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Interview with North Korea border crosser Robert Park

DEC 30, 2009 01:15 EST

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(Photographs by Lee Jae-won)

North Korea said on Tuesday it had detained a U.S. citizen who entered its territory, apparently confirming a report that an American activist crossed into the state to raise awareness about Pyongyang's [human rights abuses](#). Robert Park, 28, walked over the frozen Tumen river from China and into the North last Friday, [other activists said](#). The Korean-American told Reuters ahead of the crossing that it was his duty as a Christian to make the journey and that he was carrying a letter calling on North Korean leader Kim Jong-il to step down.

Park had an exclusive interview with Reuters last week before starting on his journey. The following are excerpts from the conversation. He requested that the comments be held until he was in North Korea.

Reuters: Why are you planning to go into North Korea?

Robert Park: The North Korean human rights crisis by murder rate is the worst in the world. An estimated 1,000 people a day die by starvation and starvation is a murder case. North Korea has been sent more food aid than any nation in the world but the food has not gone to the people who need it. So this is murder.

But not only that, there are concentration camps in North Korea that are of the same brutality as in Nazi Germany.

Responsible governments are completely silent about the issue. The United States, China, Russia, Japan and South Korea have a huge responsibility to speak out about this because all these nations played a role the arbitrary division of the Koreas, where not a single Korean was consulted. Yet the lives of these people are of no issue to these governments. That is a crime. It is a huge crime

What is happening in North Korea is genocide. We know there are legitimate fears about what could happen through nuclear weapons. But a nation that runs concentration camps, a nation that kills men, women and children without any kind of restraint can never be trusted.

We believe the resolution to this whole crisis is simply addressing North Korea honestly about this has to change.

We do not hate people. I am Christian, but I do have to say that this is not a legitimate government. We cannot talk to North Korea as if it is a legitimate government, but we need to liberate North Korea. We need to have a vision for the unification of Korea. It has to happen

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immediately because people are dying by the thousands every single day.

Reuters: By going into North Korea, how can you change this? You are going in well aware of the dangers



Park: My demand is that I do not want to be released. I don't want President Obama to come and pay to get me out. But I want the North Korean people to be free. Until the concentration camps are liberated, I do not want to come out. If I have to die with them, I will. I am Christian and it says in the Bible that we must love the lost. We must love the poor and the needy. We must love them more than ourselves.

(For) these innocent men, women and children, as Christians, we need to take the cross for them. The cross means that we sacrifice our lives for the redemption of others.

I am going in for the sake of the lives of the North Korean people. And if he (Kim Jong-il) kills me, in a sense, I realize this is better. Then the governments of the world will become more prone to say something, and more embarrassed and more forced to make a statement.

This is serious and it is a crime that America is committing against the North Korean people by not speaking out against this. President Obama just won the Nobel Peace Prize and I love President Obama and the American government, but they are committing a serious crime.

Through the media and through sacrifice, we are looking for the global leaders to be forced to give an account. There is no excuse.

We also want the church to repent. The South Korean church needs to repent. There has been so much playing around and honestly, there is no time to play games. The priority of every single person in South Korea must be to end this holocaust of lives.

I was going to go next month but what happened was that here in Korea there has been certain things that have endangered my going next month. That is why I am going right now. Because certain people have found out and are trying to prevent me from going.

Initially Christmas Day was what they were thinking of. It is the coldest time. It is the most difficult time for me to go physically and also on Christmas Day it is such a symbolic day. Worldwide is the most renowned day. It is the happiest day for most of the world but for North Korea, it is like hell.

I have to share their suffering. That is why I am asking every person who cares about North Korea, let us arise and let us demonstrate. Let us see mass demonstrations. This is not a personal agenda.

I think I may not live much longer. My personal desire is to be married and to have a future. I am laying that all down because of Jesus Christ and because God loves these people, he does not want them to die.

Reuters: Do you think you will be able to get support from governments including the United States because you are making this choice on your own, fully aware of what may well happen?

Park: I want Kim Jong-il and the North Korean government to know that I love them. I love all these people. I am going in because it has to change, for the sake of the children, the men and the women who are being brutally murdered.

But as long as this genocide continues, I have no choice. I have great sorrow for Kim Jong-il. The North Korean people have been brainwashed from youth and they do not know what the truth is.

I had a vision on July 27, which was the beginning of the demonstration movement. I am not someone who was a part of the human rights movement officially. I was someone who was praying and sharing in the physical help of refugees one by one. I had a vision where God revealed that there needs to be a mass demonstration movement for North Korean human rights. That there will be liberation of the North Korean people. There will be a global compensation movement for a measurable loss and suffering. There will be calls for unification. And there will be reconciliation between North and South Koreans.

I am making this choice on my own because it is too slow right now. There has never been a

mass demonstration for North Korean human rights and there needs to be.

Last year, there were hundreds of thousands of people in South Korea demonstrating for this ridiculous thing about the kind of beef we were getting in South Korea. There was nothing to it. What does it say about our generation that we can be mobilised to demonstrate about the kind of beef we are getting and we cannot demonstrate for people who are our own kin who are dying by the thousands every day for no reason at all.

One of the issues in South Korea is that there has been a competition among North Korean human rights groups. People are saying that 'I want to be in the leadership'. It is ridiculous. With that kind of political fighting, trying to be number one, there will never be mass demonstrations because people are selling the issue for their own gain. I am not saying that everyone is doing that.

My hope is that through going to North Korea, my sacrifice, that there will be a profound repentance among the church and also among human rights ministries – that there will not longer be quarrelling and competition.

