

Offensive Broadside Against U.N. Program

The Wall Street Journal, June 30, 2007; Page A5

While we welcome your continued interest in the United Nations, your June 22 broadside against the U.N. Development Program's work in North Korea ("Kim's U.N. Buddy," Review & Outlook) is wrong and offensive on several counts.

The truth is that after six months of accusations and allegations, no one has produced evidence that UNDP's resources in North Korea were used for anything other than legitimate development activities. The preliminary external audit of our program confirmed that UNDP's Executive Board had been informed of UNDP's staffing practices (which coincidentally are used by every other international organization and foreign embassy in North Korea today). On access to projects, although very little in North Korea is simple or straightforward, the audit confirmed that UNDP did visit its project sites.

Your contention that the auditors were "unable to follow the money trail" is misleading. As you well know, the May 31 report covered only the first phase of the audit. UNDP provided all documentation requested by the auditors for this first phase, and made all relevant personnel available for interview. The U.N. Secretary General has called for a second audit phase, include field work in Pyongyang. UNDP has supported this call. If for any reason the auditors are unable to travel to North Korea to continue their work, UNDP will bring its remaining records out of the country, and deliver them to the auditors.

When the U.S. came to UNDP with concerns about our program in North Korea last December, both Kemal Dervis and Ad Melkert responded immediately, as they would with any U.N. member state. They have continued to work constructively with the U.S. permanent representative to the U.N., Zalmay Khalilzad, to address outstanding concerns. At no time did Mr. Melkert "threaten" any U.S. official in any way. This simply did not occur, and the assertion is absurd.

Beyond the political slings and arrows in your editorial, you don't even acknowledge that the "staggering \$1.4 billion" in U.N. assistance to North Korea over the past 10 years was used, among other things, to feed millions of starving North Koreans. The bulk of this went via our colleagues at WFP and Unicef, who worked to save lives under extremely difficult circumstances. Your readers might like to know that the same source you cite for U.N. assistance (the U.S. Congressional Research Service) puts America's own spending on aid for North Korea in the same period at \$1.1 billion, a large part of which the U.S. chose to put through the U.N. system.

It seems the U.N. has not been alone in trying to help the people of North Korea. U.N. efforts in the country have kept millions of people alive and have enjoyed wide international support, including from the U.S.

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