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ARTICLE

MISSION POSSIBLE: ADVANCING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF NORTH KOREANS

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Nothing in our past lives could have prepared us for what we heard. Our duty is to report to the world the evidence we found. If this report does not give rise to action, it is difficult to imagine what will.

– The Honorable Michael Kirby¹

I. INTRODUCTION: UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS SCHOOL OF LAW'S MISSION

The focus of this paper is on the mission of advancing human rights for North Koreans as seen from a vantage point shaped by the University of St. Thomas School of Law's ("UST Law") mission: "integrat[ing] faith and reason" in the service of "morality and social justice."² This mission, coupled with my own values and experiences, helped shape my path at UST Law and then into the field of North Korean human rights research and advocacy.

When searching for a law school experience, UST Law's focus on what it means to be a member of the legal profession and practice in such a way as to advocate for others, while encouraging community engagement and public service, was appealing to me. I had been part of a mission-ori-

* The author is a 2012 graduate of the University of St. Thomas School of Law and a 2013 graduate of The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Since 2013, she has worked as a human rights attorney at the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK) a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. In this role, she lived in Seoul from 2016–19 and is currently in Los Angeles, CA.

1. Justice Michael Kirby is the former Chair of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). He made this statement after releasing the Commission's findings that the DPRK was committing crimes against humanity, March 17, 2014. The Honorable Michael Kirby, "Statement by Mr. Michael Kirby Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the 25th session of the Human Rights Council," Geneva, March 17, 2014, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14385&LangID=E>.

2. See *About St. Thomas Law*, U. ST. THOMAS SCH. L., <https://stthomas.edu/law/about> (last visited Apr. 24, 2021).

ented organization before law school while serving in the US Army,³ so a mission-oriented approach was desirable to me, especially one tied to advancing the “common good.”⁴ I felt supported by this institution that impressed upon me the idea of serving others through the practice of law, or by “integrat[ing] faith and reason” in the service of “morality and social justice.” In particular, Professors Delahunty, Wiebe, and Nichols made lasting impressions on me with their teachings and expertise on public international law, immigration law, and human rights law, respectively—but also their overall kindness. While at UST Law, I had the opportunity to learn from other talented professionals too, through the mentor program and intern/externships, including with The Honorable Susan Richard Nelson and The Honorable Michael Browne, and many more at The Advocates for Human Rights, the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota, and the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia.

II. ABOUT THE COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN NORTH KOREA

Today I work as a human rights attorney at the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK), the leading US-based nonpartisan, non-profit, nongovernmental organization (NGO) in the field of North Korean human rights research and advocacy. At HRNK, we have a small team but a big mission: to focus domestic and international attention on human rights abuses and to seek solutions to improve human rights in North Korea (formally known as the “Democratic People’s Republic of Korea” or the “DPRK”).⁵ Since 2001, HRNK has published over forty reports that have sought to advance this mission and contribute to our guiding objectives: (1) close North Korea’s gulags, (2) open North Korea’s borders, (3) inform North Korea’s citizens, (4) foster good economic principles, (5) promote outside access, (6) feed the hungry in North Korea, and (7) link development assistance to tangible improvements in the regime’s human rights record.

In addition to unique research and reporting on North Korea’s human rights situation, HRNK is engaged in advocacy on behalf of a “client” we usually never meet. In a way, we are called to be remote advocates for 25 million North Koreans who largely are prevented by the regime of Kim

3. I continue to serve as a judge advocate in the US Army Reserve. My opinions herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the US Army.

4. The “common good” is “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.” “Three component parts are also specified: (1) respect for the dignity of the human person; (2) social well-being and development; and (3) peace and security.” Anthony R. Picarello Jr., *Taking the “Sum Total” of the Common Good in Religious Freedom Discourse*, 16 U. ST. THOMAS L.J. 57, 59 (2019) (citing PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH* para. 164 (2006)).

5. For more details, see *About HRNK*, THE COMM. FOR HUM. RTS. IN N. KOR., <https://www.hrnk.org/about/about-hrnk.php> (last visited Apr. 24, 2021).

