

My name is Na Young Mi and I am from the Republic of Korea. Today, I am here to testify about my personal experience as a North Korean woman defector. I hope it will be helpful in raising international attention on women's rights in North Korea.

Due to the collapse of the rationing system of North Korea, I encountered many hardships, so I defected to China in May 1998 in order to earn a living. North Korean Defectors who defect to China like me feel a threat to their safety because we are regarded as illegal aliens and are repatriated to North Korea if discovered by Chinese authorities. In order to prevent repatriation, it is very common for North Korean woman to let themselves be trafficked into marriage with a Chinese man. For this reason, I also married a Chinese man and lived in China with him.

However, a neighbour reported me and I was arrested by Chinese police at midnight on May 21, 2002. I was eventually repatriated to North Korea. As soon as I arrived at a National Security Agency affiliated detention center, I was stripped in front of the security agents in order to make sure I was not hiding any Chinese money.

At that time, a female agent gathered all the women who were detained at the center including me. They gathered us separately from the men and had us strip naked. The agent then repeatedly ordered us to sit down and stand up around 50 times. The agent also searched my pubic area, touching my vagina in order to check whether there was Chinese money hidden inside. (This process was done while a male agent was watching over.)

During the investigation time, a male agent furiously smashed my head with a stick three or four times causing blood to flow, but the agent did not offer suitable treatment. He merely gave me a piece of cloth and let me put it on the wound. The wound has now become a permanent scar. There was no specific reason for the beating. He only did so because I was a criminal who betrayed the fatherland by escaping the country.

The next day, I was sent to a labor-training camp and detained there for two months. The safety agents here did not treat me as a human being. For example, if I could not work at a fast enough pace, the agents mercilessly beat me. Furthermore, when I didn't work as well as expected of me, the agents made me clean toilets and sleep in the bathroom at night.

At that time, I was pregnant with my Chinese husband's baby, so the agent in charge frequently summoned me to his office and tormented me. He severely beat me with a club and kicked me because I betrayed my fatherland by going to China and getting impregnated with a Chinese baby. He blackmailed me into giving up the money I had made in China and forced me to give up all the good clothes and watches I had bought in China. He even threatened to abort the baby, but I begged for mercy and pleaded that he not kill my baby. Instead, I explained to the agent that I would have an abortion later when I went to my hometown. The agent did not perform an abortion at that time but the violence did not stop

there. One day, a manager of the labor-training camp ordered me to come to him while I was working. He severely scolded me for being pregnant with a Chinese baby, and suddenly became furious, burning my left arm with the lit cigarette he was smoking. My body is still scarred from cigarette burns.

After two months, I was transferred to another labor detention facility. Every day, I did 12 hours of forced labor, such as logging and farming. I worked under the surveillance of the safety agents. If I could not work properly or worked a bit slow, the agents would mercilessly beat me with a club. They would also randomly assault me by punching and kicking me. Sometimes they would seize me by the hair and shake my head violently. They also would withhold meals from me if I did not work according to their standard. I was assaulted in this way at least five or six times during my three-month detention.

During non-working hours, I was summoned to an investigation room and interrogated. If my posture wasn't upright or if I couldn't answer immediately, the agent beat me with a club and kicked me. The agent would also take objects lying on his desk and throw them at me.

I was finally moved to the police force in my hometown. As soon as I arrived, the agent in charge sent me to the local hospital, located in the mine of the City. The agent then ordered the doctor to abort my baby. I was about seven months pregnant at that time and my belly was quite swollen. Therefore, it was not easy to perform an abortion on me. The doctor injected me with what I presume was an injection for induced labor and waited for 24 hours. However, the baby didn't come out, so the doctor reached into my womb and forcibly took out the baby. The pain was inexpressibly severe and I felt that my life was seriously in danger at this time.

After I was forced to have the abortion, I was immediately sent back to the police force affiliated detention house the next day without any time to recover. At that time, my whole body was severely swollen and I couldn't even open my eyes. I could not see well at that time and my health condition was extremely bad. However, the agent frequently summoned me to the investigation room and questioned me on charges of espionage. The agent kept asking whether I had tried to defect to South Korea, whether I had met South Koreans, or had any connection to the intelligent agency of South Korea etc. If I denied any charges, the agent mercilessly kicked me and violently hit me with a club. The agent intensely assaulted me, causing me to involuntarily make false confessions.

During non-investigating hours, I was told to stay absolutely motionless in a kneeling position with my head down. When I made even minimal movements, I was battered mercilessly. This kind of assault was repeated at least once or twice a week. Except when sleeping, I had to stay absolutely motionless in a kneeling position. Even though I had no time to recover from the forced abortion, I was repeatedly subjected to torture, leaving my condition inexpressibly terrible. At many times, I felt I had a near-death experience.

After four months of detention, I was to be transferred to some place I did not know, but I managed to escape during the transportation period. After escaping, I defected to China again and entered South Korea in February 2009. After then, I have lived as a common housewife in South Korea enjoying the freedom that I had never experienced before.

In this way, I was harassed by national agents while I was being detained because I betrayed the fatherland by defecting and becoming pregnant with a Chinese baby. I was forced to have an abortion, and I was shamed, insulted and assaulted for being female and for being pregnant.

It is very difficult and painful for me to recall every detail and experience from that time. Whenever I recall the experience I become really furious and feel miserable about myself. But I am testifying about this because what I went through is not fair, and I wish for there to be no more women victims in North Korea. I hope the issue of women defectors' rights in North Korea will get enough attention internationally so that every North Korean woman can be free to live like a human being. Thank you.