

Cross-border Movement of North Korean Citizens

Lee Keum-soon

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, the worsening economic crisis and the food shortage in North Korea have drastically changed the lives of the North Korean people. The breakdown of the central distribution system has also hastened difficulties by the central authorities to control the citizens. The paralyzed system has compelled North Koreans to find new ways to survive, which has led more and more North Koreans to go in search of food and necessities.

Meanwhile, in September 1998, North Korea amended the Constitution (Article 75): "All citizens have the freedom of residence and travel." Yet, except for special cases approved by the authorities, North Koreans are not allowed to travel for personal reasons. Even when they do so, they are required to carry various documents such as an ID card, letter of confidence, and travel permit to "prevent spies, and other negative elements from disrupting the society" or "for the safety of the nation," according to the authorities. Increasing numbers of people are crossing the provincial or national boundaries, and inspection of documents has become lax, excluding

special regions such as Pyongyang, and Rajin-Sonbong Special Economic Zone. Travel without a permit opens up the possibility of punishment by North Korean officials, who seek to benefit illegally from the issuance of permits.

The severity of the food crisis has fluctuated over the years. From 1996 to 1998 when the food situation was at its worst, a large number of residents in the northwest mountainous areas and in large northeastern cities are believed to have been displaced. In fact, the food shortage has devastated the family unit. Large numbers of children wander around the outdoor markets (*jangmadang*) and train stations. Those who live near the borders have crossed over to seek assistance from relatives or other ethnic Koreans living in China, and most of them have not returned.

The paper focuses on those externally displaced persons who are crossing the Tumen and Yalu Rivers to China or into other third countries. Over time, the issue has become an important policy consideration among concerned countries. Particularly, since the adoption of a resolution to improve human rights in North Korea by the 59th UN Commission on Human Rights in April 2003, the issue of escapees has attracted international attention. In addition, the U.S. administration is focusing not only on North Korea's nuclear development program, but also on the human rights issue and North Korean escapees.

This paper will first review the scope of the escapee issue and relevant international environments. Second, it will analyze the facts and finally, it will consider further prospects. It is hoped that such a review will lead to protection of escapees' rights and their increased support and that it will ultimately lead to resolution of the issue.

CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENTS: FACTS AND BACKGROUNDS

The Number of Escapees

The number of North Korean residents crossing national borders has surged since the mid-1990s, meaning that many are living in China, Russia and other third nations. Because of their illegal status, they cannot openly ask for help, and thus, it is practically impossible to assess their exact numbers. The South Korean government estimated in October 1999 that North Korean escapees in China, Russia and other nations numbered between 10,000 and 30,000. Although the Chinese government has set the number at around 10,000, civil organizations that support them in China estimated the number between 100,000 and 300,000. "Good Friends," a refugee relief agency, believes that 140,000-200,000 escapees are hiding in 2,479 villages in three Northeastern provinces of China alone.¹⁾ U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR), a non-profit organization, said in the World Refugee Survey, "There are 50,000 escapees in China and 100,000 wanderers from North Korea."²⁾ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also presumed the number of escapees in China to be 100,000 in June 2003.³⁾

Other data from which we can indirectly estimate the number of escapees is the number of North Koreans who have been repatriated to North Korea. According to a report on the three Northeastern Provinces, conducted by a research center under the Chinese government, the number of repatriated North Koreans was 589 in 1996, 5,439 in 1997, and 6,300 in 1998, showing a dramatic

1) Good Friends, "North Korea Report on the Food Refugees and Human Rights," (June 1996), [<http://www.jungto.org>].

2) *Joongang Ilbo*, June 27, 2001.

3) *Chosun Ilbo*, June 20, 2003, A20.

increase.⁴ USCR also said that increasing numbers of North Koreans were repatriated after being apprehended by the National Border Guard. And in the spring of 2001 when China strengthened crackdowns and repatriation, 6,000 people were arrested in June and July alone.⁵ If the number is indeed in the range of 6,000 as mentioned above, the South Korean government's estimated number of 10,000 to 30,000 seems somewhat inaccurate. Considering all aspects, the number is probably 100,000 or so.

