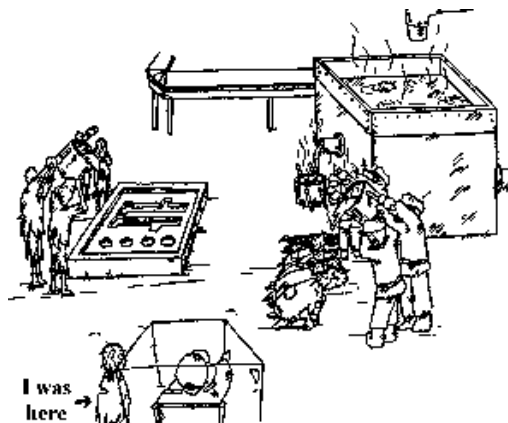


A prisoner in the police jails becomes a different person, skin and bone, from starvation and torture. Male prisoners appear to become undernourished and confused sooner than female prisoners. The jail guards commonly use inmates as martial arts target. They punch and kick prisoners during martial arts practice. The prisoners fall bleeding at the first blow and remain motionless for a while on the cement floor until they are kicked back into the cells.

The guards often bring fish and grill it on their stove, sending a wonderful aroma to the prisoners. This is as painful as any form of torture could be for the starving inmates.

Christians Killed for Refusing to Convert

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



The cast-iron factory was considered the most difficult place to work in the entire prison. Christians were usually sent there to work. One Christian working at the cast-iron factory was killed by hanging in a public execution in December 1988 for hiding a friend at his house before he was arrested.

In the spring of 1990, I was carrying a work order to the cast-iron factory in the male prison. Five or six elderly Christians were lined up and forced to deny their Christianity and accept the Juche Ideology of the State. The selected prisoners all remained silent at the repeated command for conversion. The security officers became furious by this and killed them by pouring molten iron on them one by one.

A North Korean Miner's Wife

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



When arrested



After 6 mos. in prison

Jong-ok Kim, about 45, wife of a minor, Hweryong district, was arrested for stealing some 20 liters of corn from a nearby cooperative farm when her children were starving at home in the spring of 1987. During the trial, the judge scolded her for stealing. There was a microphone in front of her but she did not know what it was. She murmured in a very low voice, "Of course, I know stealing is bad. Why would I steal if food ration had continued? How awful this country is." Her complaint reached the judge through the microphone. He was furious and committed her to 15-year hard labor in prison for "criticizing the party policy." She died in the autumn of 1992 of undernourishment and diarrhea, after five years in prison.

She was detained at the cell next to me during the police investigation but we did not see each other at that time because the movement of prisoners was always so strictly controlled that prisoners do not meet each other. The guards in the jails, however, always felt bored when on duty for hours and they would normally ask inmates for all kinds of questions, "Hey you! What's your name? Where are you from? What's the Charge? etc." I overheard their conversations with other inmates and knew about them and, in the same way, the other inmates knew about me even though we did not meet.

One day in prison in 1988, I was carrying work instructions as usual when a prisoner suddenly stopped me by pulling my clothes and whispered to me, "Aren't you the Supply Manager from Onsong District?" Speaking each other was against the prison regulation. I was scared and I moved off without a word. The next day, when there was no prison guard around, I asked her, "How did you know about me?" This is how we met in the prison.

She worked at the leather factory in prison. She had been in prison for about 5 years when, one day in the autumn of 1992, she became too weak to meet her work quota. She received reduced meal for punishment and began to be weaker with less food. She also had serious loose bowels and felt so thirsty but there was no water for prisoners. She was so desperate that she drank the dirty water from the bucket where floor mops had been washed several times. The next day, she dropped to the floor while trying to make a leather bag. She did not move when prison guards kicked her hard. She was dead. They had her dead body wrapped in a straw mat and carried away.

One day in 1994, while I was hiding in China waiting for an opportunity to come to Seoul, I was listening to a mid-night radio broadcast from Seoul which announced arrival in Seoul of two young brothers from North Korea. Their names rang my ears. When I was undergoing intelligence clearance in South Korea, I was able to confirm that the two brothers were indeed the sons of Sung-Ok Choi.

When I was expecting to see her sons in Seoul, the intelligence *officers advised* me not to tell them about their mother's death because the boys are in a very fragile condition emotionally. So, I did not tell them about their mother's death when I first met them. One day in April, 1998, they visited me and told me that they had heard from their relatives in China that their mother had died. Then, I had to confirm the information. They are in South Korea now and visit me regularly.

