



# CIVIL COURAGE PRIZE

## Acceptance Speech

The Rev. Phillip Jun Buck

2007

Ladies and Gentlemen, and Chairman John Train,

I am truly honored to have been awarded the Civil Courage Prize.

I recently read an article in The Future Korea Journal, which was published on June 12, 2007, regarding construction of a monument in Washington D.C. in memory of victims of communism. Communism began in the Soviet Union during the October Revolution of 1917, led by Vladimir Lenin, who was the head of the Bolsheviks. Communism remained in power until the Communist Party finally collapsed in 1990.

What was so terrifying about this regime was that at least 149 million people were killed during those 80 years of Communist rule. Of those, 62 million people were killed in the Soviet Union, 73 million were killed in China, over two million were killed in North Korea, and the rest in other satellites of Communism.

While improvements have been made in other countries, communist North Korea is continuing to kill its own people. Those of us in the outside world were not aware of this killing because it was done within the secrecy of a closed society; however, as North Korean refugees flee their country, the truth is finally being revealed. During the food crisis that struck North Korea for three years, one million North Koreans each year starved to death.

Starvation in North Korea was so severe that the people took desperate measures to stay alive. There are strong rumors of people consuming human flesh from persons killed for meat.

Besides starvation, North Koreans are being subjected to horrible and fatal diseases, and those who are declared as enemies of the state are executed in public. Make no mistake about this, these public executions are occurring right now in the present time. Prisoners are taken to political concentration camps, where execution and disease thin their ranks daily. The population of these political concentration camps are not comprised of only political prisoners, but average citizens accused of some infraction without trial.

North Korean citizens and refugees are human, each having a right to eat, a right to live, and a right to enjoy freedom. While in China in 1998, I came to the decision to dedicate the rest of my life on behalf of these unfortunate people, to live and to die with them.

I started in China with the concept of assisting refugees with obtaining food and other necessities. I gave money to them for rice, for rent, clothing, electrical bills, water bills, gas bills and other needs to sustain

life in a hostile environment. You see, the Chinese did not want these refugees, so they could not go out and provide for themselves as normal citizens of China could do. My life's calling is as a missionary. I have shared the word of God every time I gave money to these North Korean refugees. I did so to inspire and give them faith in the future.

In ten years, I have fed more than 1,000 North Korean refugees. From 2001, I began moving them to South Korea for asylum. I did this much like the Underground Railroad so famous before and during the American Civil War. The South Korean government welcomes and disburses money to North Korean refugees once they arrive. Jobs and freedom are also guaranteed. To date, I am proud to state I have brought more than 100 North Korean refugees through China, Laos, Thailand, Mongolia and other countries, and eventually into South Korea.

During one of these escapes to freedom, I was especially happy and exhilarated. 32 North Korean refugees arrived at the same time safely at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea, located in Bangkok, Thailand. They were immediately granted asylum in South Korea. I personally led all 32 out of China without detection.

On our trip, which included 10,000 miles by foot, vehicle, boat, and train, we eluded the police and soldiers successfully. We even boarded a train at the Three Northeast Provinces (that's Northeast China) going past Beijing and Yunnan. We ultimately crossed the border of Laos without any visas. We traveled clear across the land of Laos and crossed into the border of Thailand, where we traveled to reach Bangkok, eventually arriving at the Embassy. The reason I was able to lead these 32 courageous refugees over dangerous terrain, mountain passes, cities, rural villages, swamps, and forests, was because of the love I had for the lives of these refugees. I gathered additional strength from my dislike of Kim Jong Il, the dictator and murderer who leads North Korea.

Let me explain. When the Korean War began with the invasion of South Korea by the North, I was separated from my parents and family in North Korea. I was only a young boy, housed in an orphanage in South Korea after the War. I received an education and even a college degree through the financial support of an elderly lady who was a very good Christian, and who cared about the plight of young people like me. My gratitude remains to this day. I can never repay this magnitude.

My work with these refugees is an attempt to pass on the kindness provided to me. My efforts did not go unnoticed by the Chinese authorities. I have never harmed China or its people. All I did was provide a means denied to the refugees by the Chinese government to escape from a country that did not want them anyway. Annually, I was providing approximately \$70,000.00 a year into the Chinese economy helping desperate refugees. What I was doing was only illegal because China is reluctant to offend the dictator of North Korea, at the expense of the lives of his people.

Several years ago, when 19 North Korean refugees were arrested in my apartment in China, my identity was revealed. As a result, the Chinese authorities tried to arrest me. Even with the danger of being arrested, I refused to stop my quest to help refugees. I actually returned to the United States, legally changed my name, obtained a new passport, and returned with my new name. Please understand: I did not see what I was doing as something wrong. To me, what I was doing was right. God has instructed us to help those who are in need, and I take that instruction very seriously. What could be more needy than starving, helpless, dying men, women, and children?

On May 9, 2005, I was arrested by the Chinese authorities. That day, I was in the process of sending 14 North Korean refugees north to Mongolia. Four refugees successfully made their journey to South Korea; however, 10 were arrested. I was sent to a Chinese prison, where I remained for 15 months. Although I was locked up in a prison, I maintained my dignity and my faith.

On one occasion, when I was before a judge. I said, "You should not try me. The one who should be tried is Kim Jong Il for the murders he committed against his own people. I have only rescued those from drowning." The court remained unconvinced and I was found guilty by the People's Republic of China. My actual trial was seven months after I was arrested and the verdict was announced seven months after that. One month later, through the efforts of our government and some wonderful people, my sentence was a fine and deportation, instead of the anticipated seven to 20 years in prison. I was released on August 9, 2006, ending my 15 months imprisonment in China.

Remember when I mentioned I was arrested with 10 refugees? To this day I regret their fate and I feel guilty that I lived. I believe 7 were returned to North Korea and either were executed or were thrown in a political concentration camp where they will most likely die from long and horrendous torture and mistreatment.

What can we do to stop the further loss of life? We must continue to fight the oppression at every opportunity.

Today I am honored to receive the Civil Courage Prize. I would like to receive this award on behalf of all North Korean refugees who have been killed or died only because they have acted with an instinct to survive. With this award, I will use it to continue feeding refugees and to bring them to freedom in a third country. I would also like to help underground churches in North Korea, stateless North Korean orphans lost in China, and North Korean refugee women who have become victims in human trafficking. More than \$70,000.00 is spent every year for this ministry and the amount of the prize is \$50,000.00. It feels as though this award is given to me knowing the situation and need I have. I am very happy indeed.

After I was released from a Chinese prison, I was able to testify on December 7, 2006 before a United Nations' Committee on issues related to North Korean refugees and reasons why we should stop North Korean refugees from being repatriated to North Korea. I further testified in the United States Congress and at public forums on the same matters.

I am about to close these remarks. Throughout history, mankind has been improved by those who lived risking their lives. There are people who hesitate for the fear of their lives and there are some who give in to the injustice. I would like to remain in the forefront to improve the lives of the refugees of North Korea.

I would also like to thank God at this time for answering my prayer. I would also like to give thanks to those who worked very hard for my release in prayers and in support. I would like to share this joy with my family, the United States government, the Ambassador of the United States in China, and Consul Douglas Kelly in Shengyang, China. Consul Kelly came to visit me nine times in prison with Consul Joshua and Ms. Shin. I also thank Melanie Kirpatrick of The Wall Street Journal for nominating me for this Prize, and Suzanne Sholte who has and continuously is supporting me.

Dear Train Foundation,

I praise you for your generosity in awarding those who courageously work for the welfare and order of the world. I believe world peace will be expedited by the work of the Train Foundation. God bless you and thank you very much.