Jong-un from having a voice or being afforded human dignity (the latter concept based on Catholic Social Teaching, which carried with me from my time at UST Law). As part of these advocacy efforts, HRNK (1) teaches others—including many students—about the human rights situation in North Korea and our work to advance the study of this important topic; (2) informs decision makers, policymakers, international organizations, United Nations (“UN”) Member States, governments, academics, and concerned citizens; and (3) calls for persistent and focused actions to improve the situation on the ground for the North Korean people.⁶

III. BRIEF HUMANITARIAN ASSESSMENT OF NORTH KOREA

On March 6, 2019, the UN DPR Korea office released its “Needs and Priorities Plan” outlining its funding needs—estimated at \$120 million—to agencies supporting roughly 3.8 million people in the DPRK.⁷ Mr. Tapan Mishra, the then UN Resident Coordinator and Chair of the DPRK Humanitarian Country Team, stated that the most concerning issue was that overall food production was at an all-time low in 2018 compared to the last decade, and 9 percent lower than 2017.⁸ He went on to state that:

- Eleven million North Koreans “lack sufficient nutritious food, clean drinking water or access to basic services like health and sanitation;”
- One in five children is “stunted as a result of chronic undernutrition” and is “at risk of dying from curable diseases” due to widespread undernutrition and limited healthcare;
- Approximately 10 million people lack access to potable water;
- Sixteen percent of people in the DPRK do not have basic sanitation facilities;
- As a result, the risk of disease and malnutrition is even higher, which then strains the already inadequate healthcare system in the country, as it lacks proper equipment and medicine to address these illnesses and conditions; and
- The needs of people in rural areas are generally more acute and may vary based on the province and location.

The UN DPR Korea office also stated it had factored in “the most vulnerable including 1.6 million under-five children, and almost 395,000 pregnant and lactating women.”⁹ Nevertheless, today millions of North Koreans are vulnerable to food shortages, disease, and lack of clean water, and as a result, face numerous health and safety issues affecting their daily

6. For more information, visit HRNK’s homepage. THE COMM. FOR HUM. RTS. IN N. KOR., <https://www.hrnk.org> (last visited Apr. 24, 2021).

7. U. N. DPR KOREA, DPR KOREA NEEDS AND PRIORITIES 3 (Mar. 6, 2019), https://dprkorea.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/DPRK_NP_2019_Final.pdf.

8. *Id.*

9. Mr. Mishra’s time in the DPRK ended, and he is now Resident Coordinator in Mongolia. U. N. DPR KOREA, *supra* note 7, at 3.

lives and opportunities. Inherent in these vulnerabilities are human rights violations committed by the Kim Jong-un regime. The current COVID-19 pandemic and the Kim regime's draconian border control responses are exacerbating a fragile humanitarian and human rights situation in the country.¹⁰

IV. UNPARALLELED HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN NORTH KOREA

At HRNK, focusing on our mission to advance and improve the human rights situation in North Korea often encounters a harsh truth: that the situation has not substantially improved over the years. In some ways it has even deteriorated. And in these moments of reflection and assessment, it is easy to feel a sense of hopelessness and frustration for the inability to meaningfully and directly assist one of the most vulnerable and oppressed people on Earth.

In 2014, a UN independent investigatory body, the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (UN COI), found that "systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been, and are being, committed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, its institutions and officials. In many instances, the violations of human rights found by the Commission constitute *crimes against humanity*."¹¹ Six years later, the ongoing egregious human rights violations committed by the Kim regime against its own people continue to constitute grave violations of the regime's own commitments under international law.¹² While the violations are too numerous to detail here, the human rights situation in North Korea is both dire and urgent. Former Chair of the UN COI, The Honorable Michael Kirby, stated in 2014, "The gravity, scale, duration and nature of the unspeakable atrocities committed in the country reveal a totalitarian State that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world."¹³

In particular, it is North Korea's creation and maintenance of a "brutal feeder system of detention," as characterized by veteran human rights de-

10. Bruce W. Bennet & Diana Y. Myers, *North Korea: Denying COVID-19*, THE RAND BLOG (Apr. 2, 2020), <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/04/north-korea-denying-covid-19.html>.

11. U.N. Human Rights Council, Report of the Detailed Findings of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, ¶ 1211, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/25/CRP.1 (Feb. 7, 2014) (emphasis added) [hereinafter *UN COI Report*].

