

Human Rights Without Frontiers

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The European Union and North Korea

Willy Fautré, Director
Human Rights Without Frontiers

Ladies and gentlemen,

In my capacity of director of *Human Rights Without Frontiers*, an NGO based in Brussels (Belgium), the seat of various European institutions such as the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council, I will present you a summary of some initiatives taken by the European Union in 2001 in order to try to help the North Korean people in its quest for freedom and democracy. The European Union, this is 15 member states, a common currency for 12 of them, a common parliament with 626 members, 11 official languages, 375 million citizens. Every sixth month, a member state is in charge of the presidency of the European Union. In the second semester of 2001, Belgium assumed the presidency of the European institutions. Now, it is the turn of Spain.

In May 2001, under the Swedish presidency of the European Union, a European delegation led by Commissioner Chris Patten visited North Korea. When briefing the members of the European Parliament on the mission's results, Commissioner Patten noted that it had achieved its "modest objectives" as the North Korean authorities were at least "prepared to listen to the EU's concerns about human rights". As a follow-up, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the EU's Council and Commission to "expand EU assistance in a measured way linked to North Korea's response to international concerns with regard to respect for human rights and political and economic structural reforms". This is a very important aspect in view of the fact that the EU remains the major economic donor for the country and is in a position to emphasize the link between human rights and humanitarian aid.

Seeing the interest of the EU for North Korea, *Human Rights Without Frontiers* prepared the ground and the minds by starting a weekly press service on human rights in North Korea. Every week, we emailed the latest news, mainly coming from Citizens' Alliance, to each of the 626 members of the European Parliament, to the Belgian Parliament and Senate, to the Belgian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, to the press, to NGOs, institutions and influential people interested in the issue.

Then, the Korean authorities decided to try to open diplomatic relations with the European Union and its member states. France and Ireland turned down that proposal while Germany put a number of conditions. The other countries acceded to North Korea's request without any

preliminary conditions. Belgium and North Korea established diplomatic relations on 23 January 2001. Both countries will be represented by non-resident ambassadors. For Belgium, the ambassador residing in Seoul has been accredited to Pyongyang; for North Korea, the ambassador residing in Berlin has recently received the green light from Belgium.

The EU and many European countries became gradually more interested and sensitive to the problems in North Korea and began to think that it should not remain the exclusive zone of influence of the U.S. for military reasons but that they could also play a role in the region, different from Washington.

Human Rights Without Frontiers seized the opportunity of Belgium holding the presidency of the European Union to call the attention of Belgian authorities to the situation of human rights in North Korea. We focused in particular on North Korean refugees trying to find a safe haven in China, far from famine and political persecution, and we denounced the Chinese policy consisting in hunting down and deporting these refugees back to North Korea where they were tortured, imprisoned in concentration camps and sometimes executed.

We were fortunate to receive the support of Louis Michel, the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs. In July 2001, he visited China as Foreign Minister of Belgium and President of the Foreign Ministers of the EU. ***Human Rights Without Frontiers*** reminded then Louis Michel of the plight of the North Korean refugees in China. As a result, along with the Ambassador of Spain (this country is now exercising the presidency of the EU) the Representative of the European Union in Beijing expressed his deep concern on that issue to the Chinese authorities.

When Guy Verhofstadt, the Belgian Prime Minister, received in his capacity of President of the European Union Mr Zhu Rongji, the Chinese Prime Minister on September 5th in Brussels, he did not forget to voice concern about human rights in China and for the first time he specifically mentioned the rough handling of North Korean refugees by China. This was a first at the level of the European Union. Guy Verhofstadt found then himself jokingly invited by the Chinese Prime Minister to come and verify for himself the good status of human rights in China. And we hope that the Belgian Prime Minister and others will do it when they will visit China in a few months.

On December 4 and 5, 2001, ***Human Rights Without Frontiers*** invited to Brussels Dr. Norbert Vollertsen and two more eye-witnesses of the situation in North Korea in order to spearhead an information campaign on North Korea at the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Belgian Parliament. Their visit crowned our campaign for human rights in North Korea.

At the European Parliament, we arranged meetings with

- Representatives of the Committee for foreign affairs and human rights, the Committee for relations with Asia, and the Committee on development and co-operation.
- A number of European Parliament Members, most particularly Jacques Santer, former president of the European Commission, Jas Gawronski, Glyn Ford, Olivier Dupuis, expressed their interest in the human rights situation in North Korea and pledged their support for further activities.

At the European Commission, they met with the Chief of the Cabinet of Commissioner Patten, the European Commission desk officer for North Korea and a representative of the Humanitarian Aid Office.

During their talks with our visitors, the European Parliamentarians we met supported the idea of a meeting on North Korea at the European Parliament. We were told that the human rights experts at the European Union are trying to push forward a resolution on North Korea with the UN Human rights Commission in Geneva this year. The Office of Chris Patten, the European Commissioner in charge of External Relations showed his deep concern for the situation of Korean refugees in China and the present inability of UNHCR, IRC and NGOs to act.

Through the contacts that we have at the European Parliament and at the European Commission in Brussels, we have the possibility to put a number of issues regarding North Korea on their agenda and we can also visit influential officials through private meetings.

