

**LIBERTY
IN
NORTH
KOREA**

ANNUAL REPORT

2025



PHOTO: ERIC LAFFORGUE

From our CEO

It's been 20 years since my first visit to the border of North Korea and China. To this day, I vividly remember Stitch, a 6-year-old boy I met on that trip, just days after his parents were caught and repatriated to North Korea. I still remember the silly faces he made at us as we were leaving the shelter that night. Perhaps it was a way to hide a grief he couldn't yet understand, or maybe he was just being a little boy. Later on, I thought about his mother. I couldn't begin to imagine how she must have felt being forced back across the border to a fate unknown, wondering if she would ever see her son again. That night changed everything for me. And for the last two decades, it has never let me go.

This past year, as I reflected on stories like Stitch's that have stayed with me over the years, I was reminded that the urgency on this issue has not diminished.

Life inside North Korea remains profoundly difficult. Last year, in a follow-up to a landmark UN human rights report on North Korea, it was found that "since 2014, control by the Government over its citizens has tightened increasingly. Under laws introduced since 2015, **citizens have been subjected to increased surveillance and control in all parts of life. No other population is under such restrictions in today's world.**" The regime continues to maintain near total control through pervasive surveillance, arbitrary detention, torture, forced labor, and the increased use of public executions. All of this is happening while our attention is understandably pulled toward other crises at home and abroad. But just because it isn't in our daily newsfeed doesn't mean it isn't happening in North Korea every single day.

In 2025, the North Korean human rights movement faced its greatest crisis in decades. NGOs vital to the movement and on the frontlines, rescuing refugees, sending information into the country, and documenting abuses, were forced to downsize or potentially shut down due to a sudden collapse in funding and dramatic shifts in policy. According to reports, the North Korean government was watching all of this closely. They saw the weakening of these NGOs as a strategic advantage.

And yet, in the face of these challenges, your support made it possible for us to launch an emergency campaign to raise funds for four frontline organizations fighting to survive, while continuing our own work in these areas.



Together, we brought 17 North Korean refugees and their children to freedom, and celebrated the milestone of our 1,400th rescue. Each one required navigating a landscape that has grown more difficult every year with China's rapid expansion of biometric security systems and AI-enabled surveillance. On the other side of that journey, 22 people were newly resettled and began rebuilding their lives, while our team continued supporting 122 individuals in their resettlement.

We invested in 144 North Korean storytellers, advocates and leaders through our programs, equipping them with scholarships, language skills, leadership and advocacy training, and a community that believes in them. Two Advocacy Fellows traveled across the US, speaking at universities and Fortune 500 companies and meeting with congressional offices on Capitol Hill. Scholarship recipients completed graduate programs and are going on to shape policy; one recently received a fully-funded PhD offer and another will begin teaching international relations in Tokyo this spring. These are not just personal victories but the emergence of leaders who are working to change the future of their country.

We also made a significant bet on something we believe could irreversibly change the course of this issue: technology designed specifically for the North Korean context. We advanced seven information access projects last year, with the support of 68 North Korean defector collaborators helping us develop and test tools that give citizens safer access to far more uncensored information than ever before, alongside digital security tools to protect them from the regime's surveillance. These are significant advances. But they are only the beginning.

We are so grateful for the ways you have shown up and supported the North Korean people year after year. This work belongs to all of us, and none of it would be possible without you.

As a North Korean friend reminded us last year, **"Freedom is not given, but it is something we can achieve."**

Thank you for your shared belief in this vision. Together, we can see it happen in our lifetime.



Hannah Song
CEO, Liberty in North Korea



Vision

Liberty in North Korea.

A North Korea where every man, woman, and child can live free lives and determine their own future.

Mission

Working with North Korean people to achieve their freedom by increasing their access to information and technology, rescuing and empowering North Korean refugees, and mobilizing international support and solidarity.



