

State Department inaction hinders ministry to Korean orphans

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Two months after Texas Baptist Men appealed to the U.S. Department of State to grant a Dallas Korean Baptist minister permission to enter North Korea with food for orphans and hospital patients, Yoo Yoon still has no answer.

Yoon, director of the Korean-American Sharing Movement of Dallas, has traveled to North Korea about 30 times since 1996 to supervise the delivery of food, medical supplies and other resources provided by TBM and other donors to schools for orphans and hospitals.

In July, Yoon delivered 60 tons of soybeans to schools and a hospital in Wonsan and Moonchun, both in North Korea's Kangwon Province.

Travel restriction implemented

About that time, tensions between North Korea and the United States escalated, and U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson authorized a travel restriction on Americans seeking to enter North Korea, effective Sept. 1. A travel warning on the State Department's [website](#) notes the restriction is "due to the serious and mounting risk of arrest and long-term detention of U.S. citizens."

"Our Christian missions are greatly hindered by the administrative order," Yoon said.

The State Department said Americans who travel to North Korea for

humanitarian purposes may apply for a special passport validation. So, TBM sent a letter Aug. 22 to the desk officer for the State Department requesting approval for travel to a restricted country.

Passport validation requested

The letter from Randy Newberry, TBM men's ministry and church renewal consultant, noted TBM has worked more than two decades with Yoon to deliver food to the hospital and schools in Kwangwon Province.

"These five orphan schools and the province hospital rely heavily on the relief from TBM for food supplies," Newberry wrote. "Most people in the province know that American Christians, especially Baptists, provide these food supplies.

"Without TBM's help, more than 2,500 orphans and 500 hospital patients would greatly suffer from malnutrition. This situation is irreversible, and these children and patients rely heavily on the food provided by Texas Baptist Men."

Multiple avenues explored

To date, Yoon has not heard from the State Department, but he has continued to pursue other avenues.

"For the validation, I have contacted a Dallas FBI agent, who has promised to support me if any problem arises in regard to the North Korea relief mission," Yoon wrote in a recent message to supporters. "I am sure he is working very hard for us to get the validation."

Yoon noted he also urged a layman at First Baptist Church in Dallas to ask his pastor, Robert Jeffress, to appeal on his behalf "since the pastor knows our government well." Jeffress serves on President Trump's Evangelical

Executive Advisory Board.

Yoon also contacted the Ministry of Unification in South Korea for its validation, since he holds dual citizenship in both the United States and South Korea. However, he learned it would require an invitation from North Korea.

“It seems to be more difficult getting validation in Korea than in the U.S.,” he wrote. “At any rate, I called the North Korean U.N. office about the invitation letter for me to go as a Korean citizen. ... I have reached those whom the Lord led me to meet to help me get the validation.”

To meet desperate needs at the orphan schools and hospital, Yoon hopes to send a shipment of soybean to North Korea by Nov. 15 even if he cannot enter the country. If so, he will rely on a partner organization, the North Korea Education Project, to photograph the delivery and receipt of the food shipment by the intended recipients.