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Viewing cable 10SEOUL310, DPRK HUMAN RIGHTS BILL SYMBOLIC BUT UNLIKELY TO

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
10SEOUL310	2010-02-24 04:15	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Seoul

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000310

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/25/2030
TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV PINR SOCI KS KN
SUBJECT: DPRK HUMAN RIGHTS BILL SYMBOLIC BUT UNLIKELY TO
BECOME LAW, SAY NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CONTACTS

Classified By: POL M/C James. L. Wayman. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary and Comment

¶1. (C) Summary: National Assembly Member Park Sun-young told us February 22 that approval by the National Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee of the "North Korean Human Rights Act" was symbolically important, but cautioned the bill was unlikely to become law. The Liberty Forward lawmaker, co-author of the legislation and a leading advocate for DPRK refugees, asserted the bill would die in the National Assembly Judicial Committee because President Lee lacked the political will to overcome Democratic Party (DP) opposition. Park complained that DP Members and Pyongyang used identical language to criticize the Act. Park and DP Member Song Min-soon's Chief of Staff, Heo Young-jae, agreed the bill was introduced and passed in the Foreign Affairs Committee only to appease Grand National Party conservatives. Heo said the DP acknowledged that North Korea's human rights situation needed improvement, but former Foreign Minister Song believed the way to produce results was through a Helsinki-style process that built trust and confidence between Pyongyang and Seoul.

¶2. (C) Comment: In a call with Ambassador Stephens, Chairman Park Jin highlighted the bill's passage by the Foreign Affairs Committee, suggesting that the Blue House was looking to score some easy points not only with GNP hardliners but with Washington as well. End summary and comment.

NK Human Rights Bill: Great, but...

¶3. (C) Liberty Forward Party (LFP) National Assembly Member Park Sun-young and Democratic Party (DP) National Assembly Member Song Min-soon's Chief of Staff, Heo Young-jae, gave us their views February 22 on prospects for National Assembly (NA) passage of the "North Korean Human Rights Act." The legislation was passed by the NA's Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Unification Committee on February 11.

¶4. (C) Park, who co-authored the Act and is a passionate advocate for North Korean refugees, told us the legislation was symbolically very important. Park was particularly proud of a clause she wrote that would create an archive to document North Korea's human rights violations, similar to then-West Germany's "Zentral Erfassungsstelle." She said the bill would also permit government funding of ROK NGOs focused on improving North Korean human rights. These NGOs were

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ignored and starved of resources during the Sunshine Policy era, Park emphasized.

...MB Doesn't Have the Will to Make It Law

¶5. (C) Park lamented, though, that the bill would probably not be passed into law. There were two significant obstacles: 1) the chairman of the Judicial Committee, which needed to approve the bill, was a DP Member; and, 2) President Lee lacked the political will to get it done. Park asserted that MB had encouraged Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Unification Committee Chairman (and Grand National Party heavyweight) Park Jin to approve the bill solely to score points with the GNP's conservative wing. The Blue House really did not want to see the bill become law because it "could become a barrier" to a potential North-South summit this year.

North Korean Reaction

¶6. (C) Park commented that North Korea's belligerent rhetoric in response to the February 11 passage of the bill was "atypical and expected." What was "disturbing," Park said, was that the language used in the DPRK government statement was identical to the language used by DP Members and left-wing ROK student groups in expressing opposition to the legislation.

The Opposition View

¶7. (C) Heo Young-jae seconded Park's analysis of the bill's future. He said the prevailing view among DP Members was that the bill was introduced and passed in the Foreign Affairs Committee to appease conservatives; the Blue House, he claimed, knew that the bill would die in the Judicial Committee.

¶8. (C) Heo said the DP acknowledged that North Korea's human rights situation needed to improve. DP Members like former Foreign Minister Song Min-soon, however, believed the bill would only make life harder for ordinary North Koreans. Heo said DP Members were uniformly critical of President Lee's "containment policy," which Heo claimed was forcing millions of North Koreans to go hungry. It was Song's view that the most effective way to improve human rights conditions in the North was through a Helsinki-style process that built trust and confidence between the two Koreas. The MB administration could start that process immediately by resuming large-scale rice and fertilizer assistance to the DPRK, Heo asserted.
 TOKOLA