

REPORT ON U.S. HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO NORTH KOREANS

April 15, 2005

I. Introduction and Background

Section 201 of the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-333) requires the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in conjunction with the Secretary of State, to submit a report to Congress that describes, for the previous year, all activities to provide humanitarian assistance to North Koreans; any improvements in humanitarian transparency, monitoring, and access inside North Korea; and specific efforts to secure improved humanitarian transparency, monitoring, and access inside North Korea.

The North Korea Human Rights Act states that the North Korean government still denies the United Nations (UN) World Food Programme (WFP) sufficient access to monitor delivery of food aid properly. The Administration agrees with this finding. Over the last year, U.S. officials have closely followed the changing monitoring and access situation in North Korea, and have continued active efforts to encourage the North Korean government to address transparency, monitoring, and access issues.

II. Activities to Provide Humanitarian Assistance

The primary means of U.S. assistance to North Koreans over the last year has been emergency food aid provided on a humanitarian basis. The U.S. does not link humanitarian aid decisions with concerns about a regime's political or security policies, whether in North Korea or any other nation. Food aid decisions are based on three criteria – demonstrated need, competing needs elsewhere, and the ability of humanitarian groups to assess needs and monitor distribution. Based on these criteria, in July 2004, the U.S. pledged 50,000 metric tons (MT) toward WFP's 2004 appeal. The commodities, valued at \$22.3 million, included 24,000 MT of wheat, 12,000 MT of maize, 10,000 MT of beans, and 4,000 MT of vegetable oil. Following consultations with WFP on the timing of deliveries, the U.S. delivered the 50,000 MT of food to North Korea between December 2004 and April 2005. (Note: The U.S. delivered 60,000 MT of commodities that it pledged in December 2003 during the first six months of 2004.)

Due to the higher levels of malnutrition in the North and East of North Korea, the U.S. requires that at least 75 percent of food aid provided to WFP for North Korea be shipped to the northeast ports of Chongjin or Hungnam. According to WFP, North Korean authorities distributed the U.S. food aid to counties following distribution plans agreed to jointly by WFP and the North Korean government. In order to meet this requirement, the food was used as part of the broader WFP operation in the North and East, which included direct provision of rations to vulnerable populations, defined as small children, pregnant and nursing women, and the elderly.

In addition to food aid, the U.S. provided disaster assistance in response to the April 22, 2004, explosion at the Ryongchon, North Korea, train station, which reportedly killed over 150 people, injured 1,300 others, and damaged 1,850 homes. The U.S. provided \$242,000 in assistance: (1) \$100,000 through the American Red Cross in support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies emergency appeal for the distribution of household relief packages to 2,000 families; and (2) \$142,000 for procurement and timely delivery of two complete UN World Health Organization (WHO) medical kits, each of which provides medical supplies and pharmaceuticals for 10,000 people for a three-month period, and hospital supplies. On May 17, a USAID official traveled from China's Liaoning Province to North Korea to oversee delivery of kits.

In response to the avian influenza outbreak in North Korea, on April 1, 2005, at the request of WHO, the U.S. provided three test kits to WHO for use in North Korea. The kits, with a commercial value of approximately \$1,000 each, are to be used to test human and animal samples for infection with avian influenza.

The Department of State will submit a separate report on assistance to North Koreans outside of North Korea, in accordance with Section 201(b) of the North Korea Human Rights Act.

III. Improvements in Transparency, Monitoring and Access

When providing emergency food aid, the U.S. objective is to ensure that food aid reaches those who need it the most. To promote the effectiveness and transparency of food aid programs, humanitarian organizations generally require all recipient countries to comply with international standards related to monitoring and access. UN agencies, NGOs, and most traditional donors of emergency food aid worldwide agree on these international standards.

Under the current arrangements in North Korea, however, that government's refusal to meet international standards makes it difficult to determine how much food aid is reaching intended beneficiaries and how successfully WFP is helping those most in need. Four standards, which are common to almost all other WFP programs around the world, are not met in North Korea:

- Beneficiary list – North Korean officials have not provided WFP a list of beneficiary institutions, which is required to undertake random monitoring.
- Unannounced visits – WFP is not allowed to make unannounced field visits and select interviewees at random, but must seek approval from the North Korean government up to five days in advance of any monitoring visit.
- Access – WFP does not have access to all 203 North Korean counties/districts to assess needs and determine the areas and beneficiaries of greatest need.
- Native Korean speakers – WFP is not allowed to recruit Korean speakers as international staff.

In the last several years, WFP achieved some minor improvements in monitoring and access. In terms of monitoring visits, WFP was able to increase the number of visits from 429 per month (2002) to 513 per month (2003). In terms of access, in October 2003, WFP obtained access to one more district, bringing the total number of accessible counties/districts from 160 of 203 counties/districts to 161 of 203 counties/districts. Also, WFP international staff was allowed to study Korean once they arrive in country, and several now speak the language, according to WFP.

Over the last year, however, there were notable setbacks in monitoring and access. These followed the North Korean government's decision in August 2004 to seek a reduction in the number of monitoring visits and international staff presence.

In terms of monitoring, North Korean authorities denied more monitoring visits starting in the fall of 2004. The result was a reduction from 513 monitoring visits per month (2003) to 440 per month (2004). (See Table 1 for monthly figures on monitoring visits.) WFP attributes the October decreases to use of WFP staff in the UN nutritional survey, and the January and February decreases to regular, poor winter conditions.

At the North Korean government's request, WFP is reducing its expatriate monitoring presence from 15 to 10 officers. This reduction will have a continuing adverse impact on the number of monitoring visits that can be undertaken. North Korean officials have told UN officials and some donors that the aspect of monitoring visits North Koreans object to most strongly are visits to households, which they see as intrusive.