It appears that North Koreans have tried to move not only to China, but also to areas of the former Soviet Union, Mongolia, Northeast Asia and other regions where Korean communities exist. They have also sought political asylum in Thailand, Taiwan, Australia, the United States and other countries, with the support of civil organizations and human rights activists. But most nations, excluding China and Russia, are simply transit countries in the journey to South Korea or other final destinations. Among those who flee are loggers and construction workers who, along with others drift into China. They total about 2,000. Southeast Asian countries and Mongolia also serve as transit points on the way to South Korea, with an estimated 1,000 escapees waiting to enter.⁶

Analysis on the Escapees

Those who escape by sea or land, across the North-South border, make up only a small portion of the total number of escapees. In fact, most cross the Tumen and Yalu Rivers to China, and then try to enter South Korea, hoping to avoid repatriation and to live a secure life. As

4) Korean Institute for National Unification, *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea 2003* (Seoul: KINU, 2003).

5) USCR, *World Refugee Survey 2002-North Korea* (June 6, 2002).

6) Yoon Yeo-sang, "Local Management of Escapees Staying Overseas and Education Program Development-Focusing on Those Staying in Southeast Asian Countries" (March 2002), [<http://www.iloveminority.com>].

Table 1. Annual Number of North Korean Defectors

Year	Before 1989	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	Total
N. of Defectors	607	9	9	8	8	52	41	56	85	72	148	312	583	1,139	1,281	4,410

Source: Ministry of Unification, *Protection and Settlement Support of North Korean Defectors* (January 27, 2003), [www.unikorea.go.kr].

Table 2. Age Distribution of N. Korean Defectors (Entries in 2002)

Age	Less than 10	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	Over than 60	Total
NO.	55	155	332	368	130	61	40	1,141
Percent	4.8	13.6	29.2	32.3	11.3	5.3	3.5	100

Source: *Ibid.*

of December 2003, a total of 4,410 North Korean refugees had entered South Korea. Excluding those who died or immigrated to foreign nations, 4,147 escapees are now living there.⁷⁾

Defectors to South Korea have grown exponentially since 1994: to 312 in 2000, 538 in 2001, and 1,139 in 2002. In 2003, the number was 1,281 as of the end of December, a 12 percent increase compared with the previous year.⁸⁾ Given the annual doubling since 1999, the 2003 increase shows a marked slowdown, which is believed to be the result of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in China and Southeast Asian countries, and the arrest of human smugglers.

With the surge in escapees into South Korea, more diverse motives, types, age groups and occupations are being observed. Among the profiles in 2003, family-unit defection have increased, with women (813 persons) accounting for 63.4 percent. In terms of

7) Ministry of Unification, *Entry Status of Escapees from North Korea* (Seoul: MOU, January 2004).

8) *Ibid.*

Table 3. Origination of N. Korean Defectors (Entries 2002)

Origination	N. Hamkyong	S. hamkyong	Pyongan	Yanggang /Jagang	Kangwon	Hwanghae	Others	Total
NO.	757	121	95	51	26	39	52	1,141
Percent	66.3	10.6	8.3	4.5	2.3	3.4	4.6	100

Source: Ministry of Unification, *op. cit.*

Table 4. Occupational Distribution of N. Korean Defectors (Entries in 2002)

Occupation	Managing	Professional	Arts/ Athletics	Workers/ Farmers	Service	Military	Others	Total
NO.	32	45	18	504	72	11	459	1,141
Percent	2.8	3.9	1.6	44.2	6.3	1.0	40.6	100

Source: *Ibid.*

age, 47 percent were in their 20s and 30s, a decrease compared with 61.5 percent in 2002. In terms of region, 71.9 percent came from North Hamkyung Province and 11.7 percent came from South Hamkyung Province. As far as socio-economic classes are concerned, most were laborers or farm workers.

Early on, the motive for escape was mainly discrimination based on birth, and human rights violations. Recently, however, the main reasons are lack of food and the economic crisis. The increase in family-unit defection is due to strengthened police enforcement in the third country, economic support from those who had already defected to South Korea, and an increasing number of smugglers.

Most of the escapees who eventually entered South Korea had stayed in China for a considerable length of time. In 2003, the average time in China was three years and ten months. In 2002 the stay had been three years and two months, indicating that escapees are taking more time to properly prepare for the attempt to enter South Korea.

