

## **School Organization Raise Awareness of North Korean Refugees**

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FAIRFAX – A group of students make their way to Student Union Building I at George Mason University in April. They walk into a dim lit room and sit down to what seems like a fairly quiet room. There are signs written LiNK on the walls and a table set up with newspaper articles and a DVD cover of *Seoul Train*.

Liberty in North Korea, also known as LiNK is a non-profit organization started in 2004 by Adrian Hong and Paul Kim. There are affiliates and chapters all over the world and GMU had the privilege of starting a chapter at school.

To advocate for human rights.

To protect North Korean people where they can be reached.

To tell the world the truth.

All of these are several missions that were formed by the organization. LiNK is growing tremendously and accomplishing these missions slowly.

“I was moved just like Adrian Hong and Paul Kim were. I was always interested in human rights but when I heard about the unbelievable tragic troubles the North Korean refugees face every day, I wanted to do something,” said ChongAe Pak, 20, an officer of the LiNK organization. “That is why I joined LiNK. I want people to know what actually is going on over there.”

This small organization led by a few students started to arrange fundraising events, discussion meetings with experts on this delicate issue. But above all this, the viewing of a documentary called *Seoul Train* was one of the most powerful to reach the student body.

“I always knew about LiNK, but after watching this documentary I knew what this organization was really about. I think what LiNK is doing is awesome. Making awareness of what goes on within the world we live in today is important,” said Caleb Baek, 24, senior majoring in Business. “Everyone should really just take a moment to capture a glimpse of what goes on within the refugees’ lives. And that’s what *Seoul Train* does. It truly is an eye opener.”

Although the LiNK organization was created only two years ago in 2005, the students in this organization are trying their hardest to make known of this issue. People who are sheltered tend to listen to these issues of poverty and injustice in countries. But they don’t really let it soak in.

“I never knew about LiNK until my friend told me to come and watch this viewing. After watching it, it really made me realize that we take our lives for granted because we’re so sheltered here,” said Esther Chang, 21, senior majoring in psychology. “People just like us suffer so much and people here in America do not even know it. They just go on about their lives and that really saddens me.”

The documentary is filled with footages of the underground railroad that exposes into the life and death of North Koreans as they try to escape to their homeland. It is known that there are approximately 3 million North Koreans who have been persecuted in the past 10 years. Human rights abuses range from concentration camps and torture to forced abortion and executions.

The school organization, LiNK, has set their goal to raise awareness of the issues in North Korea to people who are interested not only in North Korea but human rights in general. *Seoul Train* seems to get to the heart of the students who have viewed it. And

this documentary viewing is just one example of what these students are doing to get the word out about North Korea.

“These North Koreans want to get out of there and live a life of peace and freedom. Instead, they’re trapped and people don’t fully understand that,” said Chris Chang, 19, junior majoring in psychology. “More organizations like LiNK should exist. Raising awareness of human rights abuse is important. We all live in the same world so we’re all neighbors in a way. As a good neighbor we should want to learn what it’s like to be in their shoes. Doing small things like raising awareness are a big help to those refugees.”