



American Friends Service Committee

1501 Cherry Street • Philadelphia, PA 19102 -1403 • 215/241-7000 • www.afsc.org

August 11, 2011

TO: Kurt Campbell, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

CC: Ambassador Robert King, U.S. Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights Issues
Jon Brause, USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Subject: U.S. Government Should Provide Food Aid to North Korea

AFSC has worked on agriculture issues in North Korea since 1997, and closely monitors the situation on partner farms as well as reports from other parts of the country. This year, an unusually cold winter reduced yields of spring barley and potatoes. Early spring drought affected winter wheat growth, delaying maturation and harvest. As a result second crops – corn, rice, vegetables – were planted later than usual, reducing their yield potential and rendering them susceptible to autumn frost. In late June crops were further damaged by typhoon weather.

It is clear to us that the North Korea is facing one of its worst food shortages in 15 years. On our visit in late May, Dr. Jerry Nelson, Professor Emeritus from the University of Missouri who has provided agricultural expertise to AFSC since 2006, estimated that barley yields would be 50% of normal, winter wheat would be at best 70% and could go as low as 25% of normal. AFSC partner farms report that they do not have adequate grains to feed their populations to the harvest season.

Findings of international institutions confirm the urgency of the situation. In June, a European Union (EU) mission reported widespread hunger, near empty markets and warehouses, and people foraging for food. Government rations have been steadily reduced, in some places to the equivalent of about one small bowl of rice per day, with the next main cereal harvest still months away. The World Food Programme (WFP), which launched its emergency food aid operation last April to feed the most vulnerable, warns that as many as 6 million North Koreans (or up to ¼ of the population) may be at risk in 2011, as an already precarious situation worsens.

The impact of hunger is long-term: malnutrition has lasting effects on physical and mental development, particularly in children. The risk of delay in providing food aid is not just starvation among the most vulnerable, but disease, stunted growth, and shortened life spans in the general population.

We have discussed with the administration in the past the challenges of the agricultural economy in the DPRK and have also consistently urged the United States Government to use every possible opening for engagement with the North. We believe that refusing to respond in this crisis would be both a humanitarian failing and a missed opportunity. We urge the United States Government to demonstrate its goodwill and generosity by joining the World Food Programme's effort to feed the hungry in North Korea.

Sincerely,

Shan Cretin
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

Quaker values in action