

## U.S. team urges expanded North Korea famine relief

by Kathy Wolfe

On the eve of the summit between President Bill Clinton and China's President Jiang Zemin, the Clinton administration announced on Oct. 20 that it is sending an emergency delegation to North Korea to assess the needs of the starving population there. "The United States government Food Needs Assessment Team will travel to North Korea Oct. 25 to Nov. 4," said State Department spokesman James Rubin. "The team includes the Agency for International Development, the Department of State, the Centers for Disease Control, and other agencies. The team will consult with North Korean officials and World Food Program representatives to strengthen the situation. The United States regards the food situation in North Korea as very serious."

The U.S. announcement came after a dramatic tour of North Korea on Oct. 15-18 by Rep. Tony Hall (D-Ohio) and Gen. Raymond G. Davis, USMC (ret.), a Korean War hero and veterans leader. Upon their return home, both called for expanded U.S. food aid and new programs for emergency medical help for the desperate country.

"People in the countryside continue to teeter on the brink of a massive disaster," Hall said in an Oct. 21 press release. "The crisis that Koreans are facing is unlike any since the famine that claimed 30 million people in China nearly four decades ago. It calls for . . . emergency assistance." Hall called for the United States to expand the amount of food it is sending; to expand food coverage, now restricted to children six and under, to include adults; and to begin a large, new program of medical supply shipments.

Hall said the United Nations has not reported "the true extent of the suffering," and "has not appealed for the amount of aid that is actually needed," because "it has only requested what it believes it can monitor," due to charges that North Korea's military has been siphoning off food. The charges are unfounded, but the resulting "current emergency triage is

now leaving too many people behind," Hall said.

Hall and Davis met with North Korean Vice Minister Kim Gye Gwan and Foreign Minister Kim Yong Nam, who promised them, Hall said, that if food shipments increase, more foreign monitors would be allowed to enter North Korea. The officials also told the American delegation that Pyongyang is eager to restart the four-power Korean peace talks involving the United States, China, and the two Koreas, which stalled in September.

### 'We have to feed the adults'

"In the industrial center of Hamhung, we saw 200 babies left in an orphanage; parents were leaving them on the doorstep because they couldn't feed them," said General Davis, who earned the Congressional Medal of Honor when he led the U.S. troop breakout at the Chosin Reservoir in 1950 during the Korean War, in an interview with *EIR* on Oct. 21. "They're losing 20% of them. We saw the loss of hair and malnutrition of those babies. Most people in the area were too thin; many said they hadn't eaten for days." He noted that with the onset of North Korea's bitter winter now, and the lack of fuel, deaths from disease complications were likely to skyrocket.

Davis, a conservative Republican, explained that he had gone on the trip to persuade North Korea to let American veterans visit Korean War sites, and to repatriate the remains of those listed as "missing in action." Once there, however, he realized that the famine crisis is a "bona fide international emergency." "Congressman Hall is right," he said. "We should continue what we're doing, and expand it. We can't just stand by and watch the people starve. Now we're concentrating on feeding children six and under—but we should expand that. We have to feed the adults, we have to send more food, and we have to start shipping medicine and help staff the hospitals, too."

Davis referred to conditions found in North Korea's hospitals, as reported in the Oct. 19 *Washington Post* by Keith Richburg, who travelled with Hall and Davis. "In Hamhung's hospital," Richburg wrote, "patients recovering from surgery writhe in pain on dirty sheets in unheated rooms. There are no antibiotics, no intravenous supplies, and no stretchers, so workers carry patients on their backs. 'We have a shortage of anesthesia,' said Dr. Lee Hyun Myung, pointing to a man gripping his mattress after a colon operation. Most of the patients have rectal, stomach, or liver problems, due to slow starvation."

Hall and Davis were emphatic that charges that North Korea's military is siphoning off donated food, are a false excuse for failure to feed the country. "I've talked to the NGOs [non-governmental organizations], private volunteer organizations, the UN people who are in the country distributing the food," Hall told PBS's "News Hour with Jim Lehrer" on Oct. 20. "There have been no incidents of our food being diverted to the military. It's going to the people it's supposed to go to."

