

From Franklin Graham to Greg Laurie, Christian Leaders Praise North Korea's Hostage Release

North Korea released three hostages on Wednesday, including a pastor, in a good will gesture after meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

ABC News reports the hostages Kim Dong Chul, Kim Hak Song and Kim Sang Duk, who is also known as Tony Kim, have been detained in North Korea for more than a year.

The three men are expected to arrive in Washington, D.C. by 2 a.m. Thursday.

According to the report:

Kim Dong Chul is the longest-known U.S. detainee in North Korea, having spent at least 900 days in custody.

He is a South Korean-born U.S. businessman and pastor arrested in October 2015.

His arrest stemmed from an allegation that he was trying to meet with a former North Korean soldier to receive classified information. North Korea said he was colluding with the South Korean spy agency, which denied being involved with Kim.

He was sentenced in April 2016 to 10 years of hard labor.

The two other detainees, Kim Hak Song and Tony Kim, worked at the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology.

They were detained in 2017 and charged with "hostile acts" against the North Korean state.

Kim's family issued a statement through their lawyer, Randall Brandt, after his release was made public.

"We want to thank all of those who have worked toward and contributed to his return home. We also want to thank the president for engaging directly with North Korea. Mostly, we thank God for Tony's safe return," the statement said. "We appreciate all of the support and prayers of friends and even strangers during this challenging year. You are dear to our hearts. We ask that you continue to pray for the people of North Korea and for the release of all who are still being held."

The move brought praises from around the globe, but especially within the Christian community. Some commented on U.S. President Donald Trump's firm hand toward the dictatorship while others acknowledged the need for more assistance around the globe.

Here's what they're saying:

Thankful to God that these men are coming home!

– Franklin Graham (@Franklin_Graham) May 9, 2018

Thank you Mr. President @realDonaldTrump.

– Franklin Graham (@Franklin_Graham) May 9, 2018

This is fantastic news and an answered prayer!

Thank you, @potus!

– Greg Laurie (@greglaurie) May 9, 2018

Che Ahn, founder and president of Harvest International Ministry:

What many may not know is that 2000 pastors gathered in

Seoul, South Korea Jan. 1-5, 2018 at our annual HIM conference. The speakers were Bill Johnson, Chuck Pierce, Lou Engle and myself. Lou gave a passionate message urging the Korean pastors to go on a 40-day fast and pray for the North and South Korea unification and the end of the war. Keep in mind in January, things were very tense between Kim Jung Um and President Trump.

Hundreds of pastors made a commitment to pray and fast for 40 days starting some time after the conference. We noticed a dramatic shift of Kim Jun Um and his policy towards the South Koreans and the USA near the end of that 40-day period. I know millions of Christians in South Korea have been praying since 1953, but I can't help but believe that what we see taking place in North Korea is the result of the specific call to prayer and fasting that took place this past January.

Sam Rohrer, president of the American Pastors Association:

We should, as God's people, be extraordinarily thankful to God for answering a prayer, because I believe this is an answer to prayer. We should be more encouraged and more committed to praying for this president and this secretary of state in particular who knows the Lord as his Savior, Mike Pompeo.

The president's comments in the Rose Garden last Thursday on day of prayer, specifically commented publicly about the plague of persecuted Christians around the world, and [how we should] attempt to help them. I think we are witnessing God answering a commitment to use the sort of government described in Romans 13, to praise and protect those who do well, and expose and do what is possible to bring to punishment those who do evil.

The big picture here is of God providing blessing and answering to prayer of God's people for these individuals. This is partly in response to the president's and administration's commitment to push back against that which

is evil, the North Korea regime and everything they're doing, and commit to help those who are being persecuted for their faith, not just in North Korea but elsewhere around the globe.

David Curry, president of Open Doors USA:

Open Doors celebrates the release of American prisoners Kim Dong Chul, Kim Hak-song and Kim Sang Duk, also known as Tony Kim. This certainly marks a great victory for these families and one critical step toward restoring diplomatic relations with North Korea.

To keep progressing, this first gesture of goodwill 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.

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

The logical next step is for the Trump administration to press Kim Jong Un to open his labor camps to the Red Cross and the United Nations Council of Inquiry within the next 30 days. We must gain transparency into how these people are being treated. And then we must push forward to negotiate with North Korea to release all political dissidents being held across their prison system.

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, leading his country to be ranked No. 1 on the Open Doors World Watch List for 17 consecutive years.

Beyond those whom Kim imprisons, he systematically brainwashes and isolates all of his citizens from outside information, and he demands cultic reverence for himself and his ancestors.

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.

Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference:

As an American, I wholeheartedly applaud the Trump administration for working tirelessly on bringing home the three detained Americans from North Korea, and more broadly President Trump's role in helping create a genuine opportunity for peace on the Korean peninsula. This is truly a historic day and one that bodes well for the prospect of peace throughout all of Asia.

As a Christian, I rejoice knowing full well that the proclamation of the gospel in North Korea has been clandestine in nature for decades. Many brothers and sisters in Christ have risked their lives in doing so and at least one of those released was detained because of his faith. Where the South has flourished economically and spiritually, the North has languished under communist stagnation and state-sponsored atheism and shamanism. I believe today marks a prophetic shift in the future of the North Korean people as well as for the gospel spreading among them, just as it did

in the south.

Vernon Brewer, CEO and founder of World Help, which has launched a campaign to send Bibles to North Korea:

The release of these hostages should be cause for celebration for all Americans, especially Christians who have been praying for the release of pastor Kim Dong Chul. Yet we cannot forget that there are still countless people still suffering inside North Korea. For example, tens of thousands of North Korean Christians have been locked up and sentenced to forced labor simply because of their faith. This news should encourage us to continue praying for a true peace and freedom for everyone in North Korea.

Jentezen Franklin, senior pastor of Free Chapel:

Today, I was overjoyed to hear of the release of courageous Christian leaders in North Korea. God has heard the faithful prayers of his followers. Let this be a reminder that the Lord is always at work, even in seemingly irreconcilable situations. In God's economy, there are no closed countries. The story of His grace and His love can penetrate even the hardest of hearts, and it's so comforting to know there are followers of Christ who haven't given up on North Korea.

This is a step in the right direction, and I hope it is only the first of many. We must continue to pray for the rest of our dear brothers and sisters who remain imprisoned and oppressed for their faith. Every citizen of North Korea deserves the freedom to worship as they please, and leaders around the world must not settle for any less than that.

Jason Yates, CEO of My Faith Votes

Americans can unite in celebration today over the homecoming of Kim Dong Chul, Kim Hak-song and Kim Sang Duk from

imprisonment in North Korea. In the midst of personal welcomes from the president and others, these men undoubtedly feel the sweet embrace of that most cherished of American virtues – freedom.

Their return, though, reminds us that even the freest person in North Korea still lives a prisoner's life under an oppressive regime that persecutes faith, squashes free speech and makes a mockery of free and fair elections. Most Americans cannot even imagine this reality, yet many around the world, including in North Korea, can only dream of living with such rights. The freedoms we enjoy are not automatic, not guaranteed and not inevitable, and our response should be to exercise them, not take them for granted. Our votes make the difference between elected officials who honor what is right and officials who oppose it, between elected officials who seek what is best for their country and those who seek what is best for themselves, and between elected officials who are principled and those who are rudderless.

Charisma News will update this story as more details are released.