2025 Highlights

17
RESCUED

22
RESETTLED

\$4,191,729
RAISED

144
Empowered through
our programs

122
Supported
in resettlement

11,833,136
Reached *online*

2,746+
Reached *in-person*

7
Information
access projects

Refugee Rescue + Resettlement Support

Helping North Korean refugees reach safety and supporting them as they rebuild their lives in freedom

Empowering Resettled North Koreans

Investing in the capacity of North Koreans to succeed and work toward changing the future of their country

The Work We're Accomplishing

Increasing Information Access for North Koreans

Developing and distributing tailored technology and content to help North Koreans access more uncensored information more safely

Global Awareness & Advocacy

Amplifying North Korean refugee voices to reshape how the world sees this issue and mobilize a global movement of support



Refugee Rescues & Resettlement Support

*17 rescued
22 newly resettled
122 supported*

While escape from inside North Korea remains almost impossible, there is an urgent need to help North Korean refugees hiding in China, many who have been living in uncertainty for years. Liberty in North Korea ensures a safe and dignified pathway, without cost or condition, for North Korean refugees who make the brave decision to seek freedom.

In 2025, we're grateful to have welcomed 17 North Korean refugees and their children to freedom, and celebrated the milestone of our 1,400th rescue.

Surveillance continues to intensify in China. The widespread use of biometric and location tracking technology has allowed Chinese police to build detailed rosters of North Korean refugees in each region and mandate daily check-ins. Our field team remains vigilant to maintain the integrity of LiNK's routes and the safety of our contacts.



“Up until the very last moment before leaving home [in China], I was terrified and hesitant. I was afraid of being arrested and worried about my family back in China. Now that I’m in South Korea, I realize I would have regretted it if I hadn’t left. Living in freedom with ID feels like a dream. I’m excited to get vocational training, find a job, and adapt to South Korea well!”

Won-mi, rescued in February 2025

On the other side of the rescue journey, LiNK helps North Koreans rebuild their lives with a strong foundation. Based on need, our team connects them to resources and services, conducts home visits, and provides financial assistance.

In the United States, LiNK also handles case management for North Korean defectors who have resettled through Humanitarian Parole. Individuals who arrive through this pathway do not receive refugee status, and are ineligible for standard resettlement benefits from the US government.

LiNK provides full fiscal sponsorship, translation services, and help coordinating medical and legal needs until they are able to achieve a more stable immigration status and independently access support systems.



United States

“We are doing well in the US, all thanks to LiNK. I recently attended an award ceremony at my son’s school where he received the principal’s academic achievement award. I was so proud of him. LiNK has also helped us get health insurance, which has made a meaningful difference in our lives.”

Heesun, resettled in the U.S. in 2023

5

SUPPORTED

*Financial assistance
and humanitarian parole
case management*



South Korea

22

RESETTLED

6

HOME VISITS

110

SUPPORTED
ONLINE

1

FINANCIAL
ASSISTANCE
RECIPIENT





Empowering Resettled North Koreans

144 *empowered through our programs*

North Korean refugees have unlimited potential, but they do not face an even playing field after arriving in South Korea or the US. We identify current challenges faced by resettled North Koreans and invest in their success

through education, skill-building, and leadership opportunities.

With the right support, North Koreans consistently prove their potential and become key players in driving change. They're reaching their academic and career goals, sending money and information back into North Korea, and building global understanding and support for this issue. This next generation of North Korean leaders, entrepreneurs, storytellers, and advocates will be the ones to determine the future of their country; LiNK's programs grow their capacity and partner with them as agents of change.



Scholarship Program

United States

LiNK's scholarships support resettled North Koreans and the children of North Korean refugees pursuing post-secondary education in the United States. Our goal is to reduce financial barriers for North Korean students to complete their programs and achieve their academic and career goals.

In 2025, a total of 5 people were awarded scholarships, including 4 continuing recipients from the previous year. It's a privilege to support the ongoing aspirations of these students and witness their growth as leaders in their fields and on this issue.



“LiNK’s scholarship has made it possible to not only complete a Masters at the University of Chicago, but also strive towards my long-term goal of pursuing a PhD... I applied to 25 PhD programs, which required approximately \$2,000 in application fees alone.

Because my tuition was covered through the LiNK Scholarship, I was able to shoulder these additional costs and remain competitive in the application process. As a result, I have already received an offer of admission for a PhD program in Political Science with full funding from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.

