

North Korea Blames Its Human Rights Problems on Christian Missionaries

North Korea responded to the United Nations Human Rights Council this week regarding alleged human rights abuses by blaming Christian discipleship bases reaching North Koreans in northeast China.

So Se Pyong, North Korea's ambassador, said in a debate before the council in Geneva, "There are in the northeastern area of China so-called churches and priests exclusively engaged in hostile acts against the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea]. They indoctrinate the illegal border-crossers with anti-DPRK ideology and send them back to the DPRK with assignments of subversion, destruction, human trafficking and even terrorist acts."

The Rev. Eric Foley is CEO of Seoul USA, a U.S./Korean nongovernmental organization that operates a number of discipleship bases reaching North Koreans across Asia. Foley says, "The significance of North Korea's comments cannot be overstated. North Korea is choosing to publicly blame Christian missionaries for its human rights problems and internal difficulties."

Foley notes that the situation facing North Korean missionaries in northeast China is tight and getting tighter. But he adds that the challenge is not only from North Korea.

"Don't expect China to do nothing," Foley says. "If North Korea is pointing to missionaries operating in China as a source of potential North Korean instability, and if it is alleging that China is the host, then missionaries can expect an increasing crackdown on churches and discipleship bases reaching North Koreans."

Foley contends that North Korea's anti-Christian message is not only directed at China.

"From a public perception standpoint, expect that North Korea will more and more seek sympathy and support from the general global public by striking an anti-Christian chord. It may be the most important development regarding Christian ministry to North Korea in the last decade," he explains.