
The Washington Times

www.washingtontimes.com

Residents starving for global food aid

By Jeremy Kirk

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Published May 29, 2005

SEOUL -- North Korea is sliding toward a starvation crisis rivaling its famine in the mid-1990s as the harsh impacts of its market reforms have benefited only a small number of its citizens, a World Food Program official says.

The WFP has fallen far short this year of donations it needs to provide 3.8 million "core" beneficiaries with vegetable oil, maize and rice milk, said Anthony N. Banbury, Asia director for the U.N. organization. North Korea has asked the agency for help in feeding 6.5 million of its 23.5 million population.

This year, the WFP has only received 15,000 tons of the 504,000 tons of food it needs annually for North Korea. Food donations came from Canada and Finland, while Norway donated \$800,000, he told reporters in Seoul on Friday.

The United States, which provided 100,000 tons of food in 2003 and 50,000 tons in 2004, has not donated this year, Mr. Banbury said. Some donor nations have mentioned their concern over North Korea's stated possession of nuclear weapons, he said.

The price of food in North Korean markets has risen since economic reforms were implemented in July 2002, and poor people can't buy it, Mr. Banbury said. Under the reforms, the government no longer pays factory workers, and if the company doesn't make a profit, workers' pay is delayed or not paid at all, he said.

"[The North Koreans] have clearly indicated a desire for profit-making," Mr. Banbury said. "When such an economic transition is made, it's virtually inevitable that there are winners and losers. The people we are trying to help are the losers in this process."

When Mr. Banbury traveled to the North Korean city of Huichon in March, he met a woman who pulled her 4-year-old out of kindergarten because meals were no longer available. The woman said she had boiled acorns for food. "That was their diet," he said.

The average monthly wage of a factory worker or civil servant -- around \$1 -- can buy a quart of vegetable oil, a crucial source of fat since most people don't eat any meat, and six to eight pounds of maize. No money is left over.

[Return to the article](#)



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

Copyright © 2005 News World Communications, Inc.