



Submission No 10

Inquiry into Australia's Relations with the Republic of Korea; and Developments on the Korean Peninsula

Organisation: Australian Red Cross

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26th May 2005

Mr John Carter
The Secretary
Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Carter,

Please find attached a submission from Australian Red Cross to the **Australia's relationship with the Republic of Korea; and developments on the Korean peninsula.**

Australian Red Cross has been involved in humanitarian activities on the Korean peninsula since 1950 from which it has developed a unique understanding on the social and humanitarian context within the Korean peninsula.

ARC urges DFAT to review their position to distinguish the political consultations from the humanitarian needs. Through this we encourage dialogue with ARC, who can neutrally and independently provide effective and appropriate humanitarian assistance to many in the community.

ARC would be pleased to provide further information to the Joint Sub-committee and to be present at the Inquiry if so desired. Please feel free to contact Mr Michael Annear, Regional Program Coordinator - North East Asia, International Operations Department on (03) 9345 1825 or mannear@redcross.org.au.

Yours sincerely,



Robert Tickner
Chief Executive Officer



**Submission to the
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade on
Australia's relationship with the Republic of Korea;
and developments on the Korean peninsula**

Introduction

The Australian Red Cross welcome the opportunity to submit the following paper outlining the social and humanitarian developments and future opportunities relevant to the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement within the Korean peninsula.

Humanitarian context

The population of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is estimated at 22.7 million people, of which 10 million are engaged in agricultural, industrial and administrative jobs. The country remains dependant on external economic assistance and humanitarian aid, which are highly susceptible to changed positions in a complex international geopolitical environment. Evidence of this was highlighted through the protracted negotiations to develop the 2005 UN Framework for International Co-operation.

The future of the DPRK economy is uncertain, the collapse of the centrally planned financial system, the demise of the Soviet Union and economic and policy changes in China have all led to a sharp decline in DPRK's international trade, resulting in negative implications for the economy. Currently the country faces an energy crisis, reduced industrial production, a deteriorating road and transport system, ongoing food shortages, deforestation and lack of resources to cover health and social services. In particular poor environmental practices, the degradation of the water supply systems and the failure to protect water sources from contamination has resulted in heavy water pollution, limited portable water supplies and resultant health problems.

Out of a population of 22 million people 6 million presently receive supplementary food aid, although this equates to just under 30 percent of the population the UN continues to voice its concern over food security, especially for children. In February 2004 for example, food assistance from the World Food Programme (WFP) targeting four million beneficiaries had to be temporarily stopped due to a shortfall in support for the operation. Although the frequency of chronic malnutrition dropped from 62 to 42 percent between 1998-2002, it still remains high and many agree the country cannot be totally self sufficient in food production at least for the short term.

In recent years DPRK has also been repeatedly affected by severe natural disasters and is prone to the effects of flash floods, landslides, tidal waves, storms and drought. In 1995 the country was hit by devastating floods displacing 5.4 million people and destroyed 330,000 hectares of agricultural land resulting in the loss of 1.9 million metric-ton of grain. As a result for the first time in its history the Government of DPRK appealed for international assistance. At the request of the DPRK Red Cross

(DPRK RC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Federation) launched an international appeal which sought support to assist 130,000 beneficiaries over three months. Since 1995, the Federation has launched annual and emergency Appeals. In 2004 the Federation's program covered five provinces reaching a population of some 8.8 million people.

The humanitarian situation in DPRK remains serious. While the country has demonstrated a high resilience and impressive coping mechanisms regarding many social and environmental issues, there is evidence of rapidly increasing vulnerability across communities. The increasingly politicised humanitarian environment, compounded by the absence of an acceptable resolution of the political stalemate on the Korean peninsula, is therefore adversely affecting communities in the DPRK.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement)

Founded as an independent voluntary humanitarian organization in 1945, the Red Cross society of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK RC) is organized with a network of 10 provincial branches and 200 city/county branches, covering the entire country. The Society is the largest humanitarian organization in the country, with a nationwide network of 330,000 volunteers, 371,730 Red Cross Youth at the community level and over one million members.

Over the past two years a significant program of governance and management reform has been undertaken. As a result society's statutes were recently revised and adopted at their General Assembly in May 2004. The General Assembly also approved the new Development Plan 2004-2010, which places vital importance on strengthening the society to maintain their strong community profile and supporting vulnerable populations in the harsh economic environment. The Development Plan also reconfirmed the society's commitment to four core activity areas building upon an already successful track record of implementation in: disaster management; community-based health care and social welfare services; humanitarian services to alleviate suffering and misfortune caused by national division; and promotion of the Movement's Fundamental Principles and humanitarian values.

These activities clearly have strengthened the foundation and capacity of the DPRK RC. In addition, provincial branches were strengthened in human and materials basis and a number of volunteers and staff received additional training. The impact that the above improvements will have on the most vulnerable people will only be visible in due time. However, the direct effect is visible in the acknowledgement by the government of national society's mandate and reduced responsibility of the government in the affairs of the DPRK RC.

