



DPRK REOPENS MARKETS, AUTHORIZES FOOD SALES

Suffering from severe food shortages, North Korean authorities ordered that markets be opened unconditionally, and that there be absolutely no crack-down on the sale of foodstuffs within the markets. This is according to a report issued on February 18 by the North Korean human rights organization 'Good Friends'.

Good Friends' newsletter revealed, "After examining a report on food shortages and the conditions of residents in each region throughout the country by the Office of Economic Policy Review, the Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party issued an 'Order for Absolutely No Regulation Regarding Foodstuffs' to each law enforcement office." The order stated that until central distribution is running smoothly, all markets are to be reopened as they were prior to recent government crack-downs, and that under no circumstances were authorities to try to regulate food sales.

Furthermore, it reported that "the People's Security Bureau also received the Central Committee's order, and passed on a special instruction to each regional security office ordering agents not to crack down on markets for anything other than illegal goods, and not to regulate food sales, in particular." Local authorities were also ordered not to engage in altercations with market traders and not to intervene or interfere in fights between traders working within the markets.

According to Good Friends, "Central Party authorities set the price of one kilogram of rice at 24~25 Won, corn at 9 Won/Kg, and corn noodles at 10 Won in an attempt to stabilize the daily lives of people, but the lack of central distribution made the attempt meaningless."

A North Korean public health official relayed to Good Friends that a report released by central authorities on January 22 stated that there were more than 47 thousand cases of tuberculosis in the North, but that more than



half were unable to receive treatment in a hospital, and that “the rise in the number of deaths due to starvation among the most indigent was due to TB patients being unable to eat and subsequently dying after catching a cold or the flu.”

In mid-January, Kim Jong Il called a meeting of Party administrative director (and brother-in-law) Jang Sung-taek and other high-level authorities in order to ease the side-effects of last year’s currency reform. A North Korean source relayed to Daily NK on February 17 that at the meeting, it had been decided that authorities would issue emergency rations to residents facing the threat of starvation.

According to this order, the Office of Food Procurement has been tasked with distribution of the emergency food; neighborhood units receive 5 kg of food daily, while offices receive between 5~15 kg, depending on the number of employees. Neighborhood unit directors or factory supervisors are responsible for assessing the food needs of their neighbors or employees, and prioritize food distribution to those households at risk of starvation.

Until the end of January, currency reform measures that banned the sale of food and drove prices up drove a significant number of households to starvation. However, since the emergency rations measure began to be enforced on February 1, there have been no reports of large-scale famine.