I am grateful for this opportunity and am committed to growing into someone who gives back to society and pays forward the generosity I have received.”

Sunghyuk An, US scholarship recipient

1

COMMUNITY
COLLEGE
STUDENT

4

GRADUATE
SCHOOL
STUDENTS

\$40,500

AWARDED
TOTAL

**US Scholarships were made possible thanks to a generous grant from the Bao Sei Foundation combined with funds from LiNK’s supporters.*

Where are they now?

Eunsook Jang

2024 - 2025 scholarship recipient

Eunsook came to study in the US as a Fulbright Scholar. After graduating from Brandeis University with a masters in international relations, she is working as a research intern at the Hudson Institute in Washington, DC.

Eunsook is a vocal advocate for North Korean human rights, recently writing an [opinion piece](#) in support of information access efforts for The Diplomat.

Ashley Hong

2023 - 2025 scholarship recipient

After completing her PhD program in the US, Ashley has been offered a position as an assistant professor at Waseda University in Tokyo. She will begin teaching in the spring of 2026, leading courses on international relations and comparative politics.

Alex Yoo

2024 - 2025 scholarship recipient

Alex studied public policy at Texas A&M as a Fulbright Scholar. He is now a researcher for the Taejae Research Foundation, a private think-tank in South Korea.

“I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the donors and supporters who provided not only financial support, but also encouragement and confidence throughout my academic journey. LiNK’s scholarship has given me the stability to pursue my research and career. I truly hope that this opportunity, and the impact it has had on my life, can be extended to many people from North Korea and their descendants.”

Ashley Hong, US scholarship recipient

LiNK English Language Program

South Korea

In South Korea, English proficiency has been identified as an essential skill for personal and professional growth, one that opens up new career and education opportunities. For 10 semesters now, the LiNK English Language Program (LELP) has equipped North Koreans with the capacity and confidence to develop personally and advocate for this issue in English. Resettled North Koreans are matched 1:1 with English-speaking volunteers, building conversational skills through weekly online tutoring.

In 2025, our team piloted a pen pal program as part of LELP, connecting North Korean English learners in South Korea with LiNK Team members in the US. All 11 participants expressed the benefits of practicing written communication and learning about life abroad, and the program will continue to expand in the coming year.

124NORTH KOREAN
STUDENTS**125**VOLUNTEERS
*from 19 countries***2**

SEMESTERS

2,691

HOURS

84%AVG INCREASE
IN TEST SCORES**83%**INCREASE IN
SELF EFFICACY



“All North Koreans that leave their home have different journeys to reach freedom and every single one of these stories deserves all the respect and admiration. I continue seeing how strong humans can be through all of the students I’ve encountered. The courage to pick themselves up and work towards their goals is truly an inspiration.”

Marilyn, LELP volunteer

“I’ve participated in LELP for 4 semesters... As of 2026, I am currently in the US through the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program. LELP not only helped improve my English skills but also broadened my cultural understanding through interactions with participants from various countries and gave me the confidence to go to the US.”

Harin, LELP participant

LiNK Intensive English Program

South Korea

Following the success of LELP, we wanted to continue supporting North Korean English learners at the intermediate level. In partnership with the British Council, we piloted a concentrated, six-week training course focused on developing advanced communication skills and the ability to effectively engage in advocacy in English.

On the path to making an impact on this issue, many North Koreans pursue education or work opportunities abroad. Program participants were challenged with discussions, presentations, and writing projects to prepare them for success in academic and professional environments, including work shaping public opinion and influencing policy on North Korea.

11

NORTH KOREAN
PARTICIPANTS

100%

PARTICIPANT
SATISFACTION

2

PARTICIPANTS
ACCEPTED TO
AN OVERSEAS
GRADUATE
PROGRAM

LiNK English Speech Program

South Korea



English-speaking North Korean advocates and storytellers are crucial partners in raising global awareness of this issue. The LiNK English Speech Program (LESP) cultivates emerging North Korean voices over five weeks of professional coaching, 1:1 feedback sessions, and practical experience. Participants prepared and practiced speeches on a wide variety of topics before delivering a final 5-7 minute speech for a live audience at a LiNK event. After the program, two participants went on to become LiNK's fall 2025 Advocacy Fellows.