Typical Scene of Prisoners at Work

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



Officially, the purpose of the prison is to reform the ideology of the prisoners. In reality, however, the purpose of the prison is to exploit slave labor. The prisoners work 1618 hours every day without wages. Cow leather whips are always ready on the walls and women are whipped, kicked, or punched daily for no reason. The prisoners are not allowed to talk, laugh or take a rest. In addition, the prisoners must always keep their heads down and only repeat the same motion for work. As a result, more than half of the women have lumps on their heads or shoulders, are hunchbacks, or are crippled. The camp officers and guards always wear masks because they cannot tolerate the prisoners' stench! The prisoners often urinate or defecate while working because they cannot wait.

The prisoners are allowed to take showers only twice a year. Therefore, all the prisoners naturally stink. The entire prison is full of the awful smell of sweat and the stench of the prisoners enters your lungs the moment you are inside the prison.

The prison officials and guards are there by life appointment. North Korean authorities never transfer them to other posts for fear that their crimes may leak to the outside world.

Have You Heard About the Human Motor?

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



The power supply in North Korea was erratic and almost every other day prisoners worked without electricity during the daytime. However, the prison rule was that the daily quota had to be met whether there was electric power or not. So, female prisoners were whipped to keep the motor running manually for the power sewing machines.

There were about 100 sewing machines in the sewing factory, operated by one electric motor. The women were forced, ten in each team, to pull the belt on their shoulders and operate 100 sewing machines, for one hour each. The hardship of the prisoners was beyond description. The production officers mercilessly whipped the prisoners to maintain their productivity.

The female prisoners must meet their work quota to get the standard meal of 100 grams. Each shoe manufactured requires a countless number of small nails to be hammered and so each prisoner has to hammer so many nails every day.

Their fingers are all bent and deformed with hard skin. Three hundred prisoners produce 1,000 pairs of boots daily, working 1618 hours daily to meet the work quota. Often they are forced to work until morning to meet the quota, under collective punishment for the failure of other prisoners to meet the quota.

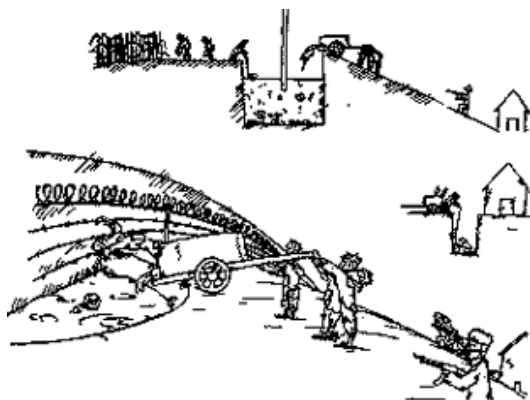
Myong-suk Kim was a very competent and skillful worker and produced the best quality boots for senior officers. The machines were German, but they were imported in the sixties and started to give problems as they aged. One day, she could not meet the quota due to equipment failure. The guards kicked her and shouted, "You swine, you better fix your machine quickly."

When it became clear one day that she could not meet the quota, she drank hydrochloric acid that was kept there for repairing the machine and killed herself. That was in January, 1992.

The prison authorities conducted ideology classes for all prisoners, everyday, to prevent this "ideological corruption" from recurring. It was very tiring to stop work for one hour everyday and stand listening to a nonsense speech before going to bed an hour late.

Women Prisoners Carrying Dung

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



The prisoners who are old, slow at work or caught looking at their reflections in a window glass are sent to the “drop-out team” for 3 months, 6 months or one year for punishment. Their main job is to collect dung from the prison toilet tanks and dump it into a large dung pool everyday for supply to the farming teams working at the prison farm outside the wall. Teams of five prisoners must pull a metal tank weighing 800 kilograms.

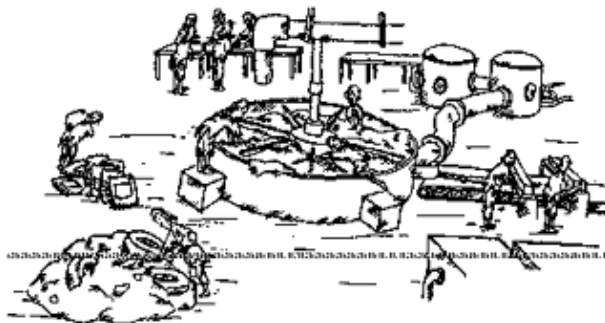
Two women wade knee-deep at the bottom of the toilet arid fill a 20-liter rubber bucket with dung using their bare hands. Three other women pull up the rubber bucket from above and then pour the contents into a transport tank.