A new avenue for gaining entry into South Korea is the UNHCR and embassies in China. From June 2001 to December 2002, about 200 escapees entered South Korea by first being deported to a third country

**Table 5. N. Korean Defectors' Sojourn Period at the Third Countries
(Entries in 2002)**

Period (Year)	Less than 1 year	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	More than 6	Born after refugee	Total
NO.	61	42	33	50	142	129	41	5	503
Percent	12.1	8.4	6.6	9.9	28.2	25.7	8.1	1.0	100

through international organizations and embassies in China.⁹⁾ The Korean Embassy in Beijing is also being used as a gateway for entry into South Korea, although there is a constant danger of crackdown by the Chinese police.

In a recent trend, escapees marry in order to enter South Korea. Most women who fled to China marry ethnic Koreans or Chinese, and with their financial support they are able to enter South Korea through various means. They will likely try to bring their husbands into South Korea later on. There have also been cases of males who married women from third countries and then later attempted to bring their spouses into South Korea. Some escapees also married South Koreans. Finally, some ethnic Korean-Chinese have pretended to be North Korean defectors in order to claim support funds from the South Korean government.

The routes to South Korea most frequently used by North Korean escapees are China, Cambodia, and Mongolia. The details remain a secret, however, in order to protect future escapees. The recent media attention has also negatively impacted some transit countries such as Mongolia and Vietnam.¹⁰⁾

9) Yoon Yeo-sang, "Assessment and Prospect of the Escapee Issue from a Global Perspective," a paper presented for the 2003 spring seminar of the Korea Political Science Association, April 18, 2003. [<http://www.iloveminority.com>]

10) Ibid.

Motivations for Crossing the Border

(1) Internal Reasons

North Koreans cross the border primarily because of the economic crisis and the food shortage. Initially, residents in mountainous border areas and large cities in the northeast did so for food and necessities, but the situation has recently eased due to international assistance and the residents' efforts to feed themselves by selling whatever they can. As a result, the proportion of North Koreans that escape for survival has decreased. Now, more people cross the borders to earn the money needed to establish a business in North Korea.

Secondly, the surging number of escapes has led to international pressure against human rights violations, which in turn led to lighter punishment by the North Korean authorities. In the past, escapees knew that failed escape would probably affect those they left behind, since the entire family is held responsible for the individual's misdeeds. But as escapes increased sharply, family punishment became a rarity. Generally, when an escapee is caught in Chinese border areas and forcibly sent to the security agents, they are interrogated about their contacts with South Koreans or Christians, their attempts to enter South Korea, and involvement with human trafficking. After being branded political criminals, they are punished. In most cases, however, they are sent to a camp for interrogation, and then turned over to a security officer from their home area. Most of them are released after less than six months of hard labor in a detention center.

Thirdly, it appears that repatriated escapees have information about life outside, and feel they cannot go on living in North Korea. Even after undergoing insults and body searches,¹¹⁾ they vow to try

11) Agents of the Security Department or the Social Security Service do not beat escapees, but ordinary criminals detained with them do this. In case of a woman escapee, who didn't answer the questions well in the interrogation, a group

again. Often, while undergoing interrogation and punishment in frontier-area battalions of China, border detention camps and labor training centers in North Korea, they learn information from other detainees, and begin planning their second escape. Repatriation has also spread information about escape itself.

(2) External Factors

A primary external factor in the success of cross-border movement is protection and support from the ethnic Korean community in the three provinces of northeastern China. A strong sense of Korean identity exists because North Korean border residents helped the community during the harsh period of the Cultural Revolution in China. Indirect help is also available from South Korean religious groups and individuals,¹²⁾ but as escapes have continued for a considerable time, crimes including theft, robbery, murder and human trafficking have increased. Moreover, the Chinese central government pressed the local authority to punish those aiding escapees.

Escapees are served as cheap-wage workers, especially in remote regions. Males can find seasonal jobs in rural areas and female take various jobs—some works in restaurants and karaoke, or as nurses and maids. It is not unusual for a North Korean woman to “sell herself” into a marriage with an ethnic Korean or Chinese. Nevertheless, she has a spouse and children and is therefore even more motivated to escape. If a pregnant escapee is caught, however,

interrogation was done with the all other detainees in the same place in the middle of the night. The angry detainees, because her interrogation had kept them awake, beat her until her face was swollen and bloody. Interview with a female escapee at a Hanawon branch, May 17, 2003.

