

LETTERS

U.N.'s Program for the Poor of North Korea Strives to Forestall Corruption

In response to Melanie Kirkpatrick's Jan. 19 editorial-page commentary "[United Nations Dictators Program](#)" and the accompanying editorial "U.N. Cash for Kim" about the United Nations Development Program's work in North Korea, I would like to offer some important context and relevant facts.

Here are the facts: There is no reason to believe that our programs were subverted to fund nuclear activities in North Korea, and the most recent audits conducted in 1999, 2001 and 2004 did not raise this concern. We would also welcome an independent and external audit of our operations in North Korea. Moreover we strongly support the secretary-general's call to have an inquiry into the operations of the U.N.'s funds and programs world-wide to ensure there are no misperceptions about our activities in North Korea or elsewhere.

UNDP operations in North Korea are in accordance with decisions of the 36 countries on its board, which includes the U.S., and with resolutions passed recently by the Security Council. They are also in accordance with UNDP's board-approved financial regulations. All of UNDP activities in North Korea have been and continue to be subject to regular audits and controls.

Here is the context: Operating a development agency in North Korea is a complex business. To give an example, operating in North Korea entails an unavoidable transfer of foreign currency. Either we pay our local staff and contractors directly in Euros or we exchange euros for North Korean won via the central bank. In light of the current context, we are taking all possible steps to reduce to an absolute minimum of hard-currency transactions and have decided that direct recruitment of staff is pre-requisite for our continued cooperation in the DPRK. The only way to prevent all hard currency from finding its way into North Korea would be to cease operations there.

Our organization works in North Korea because the member states of the U.N. and UNDP's board have made it very clear that they want us there. UNDP and its sister U.N. agencies have helped the North Korean people cope with a devastating famine in the 1990s and continue their assistance to improve the lives of North Korea's impoverished people. If the member states of the U.N. and UNDP's board were to decide that our presence there were no longer useful, we would leave immediately.

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