Sometimes, the prisoners pulling up the bucket are so weak, they fall into the toilet tank because of the weight of the bucket. When the heavy tank is full, they haul it up to a very large and deep dung pool on the hill.

One rainy day in 1991, a housewife from Pyongyang name Ok-tan Lee had been carrying dung all day long and was ready to transfer the dung to the huge pool. However, the lid of the tank on the wheel somehow got stuck and would not open. When she climbed on the tank to push the door open, she slipped from the rain-wet surface and plunged into the ground dung pool. It was so deep that she disappeared into the dung. A guard some distance away (they always keep their distance because of the stink from the prisoners) shouted, “Stop it! Let her die there unless you want to die the same way yourself!” She was left to drown there in the dung.

Female Prisoners at a Rubber Factory

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



The prison rubber factory was one of the most dangerous and difficult places for women to work. They had to mix used rubber scraps with granular rubber, carry the resulting rubber substance, mix it with rubber glue that came from a big tank

which produced poisonous fumes, and knead it in a big round tank. I remember one female prisoner whose head got covered by the rubber glue while she was cleaning the tall rubber glue tank. She suffocated.

Because air creates foam in the rubber, the whole factory is tightly sealed all year round. In addition, the factory is always full of hot steam for molding shoe soles. Therefore, it's always stuffy and suffocating! The sticky mixture in the tank often overflows and women must push it back into the tank. This was very difficult work for hungry and weak women, and so the sticky mixtures often dragged women into the tank and killed them. So many female prisoners were killed and injured that the prison authorities finally ordered the factory to be operated only by male prisoners in 1989, two years after my arrival at the prison.

Babies Born and Killed

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



When I miraculously survived paratyphoid in 1989, I was sent to the medical room to report. When I arrived at the medical room, I noticed six pregnant women awaiting delivery. I was told to wait for my supervisor to come and take me over. While I was there, three women delivered babies on the cement floor without any blankets. It was horrible to watch the prison doctor kicking the pregnant women with his boots. When a baby was born, the doctor shouted, "Kill it quickly. How can a criminal in the prison expect to have a baby? Kill it." The women covered their faces with their hands and wept. Even though the deliveries were forced by injection, the babies were still alive when born. The prisoner/nurses, with trembling hands, squeezed the babies' necks to kill them. The babies, when killed, were wrapped in a dirty cloth, put into a bucket and taken outside through a backdoor. I was so shocked with that scene that I still see the mothers weeping for their babies in my nightmares. I saw the baby-killing twice while I was in the prison.

When I went back to the medical room for routine duty a few days later, Shin-Ok Kim and Mi-Ok Cho, the prisoner/nurses working in the medical room, were sobbing and one of them told me, "Accountant, we are devils worse than beasts. They say that the dead babies are used to make new medicine for experiments." I was so afraid that I closed her mouth with my finger and said, "I never heard you say this." I hurried to leave from their presence.

I was sent to the same medical room once again when I recovered from pleurisy in 1992. This time, there were some ten pregnant women in the small medical room. They were all injected to induce forced delivery and suffering from pain for many hours. A woman, so undernourished and weak, could not endure the delivery and died during labor. The prisoner/nurse there whispered to me that it is more difficult to deliver a dead baby than a living baby.

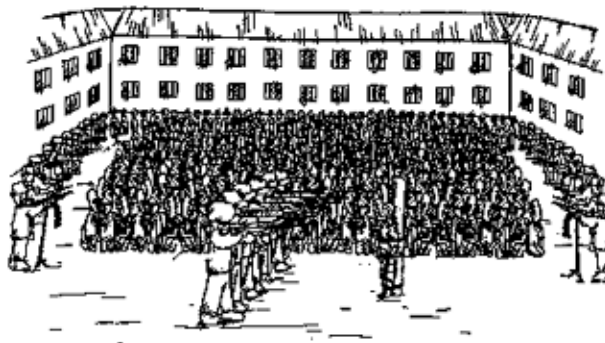
The other pregnant women looked so pale from the pain, and they had sweat on their faces. If they groaned from the pain, the doctor mercilessly kicked their belly hard and shouted, "Shut up! Don't feign pain!" I was waiting for my supervisor to take charge of me from the doctor at the corridor outside. I heard the crying voice of Byung-Ok Kim, 32 years old, and peeped into the room through the half-open door. She had just delivered a baby and cried, "Sir, please save the baby. My parents-in-law are anxiously waiting for the baby. Please, please save the baby." She was out of her mind with sorrow. All the other women remained quiet and she was the only woman crying and begging loudly. The doctor was taken momentarily by

surprise. But soon, he regained himself and shouted, "You want to die, eh? Kill the baby!" He kicked her hard.

