

Australia's Hanson starts action to relieve North Korean famine

by Kathy Wolfe

Australian Member of Parliament Pauline Hanson, in a statement released on July 11, called upon her government to sharply increase food aid to starving North Korea, following a mobilization by Lyndon LaRouche's co-thinkers in Australia for famine relief. The immediate food need of North Korea "is over 1 million tons," Hanson said. Australia must "take the lead among the nations of the world community to ensure the entire food deficit is filled as soon as possible. . . . If we seriously regard ourselves as a nation of the Asia-Pacific region, it is incumbent upon us to respond to the humanitarian crisis facing North Korea" (see box, for full text).

Her action is all the more crucial, inasmuch as Australia has 5 to 6 million tons of grain reserves, by far the largest such reserve in Asia, which could be rapidly transported to Korea.

The decisive action by Hanson, a prominent new conservative member of Parliament, along with the LaRouche mobilization in the United States and Europe, is now close to breaking the logjam which has kept world food aid from moving into North Korea, thanks to the efforts of Britain's Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the London Institute of International and Strategic Studies, which have insisted that there is no famine and that North Korea must rather be dealt with as a military threat.

U.S. State Department spokesman Nick Burns announced on July 14 a new U.S. grant of 100,000 tons of food aid to North Korea, twice as large as previous grants. The new shipment brings U.S. aid this year to 177,000 tons. The UN World Food Program estimates the actual urgent import needs of North Korea at 1.5-1.8 million tons. While the United States is generally counted upon to fill one-third of such world food supply efforts, which would make an American contribution on the order of 500,000 tons more appropriate, Washington's action has at least put the United States in the right ballpark.

Diplomatic moves

There will also be an important diplomatic initiative. Former Sen. Sam Nunn, who once headed the Senate Armed Services Committee, and President William Clinton's personal friend Dr. James Laney, who just retired as U.S. ambassador to South Korea, have been invited to visit North Korea on July 20-22. Nunn and Laney have been briefed by the U.S. State Department and will be accompanied by two experts,

one each from the State Department and the Defense Department. "It is a private visit—but it's important—because both . . . are senior respected figures who can convey a straight message from the United States to North Korea in advance of the four-party preparatory meeting on Aug. 5. So we do very much support their trip," Burns said.

Burns said that Nunn and Laney would explain "the fundamentals of U.S. policy, including the historic opportunity we have now to engage with the North and South [Koreas] with China to make sure that these four-party talks will actually go forward, and will lead to . . . a cessation of the Korean conflict, a formal cessation, a peace treaty after so many years." Also, Burns said the two former officials would discuss food aid, the 1994 U.S.-North Korea nuclear agreement, and "other issues in U.S.-North Korean relations."

'Entire generation at risk'

Meanwhile, UN World Food Program (WFP) chief Catherine Bertini told a Geneva press conference on July 9 that "an entire generation is at risk" of dying in North Korea. "Our staff in the country estimates that 50-80% of the children they have seen in nurseries are underweight and markedly smaller than they should be for their age. They are literally wasting away," she said. "This is a case of widespread malnutrition, of a vast number of people who don't have enough to eat. It's now beyond a famine-in-the-making, it's a famine occurring."

In a second press conference in Rome on July 16, Bertini said, "The international community cannot be seen to stand by as people starve to death, or their minds and bodies are destroyed by hunger. . . . I appeal to the international community to be even more generous and to help avert a major humanitarian catastrophe that could haunt generations to come."

On July 9, Bertini announced a second WFP appeal for North Korean food relief, following the much-delayed fulfillment of the WFP's April appeal for 203,000 tons, which was not completed until June. The second appeal of July 9 was for only 130,000 tons, due to the poor response from governments to the first appeal. Bertini repeated at both her July 9 and 16 press conferences, her estimate that the actual need in North Korea is for 1.8 million tons of emergency imports.

