

I am Ji Seong Ho from the Republic of Korea. I would like to say thank you for inviting me here. Today, I am here to disclose the reality of human rights conditions of the disabled in North Korea for the betterment of their lives.

I had a traffic accident in 1996 at the age of 14 when I was in North Korea. I stole coal from a mine located near my home because I was suffering from extreme poverty due to the breakdown of North Korea's rationing system. I ran away but my leg was run over by a moving train. Eventually, I had to have my left leg and left arm amputated. I couldn't get proper treatment due to North Korea's poor medical environment. The amputation was done without anaesthesia and the pain at that time was inexpressibly horrible. After that, I felt shameful about being a cripple so I stopped going to school and instead earned a living by begging.

I often crossed the border into China to beg for food and return to North Korea. But in June 2000, some neighbor reported my illegal entry and return from China. In North Korea, where there is no freedom of movement, leaving domestic territory without authority-granted approval is treason against the fatherland and deemed as a criminal offense. So I was arrested by safety agents at my house and then dragged to a branch office of the North Korean police force. The agents deprived me of my crutches and detained me in a detention facility without any warrant or explanation.

After a week, I was transferred to the police force in Hakpo coal mine village. I was detained for three days and severely assaulted by the safety agents. They frequently thrashed and kicked me. Even though I fell over on the floor, they mercilessly kept beating me. At that time, I didn't know why I was detained and beaten, so I asked for a reason. Then the chief of the police force told me that it was because I had corroded the supreme leader's dignity and stained the nation's reputation by entering into China and showing my handicapped and nauseating appearance. He also said that if foreign press had taken a picture of me, the international community would have misunderstood that North Korea is crowded with only beggars and the crippled when, in fact, the supreme leader had made North Korea the most attractive country in the world. Therefore, he insisted that I deserve punishment. Before being released, I was forced to write a pledge that I would no longer attempt to escape North Korea.

In January 2005, when huge numbers of North Korean defectors came from the border region, the People's Safety Agency, which is a police force, and the National Security Agency dispatched their agents to my residential area for an inspection. Party officers, security agents and safety agents interrogated people and checked whether they had visited China. At that time, I was arrested again at my home without any legal procedure and dragged to the security agency for inspection. The security agents confined me in a detention facility and severely assaulted me by kicking and beating me. Among the agents, there were Kim Young Soo and Lee Seok Chul. They asked me whether I went to China and

whether any of my family members had went to China. They also cursed and insulted me by saying that a cripple like you is a disgrace to the country. They kept beating me while insulting me, causing me to suffer from an extreme headache and dizziness. The authorities, seeing that my condition had seriously deteriorated, became concerned that I might die, so they eventually released me after a week of assault and torture.

In April 2006, I made a plan with my brother to defect from North Korea. However, someone reported the plan to the National Security Agency and I became a subject of close monitoring. Eventually, I was dragged to the agency and investigated again. I was not detained this time, just going back and forth between my house and the agency. During the inspection, the security agents assaulted me by kicking and beating me.

From 2000 to April 2006, when I finally defected to South Korea, I was frequently harassed by the safety agents and security agents due to my criminal history of defecting to China to beg. It is against double jeopardy but there is no such rule in North Korea.

In North Korea, the safety agents and security agents are deployed in every administrative district in order to conduct surveillance on people. There were agents who are in charge of my district and I was beaten and abused every time there were new agents in charge. They maltreated me for the reason that I hurt the republic's reputation by showing an amputated body to a foreign country. As an arbitrary punishment, they frequently provoked quarrels and kicked me without reason when I passed along the street. They also forced me to offer money or cigarettes. At that time I earned money by selling limes at the Jangmadang, which is the North Korean black market, but the safety agents used my criminal history as blackmail and kept demanding money. If I refused, they harassed and beat me severely. Among the safety agents are Hwang Hong Nam and Kim Dong Chul.

In this way, the perpetrators, who are the national agents maltreated me by way of assault, detainment, making derogatory remarks about my disability, provoking quarrels, and extorting money. The reason of harassment was that I had corroded the supreme leader's dignity and hurt the nation's image by showing my shabby and crippled appearance to China. Furthermore, I was detained longer and beaten more severely than the able-bodied detainees who had also escaped to China and came back to North Korea.

There is no concept of human rights in North Korea, especially for the disabled. I was forced to hide myself in North Korea in order to not disgrace the supreme leader and the nation by showing my appearance. I suffered from violence and got insulted just because I went to China and showed my appearance even though I did that in order to escape from hunger.

After going through these painful moments, I finally succeeded in defecting to South Korea. I know how precious the freedom is that I enjoy at this very moment. I hope the issue of disabled person's rights in North Korea will be able to get international attention so that they

can live better lives, and that they, too, can one day finally become free. Thank you.