Then, the Chief Medical Officer came in and said, "Who was it yelling like that? Put her in the punishment cell!" The Chief Medical Officer kicked her hard several times and had her dragged to the punishment cell because she could not hold herself up. This is one of the scenes that I will never forget. She died shortly after she was released from the cell.

Public Execution in Prison

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



Public executions are standard practice in and outside prisons in North Korea. In 1988, seven men and one woman were publicly executed in the Kaechon prison without trial. At each public execution, all the prisoners, some six thousand (1,800,000 women and 4,000 men), are crammed into the prison square to watch.

The victims are always gagged so they cannot protest. They are tied to a pole in three parts; chest, sides and knees. Six guards fire three bullets each into the chest for a total of 18 bullets. With the top ropes having been cut by the bullets, the upper part of the body hangs down bleeding, like a rotten log broken in half, still tied to the pole by the lower ropes. Then, all the prisoners are forced to march around the dead body and watch.

Prisoners Go Insane from Watching Public Executions



The execution victims include those who pleaded for death during torture, stole food, or simply wept over the fate of two small children left home alone. The charge was lack of confidence in the mother party. Also included are those who are branded as "anti-party elements" or "reactionaries."

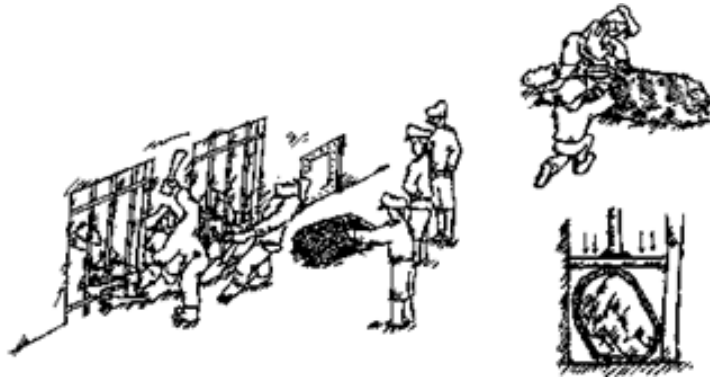
The public execution ground is so crammed with prisoners that the women in the front watch the killing from a distance of only a meter or so and often get blood splashed on them. Some women prisoners are so shocked that they vomit, faint, or develop mental illness (e.g., sudden singing or laughing hysterically). They are sent to punishment cells for being "weak in ideology" and "showing sympathy to the peo-

ple's enemy." Those who become completely insane simply disappear and nobody knows what happens to them.

Hi-suk Choi and Young-ok Choi, housewives from Kimchaek City, were punished for singing at the site and later died of shock during electric torture. The Kaechon Prison has twenty punishment cells that are always full of "ideologically weak" prisoners on the days of public executions.

Prisoners Killed in Temperature-regulated Compression Chamber

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



There are executioners in the Interrogation Department of the Provincial Security Headquarters. Here, they execute the prisoners that they are embarrassed to execute publicly. They always execute prisoners at midnight without trial and bury the corpses in a nearby valley.

There is also a temperature-regulated compression chamber used for torturing or killing. The chamber is 60 square centimeters and the height is adjustable according to the prisoner's height. A prisoner is pushed into a rice straw bag first, and then into the chamber with his head pushed down between his knees. These acts usually occur between one and two o'clock in the morning. Freezing temperatures are used in the winter and hot temperatures in the summer.

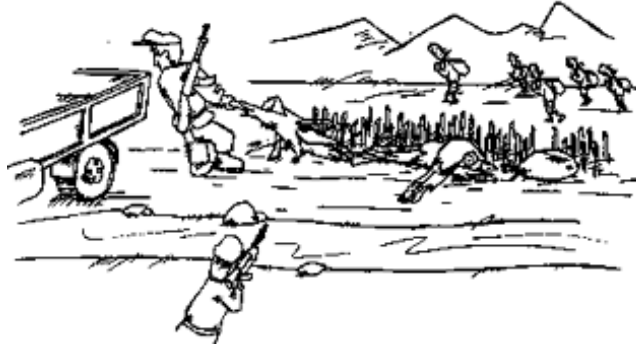
A 17 year-old boy, the son of a welder in Kimchaek Steel Factory, was brought here sometime in October 1987. He was arrested for organizing gang fighting in school. Gang fighting is considered a very serious crime leading to subversion in North Korea. He was killed in the chamber by freezing in the midnight. I heard this from Yong-ho, a guard, who proudly told us, "You bitches better obey unless you want to be killed like the boy, frozen and compressed." In fact, other guards repeated similar threats.