"They all admit that children are dying of hunger," Kathi Zellweger, director of international cooperation for the Hong-kong branch of the international aid agency Caritas, said in an

interview on July 16 after a trip to North Korea. More than 80,000 children under six in North Korea are severely malnourished and some have already died of starvation, she said. "There has been a marked deterioration since my last visit in April. . . . The situation is getting very serious. It is alarming."

"These are pictures like I'm used to seeing from Africa, but not from Asia," she said. "We saw children where I knew, if no help is forthcoming in the next few weeks, those children will not survive."

This year's harvests will still not yield enough to lift the threat of famine, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warned on July 15. "Even under the most optimistic scenario, food this year will fall short of requirements," Ajay Markanday of the FAO told a Rome press conference.

FAO consultant Hans-Peter Mueller, who returned in mid-July from a visit to North Korea, said, "The public distribution system is near collapse. . . . All food needs are being met by food imports or assistance." No food was being distributed unless a shipment of international aid arrived, and the shortages had forced the government to abandon its system of rations twice a month, he said.

EIR reported last week, there is also pressure building in the U.S. Congress for famine relief as a moral issue. "It's my

understanding that our commitments have been very small indeed," Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) insisted during State Department testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on July 8, before the latest U.S. grain offer. "I have heard" that, because of "other commitments," she said, possibly referring to a campaign by London and Seoul to prevent food aid, the United States had been "very reluctant to commit food, which to me is a position to which I do not subscribe. It seems to me that when children are starving and adults are starving, that we should contribute some of our loaded grain silos and help people out."

Clearly there is an awareness dawning on some people in Congress that, on their watch, they ought not let 10-20 million human beings starve. Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp LaRouche, in a statement on June 13, called for a worldwide mobilization to feed the hungry in North Korea. In response to this appeal, many Americans have urged their congressmen to take action.

"The North Korean famine could mean the death of an entire country" of 24 million people, said Zepp LaRouche on July 11. "As with the current genocide in Africa, the human race will not survive, for moral reasons, if we allow this famine to kill an entire nation," she said.

Hanson: 'Australia, Feed North Korea now!'

The following is the text of a news release issued by Pauline Hanson, Australian Member of Parliament for Oxley, on July 11.

It has come to my attention that due to the natural disasters of flood and drought, North Korea has suffered food shortages for two years. In recent months, this situation has worsened.

On June 4, the UN World Food Program forecast North Korea would run out of food stocks by June 20. Unicef reported that 2.6 million children are at immediate risk, and the International Federation of the Red Cross said on June 20 that 5 million North Koreans are facing starvation. Eyewitness reports from CARE Australia from June 24, UN Undersecretary-General Yasushi Akashi from June 28, and U.S. Congressman Tony Hall from April confirm the gravity of the situation.

The UN World Food Program has reported that if all the pledges are realized, their original appeal of around 200,000 tons has been filled. They also report that the food deficit in North Korea is over 1 million tons. Inquiries to

the WFP in Rome have revealed that they intend calling for another 130,000 tons, an appeal which has been formulated on the basis of increasing the ration of kindergarten children from 100 grams per day to 450 grams per day.

The Australian government gave \$2.9 million to the World Food Program appeal in the last financial year. While commendable, it is totally inadequate in terms of the volume of food actually required. If we seriously regard ourselves as a nation of the Asia-Pacific region, it is incumbent upon us to respond to the humanitarian crisis facing North Korea.

The Australian government must immediately take the following action:

1. Direct AusAID to provide, in full, the necessary food that Australian NGOs are trying to raise to provide relief. The figure being talked about in Australian aid circles is 50,000 tons; the Australian Wheat Board has 500,000 tons of wheat. AusAID should also enquire as to what grain is available from the Rice Growers Co-operative and Grainco.

2. Ensure that the next World Food Program appeal is filled immediately, and take the lead among the nations of the world community to ensure the entire food deficit is filled as soon as possible.

As of July 7, according to the WFP's forecast, many North Koreans have been without food for 17 days. Action by the Australian government must be immediate.