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KOREAN-AMERICAN MISSIONARY TO SUE N.KOREA FOR SEXUAL TORTURE

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Christmas 2009 was the beginning of a hellish nightmare for Korean-American missionary Robert Park, which left indelible scars on his mind.

He walked across the frozen Tumen River into isolated North Korea to draw international attention to its dire human rights situation. The trip created newfound public interest in Park and his campaign, but changed his life forever.

The Christian missionary from Tucson, Arizona, was severely beaten by North Korean soldiers before being taken to Pyongyang, where he said he was subjected to sexual torture and abuse so horrific he begged for death.

"Several North Korean women surrounded me and did the worst thing to me to try to make me commit suicide," the 31-year-old said in a recent interview with Yonhap News Agency. He claimed the women laughed at him in a brightly illuminated room as they beat his genitals repeatedly with a club to "make me not to have a baby and get married forever."

"I am not a man," he said as he sobbed, suggesting he has lost the ability to perform sexually.

Park also said several North Korean men beat and tortured him until he screamed in pain, while his arms were tied behind his back.

He said he could not give any further details because vivid flashbacks of the torture give him breathing difficulties and suicidal thoughts.

The claims mark the first time Park has given an account of the 43 days he spent detained in North Korea since his release in February 2010. The North's official Korean Central News Agency claimed just before Park was released that he had admitted to and repented of his wrongdoing.

Park said one woman taunted him as he was being tortured, saying, "If your God is so great, why doesn't he save you?" Another said, "We hate Yankees."

Park said he told his abusers, "God loves you." He also cried out, begging for death during the excruciating sexual torture.

"I saw the devil in their eyes. They are much worse than people in Nazi Germany," Park said.

The torture went on for days in what Park now believes was an attempt to keep him silent about torture in the North and, possibly, drive him to commit suicide after his release.

"North Korea would not have released me if they thought that I could recover" from the torture, Park said.

He has received psychiatric treatment and medications to try to move past his time in the North and rebuild his life. However, he said his flashbacks have recurred and the North Korean women still haunt him in frequent nightmares.

Park was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and has attempted suicide twice since his release.

"I can be liberated from the trauma only through death," he said, adding that North Korea committed acts he chooses not to disclose in public due to the shame and the humiliation they would bring.

He said he decided to make public some of the acts of torture to let the world know how bad North Korea is and to persuade others to support an end to decades of human rights abuses in the North.

"I can say details of torture to lawyers and in a court of law," Park said. He plans to bring a suit against North Korea in U.S. courts before the end of the year.

"I'm not interested in a financial settlement, but in speaking out against the regime's mass atrocities and I will devote any money earned to funding anti-Pyongyang forces within North Korea," Park said.

North Korean diplomats at the United Nations in New York were not immediately available for comment.

Park took a cue from the case of three former crew members of the USS Pueblo and the widow of their captain. In 2008, a U.S. federal district court awarded the plaintiffs $65 million in damages for their torture, four decades after they were captured and tortured by North Korea.

Dan Gilbert, the American lawyer who successfully sued North Korea for the 1968 torture of Pueblo crew members, said on his Web site that "he is continuing in his efforts to assist in the collection of this judgment for these families." He was not immediately available for comment on Park's proposed lawsuit.

Genocide Watch, a Washington-based international nongovernmental organization that seeks to end genocide, has vowed full support in Park's legal battle with North Korea under the U.S Torture Victims Protection Act, according to Park.

One member of Genocide Watch's Board of Advisors is Samantha Power, senior director for multilateral affairs at the U.S. National Security Council. Park said he wants to meet with Power, who was the main advisor to U.S. President Barack Obama for the Libya intervention, to discuss convincing national governments to invoke the "responsibility to protect."

The U.N. initiative outlines the responsibility of the international community to intervene if a sovereign state fails to protect its citizens from mass atrocities.

"North Korea is committing genocide under international law," Park said. "This is high time for the international community to act in North Korea."

The communist country has been accused of human rights abuses for decades, ranging from holding hundreds of thousands of political prisoners to torture and public executions. Pyongyang has flatly denied the accusations, calling them a U.S.-led attempt to topple its regime.

In Washington, the White House declined to comment on Park's allegations of torture by North Korea.