A young man became lunatic as a result of continuing torture. He complained one day, "Great Leader? What has he done for me?" He was frozen to death in the chamber that night.

The chamber was next to my cell at the end of the corridor. The cries of a prisoner resisting and angry voices of guards trying to push him into a rice straw bag and into the chamber always woke me up. I always found executioners in uniform and with a star on their shoulders on such occasions. During the 14 months I was there, I remember five or six killings in the chamber.

**Male Prisoners Shot to Death for Attempting to Get “Edible Clay” from
Women Prisoners**

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



At the end of February 1990, we were carrying edible clay in bags. Some male prisoners on the other side of the river must have seen us eating the clay. They looked like skeletons with skulls and bright eyes. They gestured to us begging for some clay. None of us responded for fear of punishment. Desperately, three of them came to our side of the river to get some clay.

Suddenly, we heard shooting. It was a horrible scene when the shooting ended. We were all so scared. The intestines of one of the male prisoners were protruding. But he was still alive because we heard his feeble voice whispering, “Help!” The second prisoner had his leg broken and bleeding. The third prisoner was dead instantly. Soon a truck arrived and an officer said, “Put them all onto the truck, dead or alive.” We were told to resume our work. That night, some twenty women complained of pain and died as a result of having eaten too much clay.

At the end of February 1990, we were bringing fresh soil from a nearby mountain to the prison farm. It was very tiring to climb up the mountain to bring fresh soil all the way down to the farm. Because it was February and still cold, we could not find any plants to eat in the mountain, no matter how desperately we looked. It was too early in the season.

One day, I saw some prisoners eating clay. As always, we were exhausted, hungry and thirsty. One of them said to me, “Accountant, you want some? This is good and tasty. Try it.” I wasted no time and ate it. It was clay and, indeed, starchy and tasted good. I ate half the size of my fist that day and I felt somewhat full and even felt some strength, too. Our unit moved our burrow to a riverside location when the killing of three male prisoners took place.

Prisoners Shot to Death for Falling on a Steep Slope

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



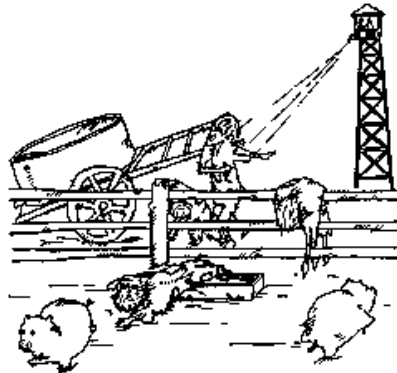
In February, 1988, while carrying a 20 kilogram bag of top soil from a mountain to the prison farm, an exhausted female prisoner slipped and fell on the slope, causing two other prisoners also to fall from the path. Although they could have been helped up to rejoin the line, they were immediately shot and killed. The prison guards shouted at the rest of the women, "Did you see what happened? This will happen to you if you fall!"

Every February, all the prisoners are mobilized to carry top-soil from Kaecheon Mountain to the prison farm. The mountain is outside the prison, 600 meters high, very rugged and slippery when climbing up and down the steep slope.

Each female prisoner must carry a 20-kg bag of topsoil on her back all the way down to the farmland. Prisoners are kicked and beaten for any bag that weighs less than 20 kilograms. 300 prison guards and 350 policemen line up on the path with rifles pointing at the prisoners. The prisoners are ordered to make three trips in the morning and three more trips in the afternoon. Climbing up and down a 600-meter mountain six times a day is like torture. The prisoners were warned that if they strayed from the path by even a step they would be shot to death instantly.

Prisoners Killed for Eating Pig Slops

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



There is no wasted food in the prison kitchen. The kitchen prisoners always give the leftover food from outside to the pigs. So, the pigs are always well-fed and fat for the security officers. The prisoners envy the pigs for the good food and leisure. The dung carrying team is also responsible for cleaning the pigsty. The prisoners

carrying dung are always so hungry that many of them risk their lives to steal the pig slops as they pass by. When caught eating the pigs' feed, they are shot and killed.