Table 1. WFP Monitoring Visits in North Korea

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Average
2000	277	276	336	303	311	121	247	270	221	197	343	280	265
2001	244	345	344	356	395	246	260	365	354	425	443	379	346
2002	402	295	460	379	409	517	545	499	493	265	461	420	429
2003	337	371	512	483	648	535	550	535	472	585	586	539	513
2004	347	435	563	506	558	509	348	464	488	222	481	356	440
2005	281	298	375*										

* Preliminary WFP estimate

In terms of access, the North Korean government declared Chagang Province off limits to UN agencies and NGOs in late 2004. Seven counties in Chagang Province had previously been open to UN humanitarian agencies. After three consecutive months without access, WFP halted distribution of food to the province under its “no access, no food” policy. By early 2005, WFP had to halt distributions to three more counties/districts due to access restrictions – Kowon country (South Hamgyong Province), Sinchon country (South Hwanghae Province), and Kangdong district (Pyongyang). This loss of access to ten countries/districts reduced WFP's total access from 161 of 203 counties/districts (85 percent of the population) to 151 of 203 counties/districts access (80 percent of the population). In March 2005, the North Korean government granted UN agencies and NGOs renewed access to the seven counties in Chagang Province, increasing access country-wide to 158 of 203 counties/districts (83 percent of the population).

Although not related to monitoring and access for food distribution, according to WFP, there has been some improved cooperation with UN agencies in terms of transparency in assessing needs: The North Korean government allowed WFP to use a new, detailed questionnaire for household visits, provided WFP with information on market prices of food and household income, and displayed good cooperation in the October 2004 large-scale nutritional survey. Information from these sources has helped WFP identify groups increasingly in need of assistance, and convince the government to add these groups to those receiving food aid.

The North Korean government demanded that WFP reduce the number of household monitoring visits. To try to compensate for the reductions in visits and international monitoring staff, and try to use the opportunity to improve monitoring in general, WFP has proposed four changes to the current monitoring system:

1. Household food information – WFP would undertake 3-4 household baseline surveys per year, interview local officials and others (e.g., farmers, factory officials), hold focus group discussions, and take observational walks.
2. Distribution monitoring – WFP would monitor actual distributions at distribution centers and food-for-work projects, interview those receiving food aid there, and increase monitoring visits to non-household sites (e.g., county warehouses, factories producing food products with WFP commodities, institutions receiving food aid).
3. Ration cards – All WFP beneficiaries would be given a WFP-designed and printed ration card that would be checked by WFP at distributions.
4. Commodity tracking – WFP staff would be allowed to physically follow food aid from the port of entry, to county warehouses, to 3-6 Public Distribution Centers per county, as well as implement a more comprehensive system to track commodities by waybill number.

WFP discussed the proposal with government officials in Pyongyang, who told WFP that they agreed to the concept of the new system in general, but they needed to work out the details. In addition to discussions in Pyongyang, the WFP Country Director is traveling to accessible provinces in early April to discuss implementation with local officials. The real test of North Korea's acceptance of the changes – and any impact of the changes on transparency, monitoring, and access – can only be determined when WFP tries to implement the proposal.

IV. Efforts to Secure Improved Transparency, Monitoring and Access

Over the last year, the U.S. has taken a number of steps with the objective of improving transparency, monitoring, and access for humanitarian aid organizations in North Korea.

First, U.S. officials have engaged North Korean counterparts directly to discuss a potential agreement under which North Korea would address monitoring and access concerns in a comprehensive manner in exchange for increased U.S. food aid. Unfortunately, the North Koreans did not respond favorably to the proposal.

Second, U.S. officials have engaged the North Koreans directly on monitoring restrictions. USAID and State Department officials have discussed the issue with North Korean officials, and the USAID Administrator wrote to a senior North Korean official to express serious concern about increased restrictions on WFP and other humanitarian aid agencies, and urge the North Korean government to work with UN officials to reverse the restrictions and move toward meeting international standards on transparency, monitoring, and access.

Third, U.S. officials have held a number of bilateral meetings during the past year with governments that provide North Korea food and other assistance to discuss transparency, monitoring, and access issues. In discussions with South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and the European Union, U.S. officials explained in detail the reasons for our concerns, and urged those governments to press North Korea to allow better access and monitoring, consistent with international standards. U.S. officials also strongly encouraged those governments to give food and other assistance destined for North Korea through WFP or other aid organizations that make serious efforts to undertake regular monitoring visits.

Fourth, U.S. officials have emphasized the importance of transparency, monitoring, and access to donors in a number of multilateral meetings. Since September 2004, UN officials have called a series of senior- and working-level meetings in New York with countries that provide food or other assistance to North Korea (e.g., U.S., South Korea, Japan, European Union, Russia, China). During these meetings, U.S. officials took the opportunity to strongly emphasize the importance of monitoring and access, and encouraged other countries to engage the North Koreans on these issues.

Fifth, U.S. officials have engaged UN counterparts on North Korea aid issues. UN officials have told us they share U.S. humanitarian objectives and agree on the importance of transparency, monitoring, and access. U.S. officials have been in particularly close contact with WFP officials through almost continuous working-level contacts and a series of discussions with the senior WFP leadership.

WFP has been active during the past year in engaging the North Korean government on transparency, monitoring, and access issues. A UN delegation led by WFP's Deputy Executive Director visited Pyongyang in October 2004 to discuss aid issues, and WFP's Asia Director visited in March 2005. WFP's Country Director and other senior staff in Pyongyang have been continuously engaging North Korean authorities. On access issues, WFP's policy has been to strictly adhere to the "no access, no food" policy. Its monitoring efforts include seeking to maintain its five sub-offices outside of Pyongyang and pursuing changes to the monitoring system, as outlined in section III of this report.