- 12) Korean organizations including religious groups have secretly conducted missionary activities and protected escapees. They were able to expand their activities thanks to the help of ethnic Koreans. Some of them established local business to promote social welfare of Korean Chinese and protect North Korean escapees.

she is examined, and forced to undergo an abortion to discourage her from another escape attempt.

Another source of support is the the South Korean government, which offers defectors support when they settle in South Korea. Under the "Protection of Defecting of North Korean Residents and Support of Their Settlement Act" enacted in 1997, if North Korean residents ask for help through South Korean embassies or consulates, it provides appropriate protection to anyone, except violent criminals. After refugees enter South Korea, they are provided with settlement funds and a house (40 million won per person), educational support, living expenses (536,000 won a month per person) under a special law, medical expenses, social adaptation education, vocational training and employment protection. As this information has spread among ethnic Koreans (by South Koreans in other countries, KBS broadcasting and other media) potential escapees have overcome their prejudices and fears about the South, and now consider South Korea as the land of opportunity.

Family members who arrive first in South Korea use their settlement funds and other income to help bring their families into South Korea, and a good portion of those attempts have been successful. In particular, various communication channels have recently been available via China, so they are using them to find ways to bring their families into South Korea.¹³⁾ Some escapees even go back to China or North Korea themselves in order to bring their relatives to South Korea.

13) In a survey involving 2,510 escapees who entered South Korea since 1993, 90.1 percent of respondents out of 780 people said they were willing to spend their settlement funds and other income to assist family members to enter South Korea. Lee Keum-soon, *et al.*, *Study on Adaptation of Escapees from North Korea* (in Korean), (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2003).

CURRENT CONDITIONS FOR CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT

Constant Danger of Repatriation

When discovered by local security officers in a third country or by North Korean security officers, escapees' very survival is threatened. At best, they are forcibly repatriated under the agreement with China on repatriation of illegal entrants.

International concern is mounting over the human rights of escapees, and this has led North Korean authorities to step up arrests of escapees. At the early stage, North Korea regarded escapees as political criminals, sent them to concentration camps for political criminals and forced their families to move to controlled areas. But as escapes have increased, punishments have been meted out, depending on the amount of time that has lapsed since the escape and the motives. Since September 27, 1997, escapees have been detained in the "September 27" relief camp for some period of time, and then released. Since 1998, escapees are classified into two groups: those who live near borders and those who came from inland provinces such as Hwanghae. The former group is treated with lenience, while those in the latter group are treated as political traitors, and subject to strict punishment. Blanket punishment against families of escapees, however, has been eased.

In a bid to ease punishment against the soaring number of escapees, North Korea dropped the clause about "treason against the nation and the people" (Article 86 of the old Constitution). However, punishment continues depending on various factors such as place of origin, family background, age, time spent at-large and activities in China.

Based on the rumored visit to China by North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, in March 2000, China designated an intensive 3-month-long search period and strengthened forced repatriation. While,

punishment within North Korea was not harsh, it was rather severe in China. The intensive search was eased that June as part of efforts to lift the spirits of North Koreans around the proposed Inter-Korean Summit. According to a defector, named Kim, in July 2000 she was placed in a detention camp on charges of crossing the border, but was immediately released under "Kim Jong-il's directive to show lenience toward escapees." This break was short-lived, however.¹⁴⁾ In 2001, after the Chang Kil-su family sought refuge in the Beijing office of the UNHCR, and following several entries into South Korea through diplomatic missions in China in 2002, China is reportedly fed up with controlling and repatriating escapees. At any rate, the rapid changes in circumstances surrounding escapes still presents the serous threat of forced repatriation.

Securing a Base for North Korean Escapees to Stay in China

In order to avoid arrest, diverse plans were set up to prepare for the prolonged stay in China. Women tried to hide from the authorities by marrying or engaging in the entertainment business, and during the process, to practice the local language. Some escapees moved to the inland or southern areas of China where the danger of arrest is relatively low, while others learned illegal ways to enter South Korea, such as passport counterfeiting and stowing away on ships.¹⁵⁾ Recently, escaped women marry South Korean men or live with them in order to enter South Korea. Ironically, when they enter South Korea, they leave families behind in China, creating another generation of separated families.

