



Statement of MJ for Press Conference December 10, 2014

In the winter of 2009 in China, I met the kkotjebbi children for the first time. Most of the children were eating what they could find in trash cans and were sleeping in the sewers in freezing conditions. They had no access to medical care and begged on the streets with frostbitten and infected feet. I even saw children who had frozen to death.

I have seen with my own eyes the Chinese border patrol guards beat kkotjebbi children with clubs and metal brushes. Our children were physically beaten so much that their heads were covered with bald spots because the hair would no longer grow back from the trauma. My wife and I lived with these children and know first-hand that North Korean defectors in China have no basic human rights or privileges and are only treated as objects for sale. Objects sold for cheap as laborers or sold for the harvesting of their organs. Women are forcefully prostituted and live as slaves for the profit of Chinese people. This is the reality for North Korean defectors.

To see these children and not do anything would be unconscionable. So starting in 2009 we started to bring the kkotjebbi children to our home to live as a family. My wife and I did our best to teach the children who had been living on the streets how to read, write, and socialize so that they could eventually live in society. In those circumstances there were many difficulties, but the children called us "mom" and "dad" and thought of us as family. This made it all worthwhile.

However, we were not able to keep the children in China indefinitely. Though North Korean defectors are recognized as refugees, China does not recognize them as such and worked to force them to re-enter North Korea. This is why North Korean defectors hide in the cold wilderness or are forced into being trafficked. We were living in fear on a daily basis and as a result lived very quietly as if our house was vacant and if we felt something was suspicious, we moved as quickly as possible. We lived like this and moved repeatedly. When we felt the children were ready for life in South Korea, we sent them three at a time from China to the South Korean Embassy in Laos and also three were safely resettled in America.

In 2013 my wife's health was in such poor condition that she could not help care for the children in our home. We then decided to go to South Korea with all nine (9) children with us via Laos. We started our journey in April, 2013. At the Chinese-Laotian border we had to separate from the children briefly to ensure safe crossing. When it was time to separate, the children were crying and reluctant to leave our side. My wife comforted each of them and cried with them before they risked their very lives to cross over the border. After we crossed the Chinese-Laotian border we were arrested in Oudomxai and held in an immigration jail for twenty (20) days. We were transferred to Vientiane on May 16. Because of the enormous stress in the immigration jail, I fell ill and was rushed to the hospital. I returned to the jail with an IV in my arm and all the children took care of me. One of the children sat by my bed and took care of me all night and watched over me to be sure the IV bag was changed. On May 27, the children were told to collect their things because they were going to South Korea. My wife and I followed behind them as they excitedly walked down the steps of the immigration center and then the Lao authorities blocked us from following them any further and locked us up in the jail. My wife and I were unable to stop the children from being repatriated back to North Korea and the Lao government made the outrageous accusation that we were human traffickers to cover their horrific crime of forcing them back to North Korea.

Please return the children we love back to us. To the Laotian government administrators who sent back the children to North Korea, who tried to cover your own mistakes by accusing my wife and I human traffickers and don't have any trace of a conscience: If you have children of your own whom you love, how could you send our children to their death and to North Korean political prison camps? How could you send our children to a country where there are no human rights? Is this something humans should be doing? Is this something you could do if you have a heart? China and Laos governments must stop murdering these refugees by forcing them back to North Korea.