"We found no evidence that American food was going to the Army," Davis said. "There's a contract with the Chinese to feed the North Korea military, and the international relief workers all said consistently that the North Koreans are buying Chinese food for the military. . . . We have representatives with all of these international organizations. None of them had any indication that the food was going to the North Korea Army. I feel that this is clear. There was one Congressional delegation that said that they had heard that, and we explored that with all these international donor groups—but their reports all seemed to be consistent, that the North Korea military is fed with the contract food from China."

### **Economic, public health breakdown**

North Korea is suffering a total economic and public health breakdown as a result of the lack of food, and lack of fuel, because all available foreign exchange is going to buy whatever food the country can procure. "People are very thin," Hall said. "Every person I saw that was in a hospital, every orphan, was ill as a result of malnutrition. The good news—if there's any good news—is that the food we have targeted for children under six is getting through and saving lives."

"But everybody beyond, older than that, is suffering. The country is slowly going down. They're slowly all starving, hanging on by their fingernails. . . . Once you get out of the capital, you go to the rural countryside, the people are very thin. There are no factories working. There's virtually no power on. Hospitals are without medicine and certainly without food."

North Korea's industrial centers have simply shut down, Richburg emphasized. "There are factories, but they stand idle. . . . No smoke comes from the chimneys; there is no activity inside the gates. Outside, people mill around, with nothing to do. Everyone talks openly about the fuel shortage and lack of electricity."

"We went to Hamhung, in the east, and visited a food distribution center that had no food. We went to a hospital and there were no antibiotics," Hall said. "They had just operated on a man who—there was no anesthesia, no pain medicine. I said, 'Can you take me to your pharmacy,' and they took me to a barn with roots and cow horns that they grind up."

Hall said they also visited Tongsin, north of Pyongyang in the mountains near China, where there have been reports of millions dying and of cannibalism. He said he could not authenticate those reports. "All I can tell you is, people are sick. Orphans are being left outside, people are just so weak, they have such little food, that once their child is born, [they] put him outside in hopes that the orphanage will pick him up," he said.

### **Strategic danger**

Davis stressed the strategic danger, that the United States could not let the situation deteriorate to the point that millions of people are dying. A mass refugee crisis or worse is a significant threat to the 37,000 U.S. troops on the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South, he said. If the United States just turns a deaf ear, then Pyongyang, if it gets desperate enough, "might react with their armed forces," Davis warned.

"I don't think they're about to do it now, but I think they could be driven to it," he said. "We can't just stand by and watch the people starve, because we'd be pushing them into a corner; my grandfather always taught me not to do that. The DMZ is within easy range of Seoul and they have battery after battery of artillery there. Seoul would be destroyed in a conflict, no matter what we do. So it would be very dangerous to let that happen."

Davis, who was a major force behind the construction of the new Washington monument to the Korean War, relates that he first sought to visit North Korea, not because of the famine, but to represent U.S. veterans. The Korean War Veterans of America and other veterans groups he represents want the right to visit battle sites at Hamhung, Chosin, and other places, where "I fought my way out the last time," as Davis put it, and to find and repatriate the remains of the many Americans missing in action in the bitter 1950-53 conflict.

After seeing the famine, Davis said he now hopes that U.S. veterans could become ambassadors for mercy as well. "Ours is a dual mission, too, because veterans are most generous, and if they could go back and see those unbelievable conditions, they could become some of the best spokesman for increased American relief effort," he pointed out. "Veterans become very much attached to the children and the families in the countries where they serve, and travel, and they would have a very good attachment if they could go back over there as part of the program." Davis said he had urged North Korean officials to let more veterans travel to North Korea to assist in mending relations, and that he had gotten a sympathetic ear. Increased visits may begin this spring when the weather permits, he said.