14) A North Korean defector Kim, testimony at interview in KINU, November 30, 2002.

15) The police rounded up members of an organization that had forged passports for the illegal entry of 60 escapees. The 10 members, including 6 Koreans and 3 ethnic Koreans, received 10 million won to assist the escapees to enter South Korea illegally. *Joongang Ilbo*, May 19, 2003.

Growing Expectations for Entering South Korea

Expectations for successful entry into South Korea are growing due to increased global concern for human rights violations and expanded NGO/civic activities. Diplomatic missions in China serve as a major route for entry into South Korea. In the past, individuals and civilian bodies helped small-scale escapes. And since March 14, 2002 when 25 escapees entered the Spanish Embassy in Beijing, and subsequently gained entry into South Korea, such cases have increased. After television viewers worldwide saw Chinese Public Security officers forcibly arresting five North Korean escapees in their attempt to enter the Japanese Embassy on March 8, the issue of escapees has taken on international proportions, and caused diplomatic friction between China and Japan.

Group escapes orchestrated by civic organizations follow detailed plans in terms of the time to enter the embassy, the choice of embassy, media relations, and training on how to escape. After the security of embassies in Beijing was strengthened, would-be escapees began targeting consulates in other Chinese cities such as Shenyang as well as diplomatic missions of EU countries, Japan, the United States and South Korea. Civic organizations contacted the media in advance so they would be on hand to record the scene, especially to focus on the plight of women and children, who attract the most media interest.

Increasing Role of Related Organizations.

A number of NGOs, both at home and abroad, have helped plan group escapes by recruiting, managing, training and dealing with public relations. In a January 2003 escape attempt, in which 80 North Koreans were caught trying to enter South Korea by sea, it was reported that both South Korean and international organizations had reportedly worked together to organize the escape. The organizations requested refugee status for the North Koreans, and

tried to internationalize the issue by engaging as many countries as possible. They also called for the nations concerned to express clear positions on the issue: They requested that the Chinese government reveal its official stance, prevent forced repatriation, and grant refugee status to the escapees. They also called on the South Korean government, the final destination, to actively deal with the issue. The NGOs then asked the United States and Japan to work to resolve the issue, including accepting applications for political asylum.

SURROUNDING NATION'S STANCES

The United States

The U.S. introduced stories of the plight of escapees and raised public awareness on escapees legal status, and also stepped up pressure on China to stop forced repatriations. It has expressed its intention to provide humanitarian assistance to North Korea, but at the same time has voiced deep concerns about whether the aid would be fairly distributed.

The United States has been even more vocal on North Korea's human rights issues focusing on political concentration camps and escapees. The National Endowment for Democracy, a U.S. NGO,¹⁶⁾ has funded the Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, and the Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights, two South Korean NGOs helping North Koreans escape. The U.S. also awarded the 2003 Democracy Award to Benjamin Yoon, director of the Civic Association on North Korean Human Rights, and to North Korean defectors Lee Soon-ok, Kang Cheol-hwan, and An Hyuk. Other U.S. organizations, the Defense Forum Foundation, the Association for the Human Rights Protection of North Korean

16) NED was established by the Reagan Administration in 1983 as part of strategy to spread democracy and to support democratic movements in Eastern Europe.

Refugees, and the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea are actively engaged in North Korean human rights issues.

As stated above, the U.S. government, and NGOs have established an alliance to work toward international cooperation to improve the human rights situation in North Korea.¹⁷⁾ Since November 2003, the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives have been sought to pass legislation of the “North Korean Freedom Act” whose goal is “human rights protection” of escapees and “democratization” of North Korea in principle, but it is being perceived as a means to induce more escapes in order to change the North Korean regime.¹⁸⁾

China

It is assessed that China feels uneasy about the international community pressuring North Korea’s human rights record, considering it unfair for Western countries to raise human rights issues with a developing nation that underwent colonial rule. It criticizes the fact that nations that have also violated human rights are using political pressure and distorted facts to point the finger of blame.¹⁹⁾ While China didn’t specify North Korea, it links the background of the adoption of the resolution on the North Korea

17) On July 16, 2003, a conference, “Gulag, Famine, and Refugees: The Urgent Human Rights Crisis in North Korea” was held. U.S., British, Korean and Japanese members of the International Parliamentarians’ Coalition for North Korean Human Rights and Refugees participated.