4

NORTH KOREAN
PARTICIPANTS

100%

PARTICIPANT
SATISFACTION

“LiNK’s program has helped me organize my thoughts and see my story as valuable. Seeing how others gain comfort or courage through my story, I feel that my difficult experiences have become meaningful points of connection. The storytelling and presentation training I received has allowed me to speak with responsibility rather than fear.”

Ree Ha Kim, LESP participant





PHOTO: LEE JAE-WON

Increasing Information Access for North Koreans

North Koreans live in one of the most closed and limited information environments in the world. To protect the effectiveness of their propaganda, the regime tries to maintain a complete monopoly on information and ideas inside the country. Their narratives emphasize the outside world as being dangerous and the threat of war as imminent, justifying the dictatorship and its draconian restrictions.

Liberty in North Korea works with North Korean defectors and engineers to develop tailor-made technology and content to help people inside the country access more information more safely. Empowered with the truth, North Koreans gain resilience against the regime's propaganda and are emboldened to scrutinize the government, imagine a different future, and build pressure for change and opening.

Increasing the North Korean people's access to uncensored outside information is therefore one of the most effective levers for change in the country.



Development & User Testing

As we develop digital tools and programs for distribution in North Korea, our team conducts extensive pre-testing with North Koreans who have already escaped and are the best possible proxies for our target audiences. In 2025, we implemented crucial learnings from user testing to refine the user interface and security features of three projects moving through development, and produced four prototypes for new projects that will be assessed for full production.

“This will have a major impact on the people of North Korea... Right now, because of the new law punishing so-called ‘non-socialist behavior,’ morale is very low. But if this program spreads inside North Korea, it will help people regain confidence.”

Anonymous North Korean user tester

7

TECHNOLOGY
PROJECTS

68

NORTH KOREAN
DEFECTOR
COLLABORATORS

80,000+

LINES OF
CODE WRITTEN

**In order to protect end users, partners, and our projects, we are limited in what we can share publicly.*

Information Access Advocacy

Traditional approaches to this issue—sanctions, diplomacy, and military pressure—have had minimal success in making the North Korean regime denuclearize or improve human rights inside the country. Information access remains one of the most effective means of affecting change from the outside, yet it's been a historically underutilized and under-invested strategy.

In 2025, unprecedented cuts to US foreign aid under the Trump Administration further [jeopardized progress in this sector](#). Funds were suspended for a number of organizations working to inform North Koreans including two news services, Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, that had been broadcasting nightly into North Korea.

Through international conferences, high-level meetings, and private briefings, LiNK advocates for the urgent investment and expansion of information access initiatives. In 2025, our team participated in three major conferences related to information access, and was invited to speak at the launch of [Korea Internet Studio](#), an online platform targeting North Korean residents living in 40+ countries worldwide.





Global Advocacy & Awareness

11,833,136
reached online

2,746+ reached in-person

For decades, North Korea has been reduced to a caricature—part threat, part joke. Dictators and geopolitics dominate headlines, making the country seem hopeless and unchanging. The global community's inattention and inaction has only helped the regime to maintain the worst dictatorship on earth.

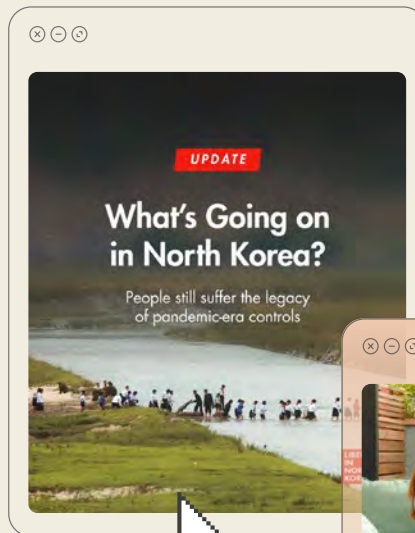
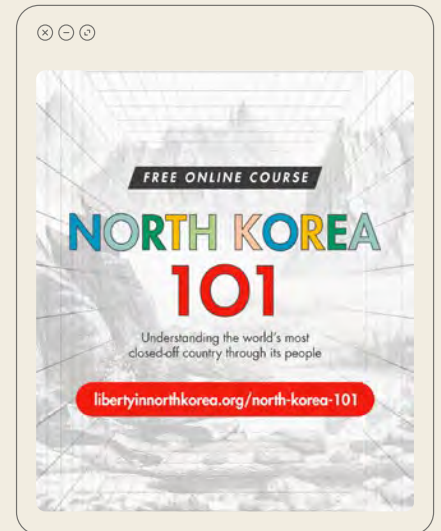
Liberty in North Korea partners with North Koreans to build an alternative narrative focused on their perspectives, resilience, and potential.