12. North Korea has ratified or acceded to five core international human rights treaties: (1) the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); (2) the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); (3) the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); (4) the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); and (5) the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). However, under the Kim regime leadership, North Korea does not adhere to these treaties.

13. Kirby, *supra* note 1.

fender and scholar David R. Hawk,¹⁴ that sets the country apart in the most regrettable fashion. The Kim regime maintains a system of detention facilities that imprison tens of thousands of people for perceived political crimes, modeled largely on Joseph Stalin's Gulag.¹⁵ In these facilities, prisoners are treated as slaves and forced to work for long periods in difficult conditions, with little food or access to medical care.¹⁶

Estimates vary, but it is believed that up to 120,000 languish in political prisons (political penal-labor colonies, concentration camps, or gulags) predominantly without hope of release, and more than 70,000 individuals are imprisoned in re-education through labor camps in North Korea. *Crimes against humanity* occur in both types of prisons according to the UN COI report and based on HRNK's own research.¹⁷ In most cases, North Koreans are detained under inhumane conditions for "crimes that are not really crimes."¹⁸ Thus, a vast majority of imprisoned North Koreans are *innocents* who have been unjustly targeted, oppressed, and denied basic human rights under the Kim regime's totalitarian system.¹⁹ To make matters worse, family members of political prisoners, those who flee the DPRK, those accused of practicing religion, or those accused of having contact with South Koreans, are subjected to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial punishment, including imprisonment in the political penal-labor colonies as well.

Evidence from HRNK's ongoing research projects on the DPRK's detention system shows that prisoners are targeted by the regime, denied basic human rights, subjected to torture, denied the right to a fair trial or in some cases a trial at all, are malnourished, riddled with infections and disease based on prison conditions and treatment, and suffer extreme physical and mental abuse. Nevertheless, the regime still refuses to acknowledge the existence of its political prisons despite ample satellite imagery and even escape and guard testimony proving otherwise.²⁰

14. David Hawk's reports for HRNK are available online. *HRNK Publications*, THE COMM. FOR HUM. RTS. IN N. KOR., <https://www.hrnk.org/publications/hrnk-publications.php> (last visited Apr. 24, 2021).

15. *Gulag*, HISTORY (Aug. 21, 2018), <https://www.history.com/topics/russia/gulag>.

16. David Hawk, *The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps*, THE COMM. FOR HUM. RTS. IN N. KOR. (2003), https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/The_Hidden_Gulag.pdf.

17. *UN COI Report*, *supra* note 11.

18. Impressed upon the author by David Hawk and as discussed in his report with the author. David Hawk & Amanda Mortwedt Oh, *The Parallel Gulag: North Korea's "An-jeon-bu" Prison Camps*, THE COMM. FOR HUM. RTS. IN N. KOR. 4, 7, 21 (2017), https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/Hawk_The_Parallel_Gulag_Web.pdf.

19. "Innocents" are a central theme of Robert Collins's report with the author. Robert Collins & Amanda Mortwedt Oh, *From Cradle to Grave: The Path of North Korean Innocents*, THE COMM. FOR HUM. RTS. IN N. KOR. (2017), https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/Collins_Cradle_to_Grave_WEB_FINALFINAL.pdf.

20. See, e.g., David Hawk, *The Hidden Gulag (Second Edition): The Lives and Voices of "Those Who Are Sent to the Mountains"*, THE COMM. FOR HUM. RTS. IN N. KOR. (2012), https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK_HiddenGulag2_Web_5-18.pdf.

As a way for civil society to continue the important work of the UN COI, I work at HRNK, together with the International Bar Association (IBA) and David Tolbert, former Deputy Chief Prosecutor of the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, to document human rights violations that likely amount to crimes against humanity in North Korea's short-term detention facilities. This winter in Seoul, HRNK and the IBA, with the invaluable pro bono assistance of a law firm and the IBA's War Crimes Committee, plan to hold an Inquiry as an unofficial follow-on to the UN COI's investigation and report. This Inquiry seeks to document crimes against humanity for the purpose of (1) establishing a factual/legal foundation for the international community to hold perpetrators accountable and (2) deterring North Korean officials from committing crimes against humanity in the future after learning their crimes are being authoritatively documented. It will also feature former North Korean prisoners' testimony of their experiences inside the Kim regime's detention facilities. Judge Navi Pillay (South Africa), Judge (Dame) Sylvia Cartwright (New Zealand), and Judge Wolfgang Schomburg (Germany) will preside over the Inquiry.

