

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The United States House of Representatives yesterday passed House Concurrent Resolution 213, expressing the sense of Congress regarding North Korean refugees who are detained in China and returned to North Korea where they face torture, imprisonment, and execution, by a unanimous vote of 406-0.

Representative Xavier Becerra (CA - 30), Vice Chairman of the U.S.-Korea Interparliamentary Exchange, co-sponsored the concurrent resolution and worked hard to ensure its overwhelming passage.

H.Con.Res. 213 was sponsored by Rep. Ed Royce (CA - 39), Chairman of the U.S.-Korea Interparliamentary Exchange. Reps. Becerra and Royce recently collaborated on House Concurrent Resolution 77, expressing the sense of Congress regarding efforts of people in the United States of Korean ancestry to reunite with family members in North Korea. H.Con.Res. 77, passed unanimously in the House on November 28, 2001 by a vote of 420-0.

Rep. Becerra's floor speech from yesterday's debate on H.Con.Res. 213 is below:

"I rise today in support of House Concurrent Resolution 213, regarding North Korean refugees in China. It appears that we continue to see the numbers grow of North Koreans who are fleeing their country, many of whom have ended up in China.

"An estimated 150,000 to 300,000 North Koreans currently are living without status in China. We are aware of the treaty that China has with North Korea which allows China to view these individuals as undocumented immigrants or economic migrants, and, as a result, to send them back to North Korea, and, again, without any consideration for the consequences of that repatriation.

"We have to acknowledge that in the case of North Korea, there are massive food shortages. Right now we are told that North Korea cannot feed about one-third of its people, so clearly there are cases for economic migrants who do depart from North Korea.

"But the cases that we have seen go far beyond those who are leaving only for economic reasons. We know that there are, in many cases, straight and very clear political reasons for many of these individuals leaving, and in some cases, religious persecution as well. Yet, with all of that, the Chinese Government refuses to permit the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to evaluate North Korean refugees in China to determine whether or not they deserve political asylum. Under Chinese law, aiding a fleeing North Korean is subject to a fine, and there is word that bounties are paid to Chinese citizens who turn in North Koreans to the Chinese authorities.

"The purpose of this resolution is twofold. First, under both international and humanitarian grounds, we should be calling on China to provide North Koreans whose asylum requests have been rejected with the right to have the rejection reviewed by international authorities prior to deportation of these North Koreans back to their homeland. That is something that they would be obliged to provide to any individual who claims refugee status under the United Nations 1951 convention

relating to the status of refugees and as it has been modified in 1967 through the protocol relating to the status of refugees.

"The second purpose is to urge China to allow the UNHCR to have access to all North Korean refugees who reside in China.

"I urge my colleagues to support H. Con. Res. 213 to recognize the plight of refugees who are in China from North Korea who are trying to flee political and religious suppression and persecution, and know fully well that we can have a voice in trying to aid these individuals towards democracy and liberty.

"I applaud the chairman for this effort to bring this to the floor; I certainly applaud our ranking member for his cooperation and support of this resolution; and mostly, I support and want to applaud the gentleman from California [Mr. Royce], not just today, but in the past, to aid the Korean peninsula in moving forward toward democracy."