

Family of Former North Korean Prisoner Praises God for His Safe Return

The family of Tony Kim, one of three American Christians released today by the North Korean regime, is thankful he's finally coming home.

"We are very grateful for the release of our husband and father, Tony Kim, and the other two American detainees," the Kim family said in a statement. "We want to thank all of those who have worked toward and contributed to his return home."

Tony Kim, who also goes by his Korean name, Kim Sang Duk, was arrested on April 22, 2017, just before boarding a plane for a flight back to the United States.

Kim was a professor at Pyongyang University for Science and Technology (PUST), the country's only privately-run academic institution.

Kim was charged with crimes against the state.

"We also want to thank the president for engaging directly with North Korea," Kim's family said. "Mostly, we thank God for Tony's safe return."

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo traveled to Pyongyang Tuesday to meet North Korea's leader and to secure the release of the men.

"He played a crucial role in this," said CBN News White House correspondent Ben Kennedy. "This is Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's second meeting in North Korea. The first time he was there as CIA director, and that kind of launched this possible release of three Americans."

Tony Kim, along with Kim Dong-chul and Kim Hak-song, were arrested by North Korean authorities between 2015-2017 and charged with various crimes against the regime.

It's a tactic the regime has used numerous times before.

"The North Koreans always have this tendency to take people, they love taking Americans," said Gary Lane, CBN News' chief international correspondent. "They take them for no reason, really, but they always charge them with hostile acts against the regime. Then they use them as bargaining chips, as leverage, to get what they want from the United States."

Still, President Trump welcomed North Korea's decision to release the men saying it was a gesture of goodwill ahead of his meeting with Kim Jong Un.

"Nobody thought this would happen for years," Trump said during a cabinet meeting Wednesday. "I appreciate Kim Jong Un doing this and allowing them to go."

Trump said the time and date of the future meeting between himself and Kim Jong Un have been set.

"People never thought you were going to have a situation where we're having serious and positive communication with North Korea and we are," Trump said. We have a chance at something really great for the world and great for North Korea and great for everyone."

The three former prisoners are scheduled to be back on American soil Thursday at 2:00 AM.

"We appreciate all of the support and prayers of friends and even strangers during this challenging year," Tony Kim's family said through a lawyer.

"We ask that you continue to pray for the people of North Korea and for the release of all who are still being held,' they added.

Open Doors USA, a human rights group that monitors religious freedom around the world, said the release of the American Christians was a “positive first time” but more must be done to “address the long-running, systematic human rights abuses that still plague the people of North Korea.”

For 17 consecutive years in a row, North Korea has topped the list of 50 countries where Christians suffer the most for their faith.

“Open Doors celebrates the release of American prisoners Kim Dong Chul, Kim Hak-song and Kim Sang Duk,” David Curry, president of Open Doors, said in a statement. “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.”

“We must continue to call attention to the 50,000 Christians who have been detained in these interrogation centers, prison cells and work camps,” Curry added.

Curry urged the Trump administration to press the regime to open the various labor camps spread throughout North Korea.

Over the years, *CBN News* has reported extensively on the brutality inside these so-called houses of horror.

“We must gain transparency into how these people are being treated (in the labor camps),” Curry added. “Then we must push forward to negotiate with North Korea to release all political dissidents being held across their prison system.”

North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un is worshipped as a god, and an entire religion known as Juche is built around idolizing the Kim dynasty.

“(Kim) systematically brainwashes and isolates all of his citizens from outside information, and he demands cultic

reverence for himself and his ancestors,” Curry said.

“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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