V. CHALLENGES IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS FIELD

Today, despite the increased international awareness of the Kim regime's human rights violations and crimes against humanity, challenges remain when it comes to improving the human rights situation for the North Korean people. To start, there is a totalitarian regime in power that devalues human life and dignity and has built a system of "coercion, control, surveillance, and punishment."²¹ However, what has morphed from that time, emerging after the Korean War armistice in 1953, is something unique to our current world: a system of repression so at odds with the concept of human rights that it defines individual human rights in terms of the collective. A part of this seemingly insurmountable obstacle is the fact that the DPRK possesses nuclear weapons and threatens the international peace and security of Northeast Asia and the United States.²² In addition, political will varies, as do world views on the history of the occupation of Korea following the defeat of Japan, the Korean War, and the role of the United States military on the Korean Peninsula today. To some, there can be no true peace and eventual unification of northern and southern Korea without human rights improvements. To others, peace on any terms is the best way forward for Koreans.

21. Ken Gause, *Coercion, Control, Surveillance, and Punishment: An Examination of the North Korean Police State*, THE COMM. FOR HUM. RTS. IN N. KOR. (2012), https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK_Ken-Gause_Web.pdf.

22. OFF. OF THE DIR. OF NAT'L INTEL., ANNUAL THREAT ASSESSMENT OF THE US INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE 15 (Apr. 9, 2021), <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2021-Unclassified-Report.pdf>.

Even within the human rights field, there are no set answers or clear path to improving human rights. We can bring attention to the facts and what we believe would improve people's lives, but we cannot act on behalf of an unwilling government or compel UN Member States to follow the recommendations outlined in the UN COI report, for example. Often at HRNK, the first step for us is informing people of the seriousness of the issues facing North Koreans, explaining the differences in Kim Jong-un's system of governance as compared to democracies, for example, and providing research on the current state of the field with the caveat that North Korea remains one of the most restrictive information environments in the world. Our efforts repeatedly look at new ways to tell a similar story, but in a way that captures the world's heart and compels concern and perhaps calls for justice or a different way of life for people without the ability to act on their own behalf. Fortunately, there are some glimmers of light in all of these circumstances, but they do require persistent efforts and some faith that the work being done to try to improve the lives of North Koreans—however imperfectly—may yield a more favorable result someday.

As an example of what can be considered success, HRNK's 2003 *Hidden Gulag* report by David Hawk (with updates in 2012, 2013, 2015, and 2017) constituted a turning point in international efforts to expose the egregious human rights violations perpetrated inside North Korea's prison camps.²³ Among the many testimonies compiled were large numbers of reports documenting the deliberate denial of adequate food and healthcare to prisoners, resulting in high mortality rates.²⁴ Hawk's reports for HRNK provide satellite imagery showing true places of "hell on earth" whose existence the DPRK continues to deny.²⁵ Since 2003, the satellite imagery has only become clearer and more available to NGOs and governments with the resources and motivation to document human rights abuses in North Korea's prison system.²⁶ Without question, another turning point was the February 2014 UN COI report's findings of crimes against humanity in the DPRK.²⁷ The UN COI heard from over 320 witnesses during its fact-finding investigation. More than 240 victims provided confidential testimony,²⁸ and almost eighty of these witnesses, both victims and experts, publicly testified before the UN COI.²⁹

23. All of HRNK's reports are available online. *HRNK Publications*, THE COMM. FOR HUM. RTS. IN N. KOR., <https://www.hrnk.org/publications/hrnk-publications.php> (last visited Apr. 24, 2021).

24. *Id.*

25. For example, see Hawk, *supra* note 16, at 91–121.

26. Hawk & Mortwedt Oh, *supra* note 18, at 2–3.

27. *UN COI Report*, *supra* note 11.

28. U.N. Hum. Rts. Council, Rep. of the Comm'n of Inquiry on Hum. Rts. in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on Its Twenty-Fifth Session, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/25/63, ¶ 14 (2014).

29. *Public Hearings (Programs, Videos, Transcripts)*, U.N. HUM. RTS. COUNCIL, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/CoIDPRK/Pages/PublicHearings.aspx> (last visited Apr. 26, 2021).