Our objective is to reshape how the world sees and responds to North Korea, increasing pressure on governments to act and mobilizing the support that the North Korean people deserve.

Participants from LiNK's programs have gone on to contribute to South Korea's policy towards North Korea and engage at the highest levels of international politics, including at the United Nations Security Council and in the Oval Office.



Top Content



Engaging International Media & Policymakers

Liberty in North Korea's insights and ideas are regularly sought out by international media outlets, policymakers, and entities seeking to better understand this issue. Our organization is recognized as a leading source of current information and analysis on North Korea, and we take every opportunity to focus attention on the North Korean people and facilitate opportunities for them to share their stories, insights, and perspectives directly.

53

MEDIA FEATURES,
CITATIONS &
COLLABORATIONS

*17 languages - including
Chinese, English, French,
Hebrew, Indonesian,
Korean, and more*

18

GOVERNMENT
MEETINGS

South Korea and the US

BBC

朝鮮日報

VOA

The
Economist


THE SUNDAY TIMES

KBS 

Advocacy Fellows

United States



The Advocacy Fellows program is LiNK's premier platform for cultivating the next generation of North Korean leaders, storytellers, and agents of change for this issue. Workshops and trainings are paired with real-world opportunities for them to gain experience, with the goal of cultivating a lasting commitment to advocacy.

In 2025, we had two Fellows, Rose and Hannah, join us for one month of training in South Korea and two months of advocacy in the US. The Fellows embarked on a nationwide tour, sharing their stories at universities, Fortune 500 companies, churches, and meeting with key stakeholders on Capitol Hill to advocate for North Korean human rights.

15

STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Congressional Staff Briefing Hosted by Senator Kaine's Office, Senator Ted Cruz Staff Briefing, & more

15

SPEAKING EVENTS

Stimson Center Hudson Institute The Korea Society & more

1,000+

PEOPLE REACHED IN-PERSON

65,363+

PEOPLE REACHED ONLINE

10

COLLEGES VISITED

\$32,418

RAISED



“I started this work because North Korean human rights isn’t just a political issue to me—it’s my story and my family’s story. But through this program, I saw so many people who had no personal connection to North Korea still listen sincerely, support us, and care. It made me reflect on myself. Have I ever shown this kind of empathy toward victims of war or disasters in other countries? Now, I want to become someone who sees the world more broadly and cares more deeply.”

Rose Jang, 2025 LiNK Advocacy Fellow

“As an Advocacy Fellow, I discovered new parts of myself, built confidence, and learned lessons that changed the way I see the world and my own story... With these lessons as my guide, I plan to stay dedicated to the cause of North Korean human rights and remain closely connected with the people I’ve met, building a lasting bridge of solidarity together.”