The prisoners on the dung-carrying team look forward to cleaning the pigsty because they can eat the leftovers from the slops with their hands still filthy with dung. The prisoners on the pig-raising team supply pig slops when the prisoners come to clean the pigsties so that the cleaning prisoners can enjoy the chance to have a "good meal" with the pigs.

Kum-bok Kim was from Kanggye town, Jagang Province. She was pretty and a very kind-hearted woman. Once, she was caught giving the pigs their feed when other prisoners were around cleaning. She was badly beaten by a prison official and kicked until she fainted. She was forced to confess her crime in writing and was sent for further investigation. She died under torture during the investigation.

Prisoners Shot for Stealing Corn

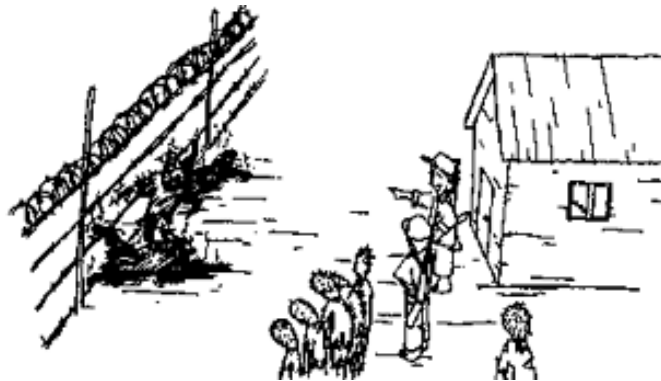
WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



All prisoners are mobilized once a year for harvest work in the prison farm. Some 400 guards watch while the prisoners work outside the prison. In September 1990, five male prisoners could not resist the temptation of eating raw corn during work and so they stole some ears and hurried to eat them. I was delivering a work order to a unit nearby at that time. The five prisoners were shot instantly by the guards without warning. In the prison, few trials or investigations were ever held for punishing or killing prisoners. Punishing and killing prisoners without trial or investigation were within the power of the prison superintendent.

Guards Killing Prisoners for Fun

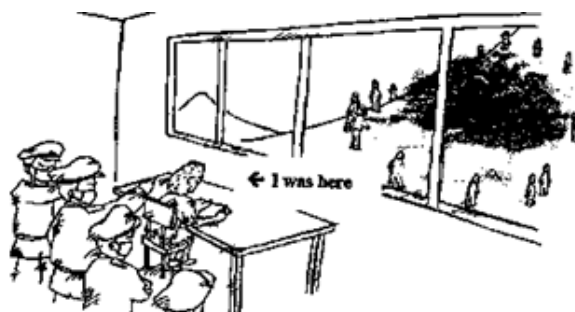
WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



A couple of times, I saw guards stop a group of male prisoners for fun. "Hey, you and you, come here. If you cross the barbed wire, I will let you go home." With these words, the prison guards tempted prisoners to cross the electrified barbed wire. The prisoners were so desperate and confused that, without hesitation, they jumped to their death with the faint hope of going home. This shows how prisoners are considered disposable and easily replaced. This is not an isolated incident. I have heard about it several times and have myself seen it happen twice during the five years I was in prison.

Prisoners Killed During the Testing of a New Chemical Poison

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



One day in February, 1990, I was doing routine paper work at the staff operation office at around 10:00 o'clock in the morning when, to my surprise, the prison superintendent, vice-superintendent, intelligence chief and three other unidentified officials walked into the room. One of them pointed to something outside my window. I was very terrified at their unusual appearance. Then, I overheard them saying, "Look! How powerful. What a great scientist Dr. Sung-ki Lee is, indeed! Well, from now on, its chemical warfare." Shortly afterwards, as I was walking to the other side of the room to deliver some papers to my guard, I saw them seriously watching something outside the window. On my way back to my desk, I took a quick glance outside. I saw many prisoners lying on the slope of a hill, bleeding from their mouths and motionless, enveloped by strange fumes and surrounded by scores of guards in the gas masks I delivered to the Chief Guard earlier in the morning.

In February, 1990, I was asked by the Chief Guard to follow him to an administration warehouse at 05:30 in the morning. He ordered me to check out six bundles (five pairs in each bundle) of gas masks with rubber gowns, which looked like a sea diver's kit. When I returned to my prison chamber, a total of 150 prisoners, several from each unit, were selected and separated from the other prisoners. The selected prisoners were mostly crippled and weak women who had less labor value.