Access to North Korean escapees, however, is still relatively rare. There is a population of 33,752 former North Koreans living in South Korea but only 220 former North Koreans living in the United States as of March 31, 2021.³⁰ Due to COVID-19 and the political priorities of countries, including North Korea, China, and South Korea, the number of North Koreans who escaped and safely arrived in South Korea was at more than a 20-year low with just 229 recorded North Korean escapees arriving in South Korea in 2020.³¹ In the first half of 2021, a mere 36 escapees have arrived in South Korea.³² North Koreans do not have the right to leave their own country without state permission, which is rarely granted, and yet there are those exceptional people who escape that provide HRNK and others with a glimpse into North Korea. North Korean refugees are typically the embodiment of courage, determination, and immense strength.

From 2018 to 2019, while living in Seoul, I had the opportunity to interview over fifty former North Korean prisoners on behalf of HRNK to document crimes against humanity committed in North Korea's short-term detention facilities. Interviewees came from two hours away or more, some of them in a wheelchair or on crutches, fit us in during work, took time off, brought their newborns and toddlers, came after psychiatric and medical appointments, brought a fellow North Korean to lean on, provided potential contacts, and stood up for themselves and other North Koreans because of the horrors they endured and witnessed in detention in North Korea and China. Their bravery and stories of abuse were compelling; their lives in South Korea not easy (living in a 200-square-foot apartment with a family of four, for example); their perseverance remarkable. They showed us their scars, physical and emotional, and thanked us for caring about what is happening and what has happened to them, their unborn children, their families, and their neighbors in North Korea and China, more often than not torn senselessly apart. We heard the voices of families still in the North through recorded phone messages and saw family photos of sons and daughters in North Korea; we listened to the mothers and fathers who long for those they left behind. Some said they just wished everyone could have enough to eat in North Korea. Some were angry at the Kim regime, some were skeptical of a way to improve human rights in North Korea, most were grateful to talk about what they have gone through.

30. For US figures on North Korean asylees, see *Admissions and Arrivals*, REFUGEE PROCESSING CTR., <https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals> (last visited Apr. 16, 2021). South Korea's Ministry of Unification provides data from 1998 onwards. *Policy on North Korean Defectors: Number of North Korean Defectors Entering South Korea*, ROK MINISTRY OF UNIFICATION, https://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/relations/statistics/defectors (last visited Oct. 12, 2021).

31. ROK MINISTRY OF UNIFICATION, *supra* note 30.

32. ROK MINISTRY OF UNIFICATION, *supra* note 30.

These interviews will forever live with me, as I am still processing the stories of heartbreaking and painfully unnecessary human suffering and tragedy. For instance, one woman recalled:

In the Onsong mobile labor brigade, a female detainee was forced to have an abortion. She was taken from her cell by the guards to a hospital and an abortion was performed on her without her consent. The abortion produced a live baby, as I was told by the woman, and the baby was moving around. The doctor then gave the baby a shot that apparently terminated the baby and the baby was put into a plastic bag. The apparent reason was that the father was Chinese.³³

Unfortunately, testimony such as the above is not uncommon; it is recurrent and pervasive, and it shows time and time again the seriousness of the situation in the DPRK and the callous disregard for human life. As a mother, some of the most difficult testimony I have heard involves infanticide and forced abortions—and I am far removed from the actual experiences that North Koreans have lived through.

As such, the testimony we collected in Seoul tells a grim tale of crimes that “shock the conscience.” As we work to document these egregious human rights abuses and locate detention facilities using satellite imagery, the constant question is, how do we actually make any improvements in this system? What we know now, as UN COI Chair Justice Kirby has rightly pointed out, is that the world knows about crimes against humanity in North Korea and there is no going back from that point. So, how do we convince people and governments to care? With limited resources, do we focus on more feasible goals, such as encouraging North Korea to provide clean water to prisoners, or do we continue to reach for our guiding objectives, such as dismantling the gulag in its entirety?

VI. MISSION POSSIBLE: WHAT CAN BE DONE?

There are no easy answers when it comes to North Korea unless and until Kim Jong-un sees a path where the North Korean people are treated with dignity, and he reforms the party-state totalitarian system in the northern half of Korea. However, my colleagues and I, and the North Korean human rights community, keep faith and hope alive despite the sizable challenges.