Hannah Oh, 2025 LiNK Advocacy Fellow

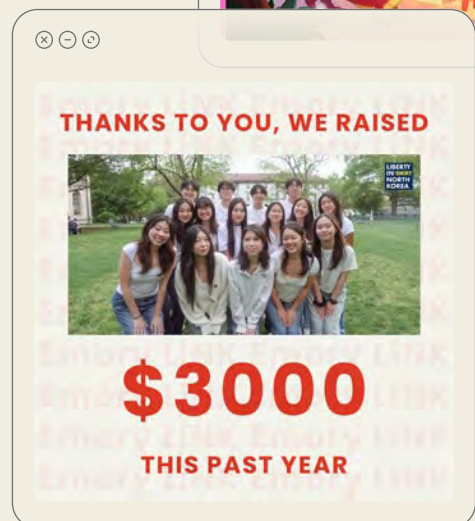
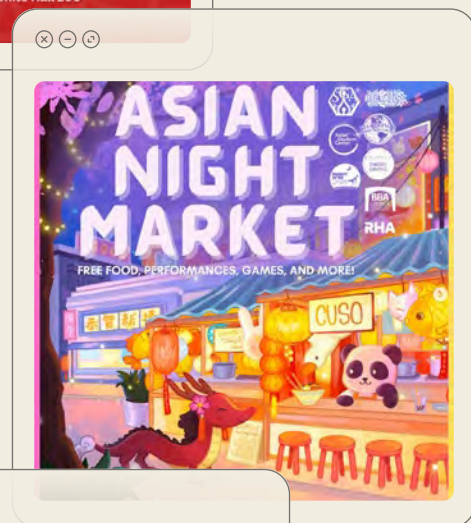
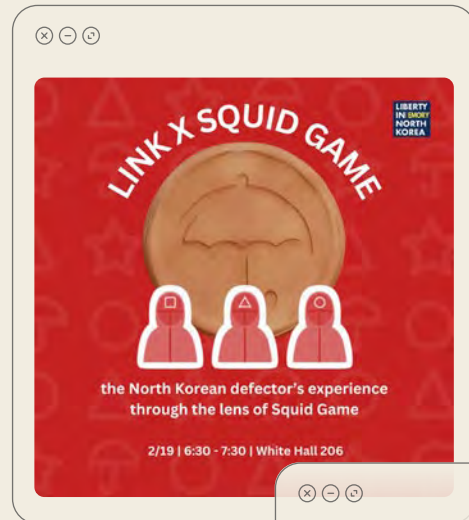
LiNK Teams

The legacy of Liberty in North Korea's grassroots organizing lives on through LiNK Teams, bringing our mission to campuses and communities across the globe. These groups of passionate supporters are raising awareness and growing the movement, lending their support and energy to North Koreans working to change their homeland.

At Emory University, LiNK Team members organized a benefit concert with Korean food, performances from local groups, and a North Korean jangmadang (market) experience. Over 100 people attended, raising over \$1,000 for the North Korean people.

Where are they now?

Nikhil's involvement with this issue began in college, when he joined his campus LiNK Team and was moved to give to LiNK's work. After graduation, he's continued to find meaningful ways to continue supporting the North Korean people. As an airline employee, Nikhil generously shares his flight benefits with LiNK and has increased his capacity as a donor, fueling LiNK's life-changing work.



Virtual Events

United States

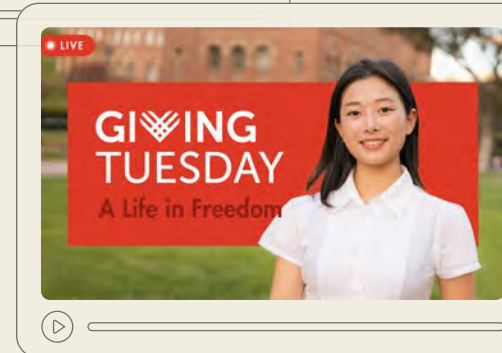
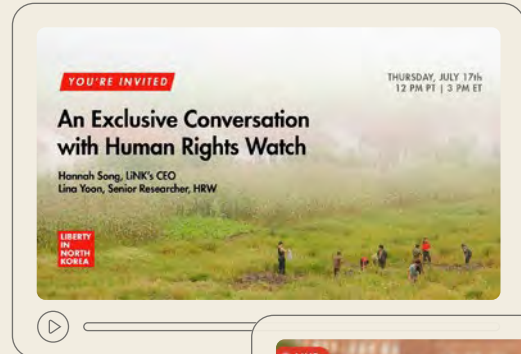
Virtual events are a key way to not only activate global LiNK supporters, but also collaborate with and seek insights from issue experts, activists, and leaders around the world. In 2025, we hosted two livestreams to inform and inspire action.