At the Belgian parliament, we organised a meeting with the senators that had involuntarily ridiculed themselves by going to North Korea in April 2000. The latest news brought back by our guests from Germany, Japan and South Korea were so appalling that they decided to create a Committee on North Korea Committee at the Parliament. This Committee will look for determined ways to act that I cannot reveal here now but they want to raise public awareness with relation to the humanitarian catastrophe and the flagrant violations of human rights in North Korea.

Belgium: Creation of a parliamentary committee for North Korea

Date: December 2001

#The undersigned parliamentarians,

- **alerted by the humanitarian situation, the human rights situation and the political situation prevailing in North Korea,**
- **conscious that such a situation is the result of the regime in place in North Korea and that it lasted for over half a century amid the quasi indifference of the international community,**
- **deeply dismayed by what they themselves observed during their visit to North Korea in the spring of the year 2000,**
- **convinced that one should alert without delay the public opinion, the Belgian government and European and international institutions and act in order to end this inhuman situation,**

have decided to create a "Parliamentarian Committee For North Korea".

#This Committee will launch whatever action conducive to :

- **improve the fate of the North-Korean population,**
- **encourage the emergence of democracy,**

- promote the respect of international norms in the area of basic rights and liberties.

#The World Football Championship which will take place in South Korea creates an obvious opportunity to inform the world of the sad predicament of the North-Korean population and to improve its fate.

Among the first actions proposed are :

- vote of a resolution by the Belgian Parliament to be conveyed to the North-Korean authorities,
- creation of an internet site for information and debate on North Korea,
- organising a Conference on North Korea,
- proposal of recommendations to the European Commission for the sending and (the) monitoring of humanitarian aid,
- sponsoring and support of the scarce local NGOs obtaining results in a clandestine way,
- encouragement of NGOs and specialised agencies to launch actions in the spirit of the preoccupations of this Committee.

Michiel Maertens will act as Secretary of this Committee.

Georges Dallemagne, Alain Destexhe, Michiel Maertens, Vincent Van Quickenborne, Ferdy Willems (Members of the Belgian Parliament)

We hope similar committees pursuing similar goals will be created by other European parliaments.

We are aware the situation in North Korea will not be solved in one day unless the regime collapses overnight as it was the case in a number of former communist countries in Europe more than a decade ago.

I have come to this conference to learn more from other guest-speakers about the plight of the North Korean people so that we can use the lever of the European Union whose 375 million citizens are represented by 626 parliamentarians from 15 countries to help the North Korean people smell and taste freedom.

Perspectives: The final solution through the collapse of the regime *How to create the conditions for such a collapse*

The sunshine policy and dialogue have shown their limits. No progress has been made in the field of human rights in North Korea in the last twelve months and it would be naïve to think that the situation might improve by itself or by the own will of Kim Jung-il. It is simply not possible to have a constructive dialogue with the leader of a Stalinist Jurassic Park. The rule

of law will never be established through the current process and every day, a lot of people die from famine.

The only solution is the collapse of the regime.

Now, there are two options. You either wait and see with the hope that a miracle will cause the collapse or you create the conditions that can lead to such a collapse.

How to create such conditions with non-violent means?

Let us remember how communism collapsed in Central and subsequently in Eastern Europe. It started with a small opening in a barbed wire fence somewhere in Hungary and a couple of hours later, thousands of cars from East Germany, Czechoslovakia and other communist countries rushed into the opening. That was the beginning of the end of communism.

Now, let us come back to North Korea. How can we produce a haemorrhage of population through the border? According to various sources, it has been estimated that 100,000 to 300,000 North Koreans are living underground in China. Each of them has risked his/her life to cross the border and tries every day and night not to be caught by the Chinese police.

Let us imagine that the international community manages to conclude an agreement with China stating that

1°) the Chinese authorities will not hunt North Korean defectors any more and will therefore stop deporting them;

2°) the Chinese government will allow international humanitarian agencies to install refugee camps all along the North Korean border, offer medical services and food to the refugees until they can be relocated either in China or in another country.

Don't you think that border guards would not be the first ones to defect? You just have to remember that famous picture showing an East German guard jumping over the Wall under construction. With the attraction power of fully equipped refugee camps all along the border in China and a weakly defended border, thousands of North Koreans could defect with a minimum of risks, including soldiers involved in the production of weapons for international terrorism in military factories hidden in the nearby mountains.

Am I a utopian? I don't think so. I think it is quite a realistic scenario.

But how could the international community convince China to drop North Korea and make such a deal? Why not if the Chinese authorities are proposed an interesting political and financial deal? China has already joined the U.S.-led international coalition against terrorism. China needs to show a better human rights record before the next Olympic Games to be held on its territory. So, why shouldn't they take a spectacular initiative? China would like to trade more with South Korea but needs to be connected to that country through a network of roads and railway lines. Why shouldn't the US, the European Union and Japan promise the Chinese to invest money in such projects? The only obstacle is the very presence in the region of Kim Jung-il's regime.

Someone famous once said "I had a dream" and his dream came true. I think this scenario is also a dream but this dream can become true because if there is a will, there is a way.