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North Korean Defectors Condemn Rights Abuses

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North Korean defectors are seeking U.S. help to end human rights abuses in the nation and oppose the Communist regime. The call comes as President Bush renews his criticism of North Korean leader Kim Jung-Il, calling him a dangerous tyrant.

North Korean defectors say tens of thousands of political prisoners are being held in forced labor camps, and millions of others suffer daily under the regime. Speaking in Washington Friday, the Exile Committee for North Korean Democracy says it hopes to coordinate the efforts of thousands of defectors and international groups in opposing North Korean leader Kim Jong Il.

The vice-president of the group, Daniel Choi, says they hope to challenge the regime by spreading the message of human rights and democracy to people in the Communist nation.

"We have to contact North Korean people directly and we have to try to give some information to North Korean people," said Mr. Choi.

The defectors' group also condemned violations against religious and political prisoners, like Mr. Choi's mother, Soon Ok Lee, who was jailed for more than five years before she fled the country.

She says North Korean prisoners suffer constant abuse. "All the prisoners, they die of torture, and they die of under-nutrition, starvation, and they die of disease, and they die from beatings. But to the last day, until the moment they die, they got so brainwashed so thoroughly they declare loyalty to the party. That's the extent of brain-washing," she explained.

The United States has repeatedly condemned human rights abuses in North Korea and continues to press Pyongyang to dismantle its nuclear weapons program.

Speaking to reporters Thursday, President Bush renewed his criticism of the North Korean leader. "Kim Jong Il is a dangerous person," said Mr. Bush. "He's a man who starves his people. He's got huge concentration camps. And there is concern about his capacity to deliver a nuclear weapon. We don't know if he can or not, but I think it's best, when you're dealing with a tyrant like Kim Jong Il, to assume he can."

President Bush says he remains committed to the six-party talks to resolve the nuclear dispute, despite Pyongyang's refusal to sit down for a new meeting since last year.

Also this week, a top State Department official said there is a "sense of urgency" for the talks, and U.S. military officials warn North Korea may have the capability to launch a nuclear missile.

While the nuclear threat continues to strain U.S.-Korean ties, human rights activist Sin-U Nam says freeing North Korea's people is the first step.

"Nuclear is important, but we believe democratization of North Korea is the way to resolve all this issue. If you re-democratize North Korea, then the nuclear issue will be resolved along with it," he said.

Pyongyang has repeatedly accused the United States of planning a military attack on the nation. U.S. officials reject the allegations.

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A U.S. soldier at the center of the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal in Iraq is to plead guilty Monday to reduced charges. Her attorney says Army Reservist Lynndie England will plead guilty to conspiracy, maltreating prisoners and dereliction of duty. Two charges are to be dropped. England was seen in widely publicized photographs holding a leash attached to a naked detainee at Abu Ghraib and, in another photo, smiling and pointing at a prisoner's...