As a result, all is not lost. While we work both proactively and reactively at times, there are tangible steps to be taken from an NGO perspective. As an NGO, HRNK advocates domestically, at the United Nations, and internationally to create awareness and make policy recommendations for governments and key stakeholders. For many years now, we have focused on calling for accountability for human rights violations, specifically

33. Interview with an anonymous woman, in Seoul, S. Kor. (Mar. 17, 2019).

crimes against humanity committed by perpetrators in the DPRK. As part of these efforts, we work on documenting human rights violations based on escapee testimony and satellite imagery analysis, looking for changes in the DPRK prison camps and evidence of mass graves, for example, that could point to extermination, a crime against humanity.

In recent years, as mentioned, HRNK conducted a series of interviews in Seoul to document crimes against humanity in DPRK short-term detention facilities. In collaboration with the IBA, we aim to press for accountability for these crimes and, in doing so, obtained sworn statements from affiants for a future quasi-judicial hearing on crimes against humanity. There is substantial evidence that ten out of the eleven crimes against humanity have been committed in these short-term detention facilities in North Korea in violation of Article 7 of the Rome Statute.³⁴ Once international travel is safe again and the current global pandemic has subsided, we will hold an all-day, quasi-judicial hearing in Seoul, South Korea, presented by the IBA's War Crimes Committee, with judges Navi Pillay (Inquiry Chair), Dame Silvia Cartwright, and Wolfgang Schomburg presiding. The judges are renowned international judges who previously participated in or chaired many of the most consequential international criminal tribunals since the Nuremberg trials (i.e., International Criminal Court as well as the Rwanda, Cambodia, and former Yugoslavia tribunals). Accountability mechanisms are just one way for an NGO such as HRNK to push for the improvement of human rights in the DPRK. This is offered as an example of "what can be done."

In addition, other organizations directly assist North Koreans to find safe passage from China to third countries and eventually to South Korea. One organization in Seoul works with former Korean War prisoners of war and advocates for an end to the tragic family separations still maintained by the DPRK to this day. Another sends information into the DPRK by smuggling USBs loaded with South Korean dramas. And another packs small bags of vegetable seeds to be smuggled across the border for people's home gardens. Fortunately, there are many people doing good work to help North Koreans, most of whom they will never meet. In this way, what is needed is already being done but could always use more attention, support, and action. I know for certain that if we do not say anything and do not advocate for human rights improvements in North Korea, we risk failing the people of North Korea who desperately need assistance.

34. There may be a compelling argument for the crime of apartheid as well. The DPRK, however, is not a signatory to the *Rome Statute*, but this is a separate discussion. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, July 17, 1998, 2187 U.N.T.S. 38544, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/resource/library/official-journal/rome-statute.aspx#article7>.

VII. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MISSION

While the mission of improving North Korean human rights is undoubtedly challenging, HRNK will continue to support the dignity of North Koreans by giving them a voice, enabling them to tell their stories, and advocating for their human rights. As we work with recognized experts in the field of North Korean human rights, and document more cases of crimes against humanity inside North Korean detention facilities by interviewing former prisoners, we will continue to build the evidentiary case for accountability and call on the UN, its Member States, and the DPRK to encourage human rights reform.

On a personal level, while I am very grateful, proud, and humbled on a daily basis as a member of the HRNK team, the truth is that faith has often compelled me not only to keep working on this daunting mission but to believe that eventually there will come a day when the North Korean people as a whole will know a better life—a life they deserve as human beings.

Ultimately, UST Law and its mission helped me find some comfort when thinking about a nontraditional legal path; its professors and course options gave me the educational foundation and the support to get started in the human rights field—and then keep forging ahead; and the plight of North Koreans and HRNK's mission gave me the purpose to continue to advocate on behalf of North Koreans in pursuit of the common good.

Here are some ways to get involved in HRNK's mission:

- Read and reference our publications: <https://www.hrnk.org/publications/hrnk-publications.php>;
- Donate to HRNK: <https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/HRNK>;
- Subscribe to our daily press: <https://www.hrnk.org/>; and
- Contact us anytime: committee@hrnk.org.