

The Situation of Children in the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea: Forced labor and discrimination

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This submission relates to articles 2, 24, 27, 28, 29, and 32 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Research for this submission was conducted between 11th and 15th August.

The target cities for investigating the situation of children's rights were: Pyongsung in South Pyongan Province, Hoeryeong in North Hamkyung Province, Hyesan in Yangkang Province, and Wonsan in Kangwon Province.

The schools concerned are Hakpo Elementary School and Hakpo Senior High School, Namun High School, Seokmak High School in Hoeryeong, and Hyejang High School.

Methodology

Three journalists who cover North Korean society collected relevant information by calling and communicating with four internal sources in total and two teenagers who arrived in Seoul, South Korea in 2017 from North Korea and another defector who came to South Korea in 2009 when she was 14 years old.

1. Labor mobilization after school and intensive agricultural mobilization for a month, especially after the Law on the Implementation of Teaching Programmes was adopted on 24 June, 2016

- **Mobilization of students for construction projects has been carried out:** In 2015 and 2016, orphanages in Yeonbong-dong and Sungwoo-dong in Hyesan extended their facilities. Students in the neighborhoods were mobilized in the construction after school. Two of our sources, a 17-year-old and a 14-year-old, had to take part in building the extension.
- **Intensive agricultural mobilization:** In Hoeryeong, students were sent to a collective farm in Imgye-ri from early May to mid-June. In Hyesan, students were conscripted into agricultural mobilization around the same season. Students stayed and worked all together being away from their homes for one month. During this season, students are required to transplant rice while staying together at a neighborhood conference hall or other kinds of big halls.
- **Economic assignment:** All the students have to submit a quote of certain items to school as part of their "economic assignment" or "children's assignment." Some items include compost, scrap metal, scrap paper, rabbit hides, wild berries, wild herb and other potentially valuable materials related to construction in their neighborhood. If students do not have any materials that the school demands, they could donate money to school. For instance, in Pyongsung, each student has to give 10 kg of scrap metal per month, but they could give 7,000 won (1) to their school in cash. Each student in high school has to give 20,000 - 50,000 North Korean won per month. It is a crucial cause of a low attendance rates for the school. Students who cannot afford to pay this amount of money to school do not go to school because they are bullied and harassed by the other students and teachers.

2. Attendance Rate

In the first half of 2017, in bigger cities like Hoeryeong, Hyesan, and Pyongsung, the attendance rate of high schools is approximately 60% - 90% while primary and high schools in suburban cities like Kangdong-gu in Hyesan are around 50%. This approximation is based on what the internal sources in North Korea reported from their children, relatives, and neighbors, and calculated based on observations about living conditions of neighbors and citizens.

In Wonsan and Pyongsung, a few dozen children were reported to have caught fish in a river and said it was for their livelihood. In markets during day time there were dozens of young teenagers who sold noodles, dry fruits, etc. for a living.

Reasons why students cannot go to school:

- (a) They cannot afford to pay the 20,000-50,000 won per month that schools or homeroom teacher requires.
- (b) They need to sell goods or food in markets or farm to make a living and cannot go to school.(2)

3. Discrimination

Discrimination against children is a major hindrance for children's rights in North Korea. The standards for discrimination stem from the political and economic situation of students' parents, which are determined in accordance with three social classes and 25 kinds of family background elements.(3) Particularly since the markets have become the center of people's lives since the early 2000s, money decides everything. Students can quickly become star pupils in their class if their parents provide the necessary monetary amount to the school and homeroom teacher for the school economic assignment and teacher's living as well.

Besides the economic assignment, schools demand that students provide certain necessary items for school management or maintenance. The monthly salary of a teacher is around 3,000 won which is worth less than 500 grams of rice, so homeroom teachers and schools tend to rely on powerful parents to supplement their income.(4) Therefore, students who have a better family background are guaranteed a better future. The mechanism of model students' participation in the June 6th founding anniversary of the Children's Union shows well the nature of inheritance.

Participation in the founding anniversary of the Children's Union

How a school selects one or two participants in the founding anniversary of the Children's Union is the best way to show the nature of North Korea's social class and *songbun*, the family background. Only one or two students of each school across the nation are selected as a participant of the founding anniversary. A school selects the best student as the representative for their school in the event. It will influence future job opportunities or even lead to future promotion in their career as well as entrance into one of the better universities in North Korea. However, this process is not based on merit; students and sources in North Korea have stated that parents who provide the school with around 10 thousand US dollars as accumulative record are able to have their children participate in the June 6th celebration of the Children's Union.

In the surroundings, students are sorted into different ranks, ranging from children with bright futures due to their parents' political and economic power and social position to others with much tougher prospects. Students who don't have parents or decent family background and who are physically weak due to their dire living condition and environment are considered to be candidates for the *dolgyeokdae*, a military-style construction brigade, in their last year of a high school course. This is because there is no other option for them, but *dolgyeokdae*.