Underpinning all DPRK Red Cross programs is an emphasis on co-ordination. This is at the heart of Red Cross activities with the support of both the Federation Secretariat and participating National Societies, such as Australian Red Cross (ARC). The Federation's country delegation further facilitates communication between the DPRK Red Cross and other National Societies by supporting exchange visits, and maintains a close relationship with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Movement partners

The Federation's Secretariat has been working closely with the DPRK RC since 1995. The focus of the Federation's support has moved from emergency relief to longer-term health programs, disaster preparedness and response and capacity building programs to bridge the gap between relief and development.

The Federation's Delegation in Pyongyang has established a very good working relationship with the DPRK RC. Through this relationship and DPRK RC's national network of branches, the Federation is in a unique position in terms of access to vulnerable communities and information about their condition, compared with other organisations. This enables appropriate program design, implementation and monitoring to be undertaken based on field data and analysis of actual needs.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) through its Geneva and Regional office has maintained contacts with the authorities, the DPRK RC and the Republic of Korea Red Cross Society (ROK RC) ever since hostilities ended in 1953. Through this dialogue ICRC has supported the DPRK RC since its formation with the dissemination of international humanitarian law and the Fundamental Principles. In 2002 ICRC supported the DPRK RC in establishing an orthopedic workshop in Songrim, providing modern prostheses to amputees as well as training of orthopedic surgeons in modern amputation techniques. ICRC is currently negotiating a second workshop to serve amputees from the armed forces.

The strength of the world wide Movement was shown through its role in maintaining communication between DPRK and the Republic of Korea in 1971 when the two governments held talks through their respective Red Cross societies. More recently the ROK RC has supported the DPRK RC society's activities and provided substantial in-kind assistance to the relief operation in Ryongchon. The inter-Korean cooperation will continue in 2005 to support families separated during the Korean War.

Since July 1950 when Australian Red Cross shipped medicines and anti-tetanus serum for civilian relief in Korea, it has supported emergency and relief programs in the Koreas. Following a series of disasters in DPRK starting with a flood in 1995, ARC launched appeals with the Australian public raising funds to support the relief operation. More recently ARC provided significant assistance with the support of AisAID to the relief activities aimed at helping the victims of the Ryongchon train explosion. In addition for the past several years (since 2001) ARC has provided technical delegates to work with the International Federation/DPRK RC program.

Red Cross Programs

In 2005 the DPRK RC supported by the Movement will focus on disaster management, health and care (including water and sanitation) and organisational development with an emphasis on developing the capacity of branches for implementing activities country wide. With support from the Federation and inline with the Development Plan 2004 -2010 the DPRK RC will develop a Cooperation Agreement Strategy laying the foundation for multilateral support within the Movement to implement longer-term activities beyond 2006.

In 2005 the focus will be on the following specific activities:

- The *Health and Care* program will continue to assist health institutions in improving the quality of basic medical services, developing capacity in community based first aid and health promotion, improving living conditions as well as reducing the risk of waterborne disease transmission among the most vulnerable through the provision of clean water and improved sanitation.
- The *Disaster Management* will consolidate capacity and expand the community based disaster preparedness program to include mitigation activities partly focused with reforestation. Activities will also be developed with the consistency and integration with health and care and water and sanitation activities.

- The *Organisational Development* process will address a number of challenges that include integration of service programs with regard to training and branch development, while also achieving greater financial resource sustainability.

Through the activities outlined above the DPRK RC and wider Movement will gain a deeper understanding of the current situation through the collection of baseline data and piloting of Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCA is a Movement tool), thereby informing the identification of new programs and supporting current program implementation.

Strategic developments

The increasing self-governance of the DPRK RC is evident through its recent and on-going governance and management reforms and enhanced status as a humanitarian organisation within the country. In addition the DPRK RC is a highly respected amongst the population due to its nation wide structure and reach, complimented by the development of strategies which respond to the needs of the vulnerable population that takes into account the complex political and socioeconomic situation.

Within this context, the DPRK Red Cross has a degree of autonomy in carrying out operations within its mandate, while the Federation, through working closely with the national society, has a comparatively good basis to support the efficient implementation and evaluation of DPRK Red Cross programs. Additionally, DPRK RC has an MoU with the government under the Disaster Relief Commission and therefore, defining their role in disaster response. The strength of all these mechanisms was evident in the response to the Ryongchan train explosion in April 2004.

