

North Korea Releases 3 American Christians—including Pastor

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will return from North Korea with three American Christians currently imprisoned in the country, says a report from a South Korean official. President Donald Trump confirmed the news Wednesday morning in a tweet.

“I am pleased to inform you that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is in the air and on his way back from North Korea with the 3 wonderful gentlemen that everyone is looking so forward to meeting. They seem to be in good health,” Trump wrote.

The official told South Korea’s Yonhap News Agency that Pompeo was expected to return to the United States with a specified time and date for President Trump’s upcoming meeting with North Korean Dictator Kim Jong Un.

“We expect him to bring the date, time and the captives,” the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Pompeo arrived in North Korea early Wednesday morning to prepare for the Korea meeting.

Trump announced the visit Tuesday afternoon and hinted that Pompeo might return with the three American Christians imprisoned in the Hermit Kingdom. The confirmation came Wednesday,

“Plans are being made, relationships are building,” Trump told reporters at the same time he announced the United States’ withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal. “Hopefully, a deal will happen and, with the help of China, South Korea and Japan, a future of great prosperity and security can be

achieved for everyone.”

However, Trump remains cautious and added: “We’ll see how it all works out—maybe it will, maybe it won’t.

Trump also hinted at the Christians’ release on Twitter last week.

Open Doors USA President David Curry hailed the release of prisoners Kim Dong-chul, Kim Sang-duk and Kim Hak-song as a “great victory” for their families.

“Open Doors celebrates the release of American prisoners,” Curry said. “[It is] one critical step toward restoring diplomatic relations with North Korea. To keep progressing, this first gesture of good will must now be followed by further actions to address the long-running, systematic human rights abuses that still plague the people of North Korea. Building on this positive development, we must continue to advocate for the release of political and ideological prisoners among the estimated 250,000 North Koreans in Kim Jong Un’s prison system.”

Curry, however, said there is still much work to do considering North Korea has been ranked No. 1 on the Open Doors World Watch list for 17 consecutive years.

“We must continue to call attention to the 50,000 Christians who have been detained in these interrogation centers, prison cells and work camps,” he said. “And we must continue to work toward religious freedoms for the estimated 300,000 North Korean Christians who must practice their faith under threat of harassment, imprisonment and even death. ... “We must make it clear that Kim Jong Un can only be invited back into the world’s good graces, and be lauded for political gestures, if he commits to resolving decades of human rights violations at the hands of his regime. This man maintains fascist control over North Korea.

“While the freedom of three American prisoners is a fantastic start, let’s acknowledge that Kim has not yet ushered in freedom for all. Don’t let these recent positive developments be perceived as the celebratory end of the freedom work in North Korea, and instead let it mark the beginning.” {eo}

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