
The Washington Times

www.washingtontimes.com

N. Koreans detail deadly experiments on prisoners

By Jeremy Kirk

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Published November 24, 2004

SEOUL -- North Korean scientists are said to have conducted lethal gas experiments on political prisoners in the 1970s that were still happening as recently as 2002.

In 10 hours of interviews Monday, three North Koreans detailed chilling experiments in which prisoners were placed in glass chambers and exposed to chemicals that killed them within hours, said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish human rights group based in Los Angeles.

Mr. Cooper said the accounts came from North Koreans now living in South Korea and who purportedly were involved in the experiments.

"The openness and the specificity of the description of these murders was quite remarkable," Mr. Cooper said. "On the other hand, the lack of any inkling of remorse on the part of the individuals decades later -- this kind of action I found to be quite shocking.

"The attitude of the scientists ... was these were political prisoners, they were as good as dead anyway, and therefore, utilizing them for experiments held really no moral implications whatsoever."

Mr. Cooper said the interviews were arranged by other human rights activists in Seoul, not by the South Korean government.

None of the three North Koreans were present at the press conference, and few other details were released about them.

In a meeting later with South Korean Foreign Ministry officials, Mr. Cooper said, "there was absolutely no attempt to deny these kinds of activities on the part of the South Korean official I met. He did say it was unfortunate."

Mr. Cooper detailed an account from a 31-year-old North Korean chemist who said he was involved in one of two parallel groups involved in experiments.

The chemist's group experimented on animals, and recorded data on a chart.

The defector told Mr. Cooper that if the experiments were successful, "we then turned over the results to our colleagues, and they were experimenting on human guinea pigs."

Two of the North Koreans Mr. Cooper spoke with were sources for two presentations by the British Broadcasting Corp. (BBC) earlier this year.

Those programs featured interviews with North Koreans who said chemical experiments were conducted on humans, as well as documents that were said to have been smuggled from inside the country.

Pyongyang denied the reports.

The experiments are on a different scale and for different reasons than those of the Nazis, Mr. Cooper said. But the reports underscore the importance of incorporating human rights issues into discussions with North Korea, he said.

South Korea has avoided direct confrontation with North Korea on human rights issues. The North Korean Human Rights Act, signed into law in October by President Bush, was criticized by several members of the ruling Uri Party, who saw the measure as antagonistic and a threat to reconciliation between the Koreas at a time when economic cooperation is increasing.

Copyright © 2004 News World Communications, Inc. All rights reserved.

[Return to the article](#)



[Click Here For Commercial Reprints and Permissions](#)

Copyright © 2004 News World Communications, Inc.