Fireside Chat with Lina Yoon from Human Rights Watch

Lina Yoon, senior researcher for Human Rights Watch (HRW)'s Asia Division, joined LiNK's CEO, Hannah Song, for a deep dive into HRW's landmark 2024 report detailing the pandemic's impact on life in North Korea.

A Life in Freedom – Giving Tuesday 2025 with Hannah Oh

From being rescued by LiNK in 2019 to becoming an Advocacy Fellow in 2025, Hannah exemplifies how North Koreans can become powerful agents of change on this issue. For Giving Tuesday, she shared her full-circle journey to highlight how LiNK's work and the support of this movement helps North Koreans unlock their potential.



2

LIVESTREAMS

755+

TOTAL VIEWS

4,200+

IMPRESSIONS

Community Engagement

South Korea

Talk Show with Authors Sohn Mina and Seol Song-ah

LiNK hosted a speaking event with Son Mina, renowned South Korea author and former KBS anchor, and Seol Song-ah, a North Korean defector, author, and researcher. Despite their vastly different backgrounds, both women spoke to the ability of ordinary people to enact change and break free from systems of oppression.

34

EVENTS

1,746

ATTENDEES





Keynote Speech at WISE Conference 2025 Partnership

One of LiNK's North Korea-born staff members delivered the keynote address of the 2025 Women in International Schools Empowerment (WISE) Conference held at Dulwich College in Seoul. With 200+ international educators and diplomats in attendance, she shared her journey from escaping North Korea to growing into a human rights activist.



The Second Annual North Korean Defectors' Day

In celebration of North Korean Defectors' Day on July 14th, the Ministry of Unification held a cultural integration festival to bring together North Korea and South Korea-born citizens. LiNK hosted a promotion booth sharing our organization's key initiatives, engaging with over 300 visitors.

Emergency Fundraising Campaign

for North Korean Human Rights NGOs

In 2025, the North Korean human rights movement faced an unprecedented crisis. With [US foreign aid cuts](#) under the Trump Administration, crucial South Korean NGOs working on this issue lost their primary source of funding overnight. Life-changing programs and decades of progress inside and outside North Korea were at risk of being undone.

In response, LiNK launched an emergency fundraising campaign to preserve the work of key NGOs as they scrambled to cut costs and find alternative funding. Even with an issue as big as North Korea, the community of organizations and individuals doing this work is relatively small. All our efforts are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

The decline of activities documenting human rights violations and sending information into North Korea is [seen by the regime as a "strategic advantage."](#) LiNK's supporters stepped up to help stabilize the broader global movement for North Korean human rights, raising funds that were distributed to 4 NGOs—[Woorion](#), [NKDB](#), [Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights](#), and [Unification Media Group](#). Unfortunately, funding continues to be a critical issue for many organizations.



URGENT SUPPORT NEEDED

North Korean
Human Rights
NGOs in Crisis

Advocacy Campaign with HanVoice

Following the emergency fundraising campaign, LiNK joined forces with HanVoice to launch a nationwide grassroots effort focused on securing the future of North Korean human rights work.

We mobilized the movement to send letters and call members of congress to advocate for the protection of funding and reauthorization of the North Korean Human Rights Act. These efforts were supported by our Advocacy Fellows meeting with representatives on the Hill in Washington, DC.



**Audited financials were not available at the time of publishing this report*

Financials

Revenue

	AMOUNT	%
Contributions & Special Events	\$3,653,692	87.2%
Grants	\$500,000	11.9%
Net Other Miscellaneous Revenue	\$38,037	0.9%
TOTAL	\$ 4,191,729	100%

Expenses

	AMOUNT	%
Program Services	\$3,018,192	69.8%
Supporting Services	\$1,303,878	30.2%
TOTAL	\$ 4,322,070	100%

Resources Spent for Programs

	AMOUNT	%
Refugee Rescues & Resettlement Support	\$618,567	20.5%
Empowering Resettled North Koreans	\$1,035,505	34.3%
Increasing Information Access	\$745,271	24.7%
Global Advocacy & Awareness	\$618,849	20.5%
TOTAL	\$ 3,018,192	100%

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Thank You



**LIBERTY
IN
NORTH
KOREA**