I had to issue instructions for lunch with the same usual number for the male prisoners but 150 meals less for women. The prisoners started to exchange nervous looks with each other when the 150 prisoners did not return to work. An air of unusual tension and fear spread among the prisoners.

Normally, when a prisoner is sent to a punishment cell, an announcement is always made about why the prisoner is being punished to warn others. But that night, so many prisoners were sent to punishment cells for whispering, looking around nervously and exchanging signs of tension without the usual announcement. That night, the punishment cells were all full with a long list of prisoners awaiting the punishment. Obviously, the prison authorities attempted to cover up the killings.

Around October, 1990, an engineer supervisor was sent here from the defense chemistry factory in Hamhung. He was responsible for an explosion in the factory there and was secretly executed at an underground cell in about a month. At that time, I was told to reduce the number of meals by one in the kitchen. Later, I was confidentially informed about the killing by a prisoner/nurse who was involved in getting rid of the corpse.

At that time, 500 female prisoners were sent from here to the Hwachon area for some kind of expansion work of a chemical factory. The prisoners returned in about a month's time. One of the prisoners told me that there was a special chemical research institute in Hwsachon.

Prisoners Killed During a Biological Test

WITNESSED BY SO LEE, FORMER FEMALE PRISONER OF A POLITICAL PRISON



One day in May 1988, I had been in the prison for only six months and I was still trying to get accustomed to the prison conditions. I was working on the second floor of the export factory moving half-finished products from one table to another for assembly. During lunch time, I saw a pile of fresh cabbages at the kitchen entrance through the windows. This was the only time I saw cabbages in such good shape at the prison. I was so hungry that I began to wonder who would be the lucky people to eat them.

A little later when I came back to the same spot, I saw some fifty women prisoners eating the cabbage from a bowl with their fingers. The cabbages appeared somehow steamed. Soon, I saw the prisoners vomiting, bleeding from their mouths and moaning on the ground. I could not stay to watch more.

However, when I came back to the same spot again after a little while, I saw camp guards loading the dead prisoners onto a truck.

There were several strangers in white gowns around the dying prisoners. This was very strange because the political prison was under such strict control that no strangers were allowed inside. Then, I remembered that some fifty women had been told to come outside earlier, a few from each work unit.

Later, it was announced that they died from food poisoning. The prisoners knew what happened and they started to inform each other through their eyes. The prison officials were very nervous trying to keep the prisoners quiet. Why were the prison officials so nervous over the food poisoning when its mention was not a subject for punishment on other occasions? Unusually, many prisoners were sent to punishment cells that night for whispering or looking nervous.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENT

From Harbin to Hong Kong: The Final Chapter of My Escape from North Korea

Those of you who read my book *Eyes of the Tailless Animals* know the account of my son's and my escape from North Korea in the winter of 1994 and subsequent wandering around Northeast China in 1994 and 1995. It records how we made our way to Heilongjiang Province where a number of different people gave us refuge. As I noted we were being pursued by North Korean plainclothes police inside China. They were determined to find us as they did not want a former inmate of the North Korean camps organized to hold political prisoners to reach the outside world and bear witness to the human rights abuses taking place inside the camps. My book finishes with us making our way to South Korea via Hong Kong but does not contain the particulars of our route from Harbin to Hong Kong. The following are the details of that round-about refugee trail:

After moving from place to place with a price on our heads, we finally came to the city of Harbin, where a Korean-Chinese family helped us out of kindness, for a period of a few weeks. We heard there that the North Korean security services had undergone great anxiety when they learned that a former prison camp inmate had escaped to China. As I noted in my book, I was the only one I knew of to be released during my years in the camp; I was only released due to a desire to show official leniency and to gain good publicity on the occasion of Kim Il Sung's 80th birthday celebration. I also believe it was seen by prison authorities as a means of showing those in the camp that, if they studied Kim Il Sung's philosophy with diligence, worked hard, and truly reformed, they could anticipate being released some day. Still, I was the only one released and I still consider it a miracle.

After being released, the security authorities naturally kept me under close surveillance so they knew immediately when my son and I illegally left for China in February, 1994. Thus, there was a widespread manhunt on for us even in Harbin, far from the North Korean border. This last family wanted to assist us, but they had to think of their own and our safety. They advised us to go to Beijing to seek help getting to South Korea. Surely, I thought, my compatriots at the South Korean Embassy will help me? We are the same race, the same people, the same blood. The family bought train tickets for my son and me and we took the train to Beijing planning to make our way to the South Korean Embassy.

