

Charismatic Wins Peace Prize

Suzanne Scholte was honored in Seoul, Korea, Tuesday for her campaigns to improve the human rights of refugees from North Korea and the Western Sahara.



[] A charismatic Christian was awarded the prestigious Seoul Peace Prize Tuesday for her work in promoting freedom and human rights for the citizens of North Korea and the Sahrawi refugees of Western Sahara—the only colony in Africa under Moroccan rule.

At an awards ceremony held in Seoul, Korea, Suzanne Scholte, chairwoman of the North Korea Freedom Coalition and president of the Defense Forum Foundation (DFF), was honored as the ninth recipient of the biennial award, which recognizes individuals or groups that have contributed extensively to world peace. Three of the eight previous recipients were later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

“I feel humbled but also I feel honored,” Scholte stated in September after being notified of her selection. “It is a great honor to receive this great prize even when I just did what I should do. Doing all that we can do for the promotion of the human rights for North Korea and North Korean refugees represents the conscience of the age.”

Scholte, a Spirit-filled Christian, told *Charisma* that her

compulsion to help the suffering stemmed from an earnest prayer. "Years ago," she said, "I prayed that God would break my heart for things that broke His heart."

She became a convert to humanitarian activism after two North Korean defectors begged her in 1996 to investigate a political prisoner camp in North Korea, where they claimed the government imprisoned tens of thousands of people to maintain control.

At that time, as president of the DFF since 1989, Scholte had helped her Washington-based bipartisan group evolve into a human rights organization by not only educating Congress on national security issues but also by promoting freedom and democracy in nations known for human rights violations. According to the DFF Web site, the transition in focus was because "the greatest threats to the United States are always from regimes that terrorize their own people."

In April 1999, Scholte hosted the first hearing in Congress on the North Korean political prisoner camps at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs. She not only testified in the hearing but also personally hosted those first North Koreans who barely survived harsh prison camps.

Since that time, Scholte has invited a wide spectrum of 57 defectors to the U.S.—from sex-trafficked women to diplomats once close to

North Korean dictator

Kim Jong-il. Many of the refugees have testified in Congress, participated in rallies, granted media interviews and spoken at conferences. She also has assisted behind the scenes in the rescues of dozens of North Koreans who made the dangerous trek across the Tumen River into China.

While playing host on Capitol Hill, Scholte developed an interesting relationship with one of North Korea's highest-ranking defectors, Hwang Jang-Yop—a revered thinker in North Korea responsible for Juche theology. The humanistic belief purports that man is the center of the universe. It grew into Kim Jong-ilism, the worship of North Korea's infamous dictator. "Yop knows my Christian beliefs," Scholte said. "I called on him personally to renounce the ideology he founded and accept Christ as Savior."

She said Hwang does not feel worthy to accept Christ's forgiveness but, to her surprise, he publicly published her appeal to receive Christ to all of his Korean constituents. She said Hwang was deeply inspired by her faith, reminding him of a 45-year-old experience he had of "beholding the deep, wide, and magnificent beauty of the Geumgang Mountains."

"Who has created this great beauty?" he asked. "Suzanne Scholte is the lamp that lights the right pathway for the people, not letting them go astray."

Scholte is also lighting a pathway for the people in Western Sahara, Africa. In 1994, the Muslim president of Sahrawi Republic,

Mohamed Abdelaziz,
gratefully received an Arabic Bible that Scholte gave him,
calling it a “holy
book.”

“The Sahrawis believe in a personal relationship with God, not
imams,
Sharia law, or state-regulated Islam,” Scholte said. “The
president has invited
Christians to plant churches in their country. It’s remarkable
to have a Muslim
president call for open religious freedom in his country.”

Scholte points out that although in the Muslim world women
aren’t even
allowed to drive, the Sahrawi Republic government believes in
freedom of
religion and all their women have rights, vote and are
involved in public life.
“The only way to win war on terror is to empower Muslims who
believe in these
basic fundamental rights,” she said.

Scholte joins a prestigious list of previous Seoul Peace Prize
recipients
including former U.S. Secretary of State George P. Shultz,
former U.N.
Secretary-General Kofi Annan and former President Vaclav Havel
of the Czech
Republic **—C. Hope Flinchbaugh**