Orphans and *dolgyeokdae*, a military-style construction brigade

In late November 2015, there was a landslide at a railroad construction site between Samjiyeon and Hyesan, Yangkang Province, that killed 13 teenagers.(5) The 13 victims are all workers of the Northern Provincial Railroad *Dolgyeokdae*, which consisted of graduates of the Hyesan Junior High Boarding School.

For last several years, baby homes, orphanages and boarding schools for orphans have been built across the country, according to internal sources and the North Korean state-run media. The graduates of the boarding schools are the subject of the slavery system of North Korea, the *dolgyeokdae*. In addition, the ages of children whom the Junior High Boarding School took care of range from 11 to 16 years. Therefore, the victims of the landslide accident might have been *dolgyeokdae* agents who were 16 or 17 years old, and not have parents.

Appendix

(1) 1 kg of rice = 5,800 won / 1 US dollar = 8,100 won

<http://www.dailynk.com/english/market.php>

(2) Ms. Baek, who came from Hyesan to Seoul, South Korea in early 2017 and is 15 years old, sold corn noodles in markets and didn't go to school starting from when she was 13 years old. Nevertheless, when the agricultural mobilization season came, the homeroom teacher and classmates came to her to convince her to take part in the agricultural mobilization at a collective farm. Ms. Kim, who is 22 years old now and came to South Korea in 2009, started selling traditional liquor in 2005 when she was a ten-year-old child until she left North Korea in early 2009. She hadn't gone to school since she was 10 years old.

(3) **Songbun Categories**

Class	Category
Core	1. Revolutionaries; 2. Families of revolutionaries; 3. Bereaved families of revolutionaries; 4. Disabled veterans who served in the Korean War; 5. Honored, wounded soldiers; 6. Those who met and took a photo with Kim Il-Sung or Kim Jong-il; 7. Those who were invested with the title of "Hero"; 8. Persons of merit; 9. Discharged soldiers; 10. Families of soldiers who were killed in action; 11. Families of soldiers who were killed; 12. Families of socialists who died for their country; 13. Others (People who have faithfully served the regime at the revolutionary post for a long time, core military personnel and workers, farmers, soldiers and intellectuals who have appropriate class, today, environment and social and political beliefs)
Wavering	1 Those who avoided enlisting for the military; 2. Those who escaped from the military; 3. Returning soldiers; 4. Returning citizens; 5. Those who participated in reactionary actions; 6. Those who worked for Japanese institutions; 7. Freedom troopers; 8. Those who were discharged from <i>dolgyeokdae</i> ; 9. Those who have defected to North Korea; 10. Those who are affiliated with the 10 zones; 11. Those who are affiliated with the Geumgang Institution; 12. Re-educated political prisoner; 13. Religious people; 14. Families of those who defected to South Korea; 15. Families of those who were punished; 16. Families of those who were arrested; 17. Families of re-educated political prisoners; 18. Families of those who were taken as prisoners but did not return; 19. Families of those who escaped to overseas; 20. Families of landlords; 21. Families of wealthy farmers; 22. Families of capitalists; 23. Families of pro-Japanese people; 24. Families of pro-American people; 25. Families of religious people; 26. Families of reactionary 27. Families of Anti-revolution factions; 28. Families of espionage agents; 29. Families of managers of collective farms; 30. Families of businessmen; 31. Families of merchants
Hostile	1. Landlords during the Japanese colonial period; 2. Wealthy farmers during the Japanese colonial period; 3. Capitalists; 4. Pro-Japanese people; 5. Pro-American people; 6. Religious people; 7. Those who were expelled from the Party / Anti-Party or Anti-revolution factions; 8. Those who are related to expelled from the Party / Those who are related to Anti-Party or Anti-revolution factions; 9. Espionage agents; 10. Supervisors on farms 11. Businessmen; 12.

	Merchants.
<p>Elements of Family background</p> <p>1. Revolutionary; 2. Professional revolutionary; 3. Worker; 4. Soldier; 5. Old farmer; 6. Poor farmer; 7. Farmer; 8. Hired farm helper; 9. Middle-class farmer 10. Rich middle-class farmer 11. Supervisor on farm; 12. Rich farmer; 13. Landlord; 14. Office worker; 15. Student; 16. Craftsman; 17. Supervisor; 18. Small business owner; 19. Patriotic entrepreneurs; 20. Entrepreneurs; 21. Petit bourgeois; 22. Small merchants; 23. Merchants; 24. Those who are religious; 25. Those who cooperated with the Japanese</p>	

(4) A child of an internal source had to give 50,000 won or 10 kilograms of potato starch to the homeroom teacher for her wedding. In addition, one or two students per class are required to be in charge of homeroom teacher's private farming.

(5) Kang Mi Jin, *Daily NK*, "Tragic accident befalls orphan workers at rail site," December 14, 2015, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?catId=nk01500&num=13633>.