Beijing in the summer of 1995 was hosting the UN's International Conference on Women to discuss human rights. I, as a Korean woman and mother, made my way to the South Korean Embassy for help. Instead of the warm reception from my own people which I expected, I was received in a cold-hearted and rough manner. For two hours I begged for help; pleaded that my son and I were on the run and were being pursued by North Korean agents. "Go away," they said. With nothing, my son and I left after two hours.

My son, 26, who had a knack for languages and had learned some Chinese during our journey across northern China, came up with an idea. He said we should go to a port city where there was cargo traffic between China and South Korea and try to stowaway on a ship.

My son found a Chinese truck driver at a warehouse in Beijing who drove cargo between Beijing and Qingdao, the Chinese main port city on the Shandong peninsula where there is a lot of trade with South Korea. The Chinese driver took pity on us and agreed to drive us for free to

Qingdao. When we arrived at the factory near the Qingdao docks which was the driver's final destination, he told us that he would be back in a week to pick up more cargo. He said that if we had no luck in getting out of Qingdao to go to South Korea he would meet us in the same place exactly one week later and take us back to Beijing.

We hid among sacks of corn piled on the dock for one week. Cargo ships going to South Korea were there. There were also many Chinese customs and other officials so we had to hide ourselves. My son wanted me to climb the ropes that moored the cargo ships to the docks and get on board a South Korean-bound vessel. However, my legs were still crippled from the torture I received in the concentration camp and my shoulder and back were also in pain. The decks of the ships were too high. I just could not make it up the ropes to the waiting deck. We also failed to find any South Korean merchant sailor in an isolated situation where we could seek help. After a week we gave up. We decided to meet the kind Chinese truck driver at the agreed rendezvous point and to return to Beijing. There we would try our luck one last time at the South Korean Embassy.

When we arrived in Beijing, before going to the South Korean Embassy again, I went to a pharmacy and purchased rat poison. I placed the poison in two plastic bags, one for my son's pocket and one for my own. I told my son that if we failed to get help this time, we would die on the streets of Beijing rather than be returned by force to North Korea.

We came to the South Korean Embassy at nine o'clock in the morning and stayed until approximately six p.m. in the evening. We were interviewed by two South Korean officials, "Minister Counselor" Choi, as everyone called him, and "Consul" Hong. I begged and pleaded for help. "Please save the lives of my son and myself!" I cried. "You are our fellow countrymen. North Korean agents are looking for me as the one who has knowledge of their concentration camps. They will not let me live. If you do not help my son and me, I will be sent back and will die in North Korea." Choi and Hong said there was no way they would or could help. They said that my son and I should go away. I asked what would happen if I went to the American Embassy. They told me that I did not understand international relations. "If you go to the American Embassy they will just call us and we still won't help you," they said cold-heartedly.

I became hysterical. I cried bitter tears. I begged them to help me, to save our lives. As the day wore on, they lost patience. They said that if my son and I did not leave at once they would call the Chinese police and have us arrested. I told them that this meant death, that the Chinese police would give us to the North Koreans and that I at least would surely die. They just didn't care. My own people turned their backs on me. Even now when I remember this experience I am moved to tears. At six p.m. they said "We close the doors now. You must leave." Six Embassy officials pushed me and my son out of the diplomatic compound and into the street, closing the door on us. We were all alone.

I told my son there was no hope. We were all alone in the world. I said that "No one will help us, so we must die." We went to a city park in Beijing near the South

Korean diplomatic compound. We sat on the ground dejected, waiting for the courage to take the poison. An old Chinese gentleman, out for his evening exercise, came by. He noticed that we looked alone and depressed. "What is wrong?" He asked. "Can I help you?"

My son explained our circumstances. The old man was intelligent; he looked like he had once been a high Chinese government official. He said that he could take us to the Embassy of a third country where he was certain they would help us. It was a long way. He took us to the gates of that country's Embassy and said "please go in." We entered, not really knowing what to expect.

Two diplomats, a man and a woman, listened to our story. We told them that we had been twice to the South Korean Embassy and that all help there had been refused. They agreed to help us. They made arrangements for us to go to Hong Kong. I was in Hong Kong for forty days because this third country Embassy arranged for me to be hospitalized to recover from some of the injuries brought about by torture in the prison camp. Then the British allowed us to leave Hong Kong and to travel to South Korea. (This was before reversion of control of Hong Kong to China.)

This is my story.

Signed: Lee Soon Ok, May 2, 2002