Reuters: Do you see the possibility of your imprisonment helping Kim Jong-il. The North Korean leaders have used others, like the U.S journalists, who have crossed into its territory as bargaining chips. Do you see your actions as having the potential to help the North Korean leaders you want to see removed?

Park: I am aware of this and have been hesitating for a long time. As a result of what happened to the [journalists](#), I was speaking to a refugee friend of mine, she said it was one of the best things that happened for North Korea's liberation. This was shortly after it happened and they were freed. But now it has become worse because the journalists have not spoken out about the human rights crisis. They were ransomed for a lot of money and they went home and wrote a book.

Ultimately, I am more tortured if I allow North Korea to be like this. The difference with these journalists is that they were kidnapped against their will. I am going in saying either kill me or take me. I am saying to the governments of the world, do not try to ransom me out but address the human rights crisis.

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JAN 10, 2010
8:16 AM EST

It should also be considered that most followers only love a supreme being through love of reward and/or fear of punishment (or potentially indoctrination). Would such love also be considered forced or under duress?

It is true that allowing something to happen is not exactly the same thing as causing something to happen.

But at the same time, christian dogma proposes that a deity is the supreme source of all things. Had that deity not given us free will, we would not have the potential for evil. And there would be no evil.

But evil exists. Hence as the deity created in us the potential for evil, that deity is the source of all evil. Just as that supposed deity is the source of all other things as well.

That would not mean the deity is inherently evil, any more then the universe where evil exists could be considered evil. But it certainly raises the question of whether a source of evil could be considered benevolent.

Regarding the standard of what is good or evil, has always been a distinction which differs by the perception of each individual person.

It is just that through organised religion, society or sect, certain common values are imposed on and shared by groups of people.

Imagine a world where christianity suddenly disappeared. Common values of good and evil would still exist. They would simply be different, and/or imposed from society itself or the influence of other religious groups.

Posted by Anon86 | [Report as abusive](#)

JAN 10, 2010
7:23 PM EST

Anon86, It's easy to blame the God you don't believe in for what this man decided to do, but what does that have to do with helping to liberate people who are being oppressed and held against their will (and others murdered because they won't bow to this evil man)?

Also, if 'you' and others who think like you really believe doing away with Christianity would 'benefit' mankind in the long run, you're about to be tested on

that 'theory' in ways you could possibly never imagine in your wildest dreams, but don't say 'you' (and they) weren't warned.

It's amazing how 'we' want to blame God for 'our own' mistakes and failures, but lay it 'ALL' at His feet, when He gives us the ways to stop these things from coming about. Also, He never said we wouldn't have good and bad days, nor that we wouldn't be persecuted for following Him "while we lived on this earth", but that the end "will" most certainly justify the means when we follow Him to the end (then again, of course you and others don't believe this).

Getting back to the original subject, my prayers go out to Mr. Park, as although he did what he thought was right, perhaps there might have been a better way to carry this out (but only God knows this for sure). He and those who are imprisoned are in my prayers that God will deliver them soon.

Posted by preta | [Report as abusive](#)

JAN 11, 2010
5:29 AM EST

Here we go again, the discussion becomes , for most, entirely divorced from the subject confronting us.

We are now aware of a man that is so appalled at the actions of a particular regime, that unlike most of us arm chair commentators, he has decided to do something about it.

I am humbled and ashamed of my inactivity, not only toward NK but in so many countries around the world where we regularly see injustice, starvation, lives being lost through the corruption of governments, where we send a cheque for a fiver then settle back into our comfortable lives, and devalue the extraordinary actions of people like Mr Park.

Has Mr parks actions made any difference, certainly to one persons determination to become a "doer" not just a talker.

Thank you Mr Parks

Posted by genesis | [Report as abusive](#)

JAN 11, 2010
5:56 AM EST

[...] Interview with North Korea border crosser – Robert Park [...]

Posted by [Interview with North Korea border crosser – Robert Park](#) « [Agape Youth Group](#) | [Report as abusive](#)

JAN 11, 2010
7:18 AM EST

[...] down because of Jesus Christ and because God loves these people—he does not want them to die. (See: <http://blogs.reuters.com/global/2009/12/30/interview-with-north-korea-border-crosser-robert-park/> [...])

Posted by [SloppyNoodle.com](#) » [Robert Park — Why did he do it?](#) | [Report as abusive](#)

JAN 11, 2010
4:07 PM EST

This is an excerpt of an encouraging article on reuters today regarding the DPRK's desire to have a formal peace treaty in place the the Korean War ceasefire, and an attempt to build trust with the US. Of particular importance is what President Obama's point man for human rights in NK says about what it would take to have a relationship with the US. Hopefully this momentum will continue in calling the leaders of the DPRK into account!

HUMAN RIGHTS IN FOCUS

Human rights have been a flash point in already tense ties between rivals North Korea and the United States, but the issue has often been overshadowed by Washington's attempts to prod Pyongyang back to the nuclear talks.

"It is one of the worst places in terms of the lack of human rights. The situation is appalling," U.S. special envoy Robert King told reporters in Seoul on his first trip overseas since taking up the post about six weeks ago.

"A relationship with the United States and North Korea will have to involve human rights," King said.

The United States says North Korea maintains a network of political prisons where anyone thought to be associated with anything critical of Kim's rule can be jailed along with their families, who are deemed guilty by association.

Posted by zs1027 | [Report as abusive](#)

JAN 11, 2010
4:14 PM EST

@Anon86 – I've enjoyed the dialogue back and forth. Would you be up for continuing this discussion over email? If so, shoot me a note to zslagel@hotmail.com

Posted by zs1027 | [Report as abusive](#)

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