However, as part of recent moves by the Government and quality assurance processes, the Federation is reviewing its monitoring procedures. Monitoring by international staff must be pre-arranged and while this may pose daily movement or operational constraints, reviews and evaluations have not indicated this has affected the provision of or support to targeted communities. A field visit undertaken by British Red Cross in 2004 noted for example, that while geographic access is limited to 4 of the 9 provinces, access is improving and while field visits are short, they do allow effective monitoring. Recommendations to improve monitoring processes with an increasing responsibility of the DPRK RC in the monitoring process, and Federation focussing on analysis and quality assurance, will be a feature of strengthening programs in 2005.

A number of specific program sector reviews have been conducted since 2002 (health, disaster management and water/sanitation) all of which have demonstrated significant effect through the incorporation of key recommendations into program design and implementation. The processes implemented by the DPRK RC in Disaster Management for example, are seen internally within the Movement as examples of best practice. Furthermore it is notable that the DPRK RC and Federation were granted access to extend health activities into South Hamyong province in 2004 for example, where the provision of essential drugs is vital due to the DPRK government's inability to manufacture simple antibiotics to appropriate international standards through lack of raw materials and certified process. Also, an evaluation of the water/sanitation program reported in the 2002/03 period a 38.4% decrease in water borne disease cases within the target communities.

Resulting from the recent internal governance and management changes the DPRK RC has initiated a Cooperation Agreement Strategy (CAS) process. This is a

Movement tool used by National Societies (considered an integral part of the ongoing organisational development process) to manage cooperation with the wider Movement and non-Movement partners to achieve its objectives in support of the community it serves. The CAS process builds consensus towards longer-term cooperation through a culture of negotiation and reciprocity. An important part of the CAS process has been the completion of a Strategic Review jointly carried out by representatives from the Federation, sister Red Cross Societies and the DPRK RC in order to analyse the strengths and challenges of international programming undertaken and provide clear recommendations for future humanitarian assistance.

The Strategic Review will distribute its recommendations in July 2005, however the main findings were presented by the review team at the May 2005 East Asia Partnership Meeting, Mongolia. The findings indicate the Movement must continue to maintain a policy of engagement and solidarity with the DPRK RC, that to date has reduced human suffering and contributed to the wellbeing of vulnerable groups within this clearly sensitive environment, where the norms and standards of humanitarian aid and development often apply differently.

Recommendations

It is clear that in the present context, DPRK RC is one of if not the most effective and respected humanitarian organisations operating in the country. The access of DPRK RC through their programs has been demonstrated through comprehensive and open evaluations and further supported by mandates given by the DPRK Government. All of which suggest DPRK RC is very well placed to access vulnerable communities, while strengthening their own organisational capacity and strategic direction for the longer term. Furthermore the DPRK RC supported by the Federation and wider Red Cross Movement partners including Australian Red Cross, provides a unique insight into the context, through working collaboratively with the government and other actors, to ensure a balanced approach to genuine needs, while preparing to supporting vulnerable populations that will require longer term developmental responses.

While the Cooperation Agreement Strategy processes will facilitate a strengthened approach beyond 2006, ARC does not wish to underestimate the importance nor scale of support that is required now for current programs. The present humanitarian situation runs the risk of being further exacerbated through vulnerability to natural disaster.

Since November 2004, ARC has been engaging with AusAID for the purposes of information sharing and seeking the possibility for future humanitarian funding. ARC are cognizant of the heavily politicised aid environment, while the 6 party nuclear talks have stalled, however despite AusAID's existing commitments to multi-lateral organisations such as UNICEF, the humanitarian need is still immense.

ARC urges DFAT to review their position to distinguish the political consultations on the nuclear talks from the humanitarian needs. Through this we encourage dialogue with ARC, who in partnership with the Federation and the DPRK RC can neutrally and independently provide effective and appropriate humanitarian assistance to many in the community.

As such, ARC encourages the consideration of the following as part of the Australia's future relationship with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Republic of Korea:

1. Multi-year funding of the DPRK Red Cross humanitarian program with specific consideration to contribute to either:
 - i. Disaster management - recent program reviews (ECHO and DFID) reflect the interest of both DPRK Red Cross, British Red Cross and DFID to diversify the funding base away from a single institutional donor. This would provide the Government of Australia a sound basis for engagement with it's own sectoral interest in disaster response, and an opportunity in particular to build upon its strong support to humanitarian and disaster response in East Asia.
 - ii. The water/sanitation program in conjunction with the health education program has a clear impact on the lives of vulnerable communities through, for example, prevention of water-borne diseases and support for risk reduction activities.
2. Funding for specific technical personnel to maintain the already strong profile of professional Australian delegates deployed to support the Federation and DPRK Red Cross activities.
3. In all cases, follow closely the developments in the DPRK, continue to engage in information sharing with ARC in areas of mutual interest, supporting the Government of Australia's developing approach and/or future emerging opportunities. In particular, Australian Red Cross will continue dialogue with AusAID as regards further humanitarian developments.

Future Dialogue

Australian Red Cross, based on the Movement's expertise, is available and willing to attend the Joint Sub-Committee to speak to this submission.