18) Yu Jung-ae, “Is the ‘Korean Peninsula Security and Freedom Act’ for the security on the Korean peninsula and human rights in North Korea?” paper presented at a Korea Women Research Center seminar, Ewha Women’s University, October 23, 2003, [http://news.naver.com/news_read.php?oldid=2003102700000165126&s=1065&e=1325].

19) Statement by H.E. Ambassador ShaZukang, Head of Chinese Delegation, on Item 9 at the 59th Session of the Commission on Human Rights, April 1, 2003, [<http://www.china-un.ch/eng/45906.html>].

human rights with U.S. unilateralism.

Considering its close relations with North Korea, China has continued to repatriate escapees, saying that the issue is deeply related to the security of the three northeastern provinces, as well as employment and other internal matters. Thus, domestic social pressure still affects repatriation. It is also related to the issues of minority and religion, to which China is sensitive. Against this backdrop, China has strengthened its control, not only of escapees, but also the organizations that support them.

China seems to be highly concerned about possible criticism by the international community regarding the escapee issue. So far, the government in Beijing has allowed them to enter South Korea as deportees into a third country. It has also tried every way to avoid any problems stemming from forced repatriation. Despite the call by the international community to stop the practice, however, China has continued, arguing that the escapees are merely "economic migrants." By doing so, China hopes to minimize social problems within the nation and to prevent possible mass escapes.

Meanwhile, as South Korea halted consular services in its Beijing embassy for some time last year due to the stalled handling of the large number of escapees, there were diplomatic negotiations over the issue between the two countries. Yet, it does not seem that China is desperate to change its existing position over escapees, particularly the deportation of escapees to a third nation.

Japan

When North Korea finally acknowledged its abduction of Japanese citizens, Japan lashed out at the human rights violations committed by the North Korean government. And when Korean-Japanese escapees, along with their Japanese wives, reached a third country and asked for protection, Japan allowed them to stay after closely examining individual cases. Except for a few refugees that have settled there, however, Japan has been reluctant to take in

North Korean escapees.

Korean residents in Japan and their families who returned to and now living in North Korea have experienced political discrimination, and since their families and relatives are in Japan, many of them have a strong urge to return. Considering the number (95,000 Korean returnees and their 6,500 Japanese wives) of refugees that may be destined for Japan, Japan needs proper policy measures.²⁰⁾

CONCLUSION

It is estimated that 100,000 North Koreans are now residing in China in hopes of entering South Korea. Thus, for the mid and long term, the number of escapees arriving in Seoul will continue to increase. Although unlikely, China could adopt a more positive approach to the issue, which could result in a mass exodus. Given the scenario, it would be impossible to accommodate refugees through current entry methods, means of transportation, screening and resettlement. Therefore, a comprehensive review is required. Considering relations with North Korea, large-scale entries should be managed quietly and effectively.

Based on information about escapees living in China and other countries, it is necessary to work out a way to provide stable lives for them. China and other nations must be persuaded to improve the living conditions of the North Koreans living there. In other words, through the International Organization for Migration and other organizations, practical measures must be devised to protect escapees. Concerned nations can also issue temporary stay permits to illegal immigrants to protect their basic human rights. Considering that the escape issue will continue indefinitely,

20) Masaharu Nakagawa, "Opening Remarks to the ICPNKR Parliamentary Roundtable on the North Korean Refugee Crisis," [<http://www.ned.org/events/demaward/demaward2003-opening.html>].

institutional protection of *de facto* marriages is also needed. Realistic measures must be explored to protect the women and offspring, whether the marriages are legal or not.

The international community also needs to persuade North Korea not to punish those who voluntarily return to North Korea. To ensure that North Korean residents can live safely within their country, the international community should call on North Korea to address the humanitarian crisis and protect the most vulnerable through proper humanitarian aid.