

Sungnye Medal Award Ceremony Remarks
Ambassador Y.J. Choi
Korean Embassy, February 15, 2013

Dr. Suzanne Scholte, Chadwick Gore, Family, Friends, and Distinguished Guests, Today we gather to celebrate Dr. Scholte's acceptance of the Order of Diplomatic Service Merit Sungnye Medal. We thank her for her decades of friendship and solidarity with Korea.

In Korean, Sungnye means "respect for ethics." One of the central tenets of Confucianism is respect for proper ethics between relations. As such, the Sungnye Medal seems particularly fitting for Dr. Scholte who is an advocate for human rights and the codes of proper ethical conduct between peoples.

Since 1996, Dr. Scholte has raised awareness both in the U.S. and internationally about human rights abuses in North Korea. As President and Chairwoman of human rights organizations like the Defense Forum and the North Korea Freedom Coalition, she has given a voice to those silenced by the Kim regime.

This has been evident in her work bringing political prison camp survivors like Chul-Hwan Kang and Myong-Chul Ahn to the U.S. to speak before Congress. They have spoken about deplorable conditions unimaginable to those of us who live in the free world. Through pioneering North Korean Freedom Week, which has now become an annual event, Dr. Scholte has also helped raise public awareness and attract media attention for an issue that has too long been in the shadows.

It is thanks to her efforts that we have begun to look to a day when freedom, human rights, and dignity are restored in North Korea. Now in its tenth year, Freedom Week will be held at the end of April in Seoul and we all look forward to this meaningful event.

Thus, the Order of Diplomatic Service Merit Sungnye Medal carries with it an appreciation for Dr. Scholte's career as a human rights crusader. It honors her service. It is presented to her as an expression of friendship, admiration, and gratitude from the Korean people.

Thank you Dr. Scholte and congratulations once again on your great achievement.

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Presentation of the Order of Diplomatic Service Merit Sungnye Medal to Suzanne Scholte

February 15, 2013 -- Acceptance Remarks by Suzanne Scholte

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to President Lee Myung Bak, Ambassador YJ Choi and all of you who have joined this ceremony today who have helped make this day possible.

This medal comes from working on human rights issues since 1996 with South Koreans and North Koreans who escaped to South Korea, and I must confess it has not been an easy task, but there were three reasons I was driven to do this work.

First, as an American, I have always felt that our country should always stand with those who desire freedom wherever they are in this world. I have also felt that we especially have a moral obligation to the people of Korea because of the decision made in 1945 to allow the Soviet Union to enter and occupy Korea up to the 38th parallel, and the fact that after North Korea brutally attacked South Korea, we had an opportunity that we did not seize to unify the country so that all Koreans had the chance for democracy. While we can argue all the reasons why decisions were made during the weariness and hell of war and we should always honor the bravery of so many who gave their lives for South Korea's freedom, this division just illustrates that when you compromise on fundamental principles, there is enormous suffering on the innocent. We certainly saw that when America was first founded when we compromised on our fundamental principles that all men were created equal and we ended up a divided nation as a result.

Second, as a human being, I have been making this point for 17 years now: there are no people who have suffered more than the people of North Korea. It is a fact that North Korea is the only country in the world that does not enjoy a single human right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is a tragic irony that this document was passed by the UN in 1948 in response to the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan – 1948 was the same year that Kim Il Sung came to power to ensure that North Koreans would have none of these rights.

I have always believed that each of us has God given rights simply by being born and how unfair that in the country of Korea whether you were born North or South of the DMZ has enormous consequences. I know that our host today, Ambassador Choi, knows this deeply. He shared with me when we first met at the Korean—US Prayer breakfast, his personal story. When he was a baby, a hard pinch by his Mother saved him and his sisters from disaster. Ambassador Choi, his mother and his sisters were being forcibly marched along with all the people of their town, into North Korea by retreating North Korean soldiers, as General Douglas MacArthur was landing at Inchon. Ambassador Choi's cries led the guards to allow his mother to leave the march temporarily so that she could quiet her crying baby. Of course, she immediately fled back with her children to her town which would soon be liberated by General MacArthur. Today, Ambassador Choi is serving a wonderful, vibrant, democracy known as the Republic of Korea, but how different his fate would be without his mother's quick thinking and determination to save her family.

Even today, this situation continues as so many North Korean mothers are facing that same choice – trying to find a way to save their families and as you know most North Korean refugees are women.

A third reason for my dedication to this issue is because of my Christian faith: I could not turn away from this issue although I confess I have wanted to a number of times a combination of hearing the testimonies of those who have suffered under the triple Kim dictatorships and the sheer frustration of governments not responding. Many of you are familiar with this frustration as I had really naively believed when I brought the first defectors to speak out publicly about North Korea in 1997, hosted the first survivors of the political prison camps in 1998, and organized the first Congressional hearing in 1999 on the NK gulag that people would recognize that human rights in North Korea was the most important issue. As hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children are today suffering in political prison camps while millions have starved to death, we were failing to fulfill that promise we had told ourselves after the Holocaust: never again would we stand by and watch such destruction of innocent human life.

In frustration, I had cried out to God: Why have you made North Korea such a burden on my heart? God gently reminded me that He was simply answering my prayer as I had prayed to Him to break my heart for what was breaking His heart.

This calling was further confirmed over the years as I grew very close to Hwang Jang yop, the creator of the juche ideology and the right hand man of Kim Il Song when the dictatorship was first established. He often thanked me for my efforts and I always explained it was because of God's calling. Hwang came to embrace the Christian Gospel and believed it was the one message that could break the twisted brainwashing that starts at childhood in North Korea.

My family use to tease me that after all this work – hosting defectors, organizing Congressional hearings, protesting at the Chinese embassy to save refugees, organizing North Korea Freedom Week and so many events -- that all I had to show for it were two things: 20% off my dry cleaning and a balloon.

This is because when I went to get my dry cleaning one day back in the early 2000s, it turned out that the owners were originally from North Korea. They recognized me and said, "From now on you get, 20% of your dry cleaning, it is something we can do for you."

One day my husband, Chad, and my son, James, and I were in a Korean store to get a copy of the newspaper that had a front page photo of one of our protests at the Chinese embassy. My son James saw that they had balloons and he asked for one. As my husband was getting ready to pay for it, the woman asked as she nodded in my direction: Is that your wife?

My husband said: Yes, She replied: Then, the balloon is FREE.

Of course, since then I have been greatly honored to have received the Seoul Peace Prize and of course today this great honor is the most significant recognition I have ever received in my life. As someone who deeply loves Korea and the Korean people. I cannot fully express in words how much this means to me.

Today, we have made enormous progress in the recognition of the horrific human rights atrocities occurring in North Korea today, but there has been no improvement in the lives of those in North Korea, and the situation facing North Koreans in China has gotten even worse.

Just this week, in defiance of the international community, Kim Jong Eun conducted his third underground nuclear weapons test. It is estimated that North Korea has spent 1.5 billion dollars in developing its nuclear bomb. Last year's failed rocket launch cost the North Korean economy \$850 million – enough money to have fed 19 million North Koreans for an entire year. Understand that at that very same time, tens of thousands of people were dying of starvation in Hwanghae Province.

There is absolutely no reason for anyone to starve or to even go hungry in North Korea— all these deaths – millions of men, women, and children -- are the fault of the Kim regimes.

However, Kim Jong Eun's North Korea is not the North Korea of Kim Il Song or Kim Jong Il. We know that the people of North Korea are hearing us. They are no longer in the dark and increasingly gaining information about the outside world and their own circumstances, despite Kim Jong Eun's desperate attempts to keep them literally in the dark. With the failure of the public distribution system under Kim Jong-il, we know North Koreans through their own determination have survived by creating well over 200 markets to trade and sell – a system the regime has given up trying to shut down.

We know that North Koreans no longer want to join the Worker's Party to get ahead. Instead they are trying to save money to survive the coming collapse of the Kim Jong Eun regime.

With these dramatic changes in North Korea, we must be ever vigilant in our efforts to reach the North Korean people directly through all means possible whether radio broadcasting, balloon launches, or getting information through USB sticks, VCDs, DVDs, and other means through the China-North Korea border. We must continue to press China to end their illegal, brutal, and inhumane treatment of North Korean refugees.

I do believe the day is coming soon when North Korea will be free of the tyranny of the triple Kim dictatorships. There is no turning back the North Korean people whose desire for information and true knowledge continues to grow and their resolve to survive and provide for their families continues to make them rely on their own determination and NOT their failed leader.

There are two things people told me never to do when I got involved in this issue. The first was when I went to Korea in 1999 for the first time: People knew I came from a big family of huggers. They told me: "Suzanne, Koreans do not liked to be touched, so do not hug anybody." Well, I never followed that advice and last year during North Korea Freedom Week there were at least three photos including the front page of the *Chosun Ilbo* of me hugging somebody. Even Hwang Jang Yop got used to my hugs and started hugging me first.

Second, people told me never talk about REGIME CHANGE in North Korea—that is too confrontational and suggests you want to overthrow the Kim dictatorship. Well, I think we are well overdue for some REGIME CHANGE in North Korea. I think everyone in the free world agrees with us now.

So, let's work together until regime change is accomplished and the miracle on the Han that occurred in South Korea will soon be the miracle on Daedong when North Koreans finally have their chance at true freedom.

I am deeply humbled by this medal and wish to dedicate it to the people of North Korea, who have inspired me to continue this work no matter what.

CHAYU BUKHAN (FREE NORTH KOREA).



