

GRS Participates in USAID Food for Peace program.

GRS participates in the first U.S. bilateral food assistance program to North Korea since 2000. A group of five non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have signed a groundbreaking agreement with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. These organizations will distribute approximately 100,000 metric tons of food in two North Korean provinces over a period of 12 months. This partnership is part of a broader effort funded by the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) office of Food for Peace that will distribute 500,000 metric tons of food in North Korea. The World Food Programme (WFP) will distribute 400,000 metric tons to regions not covered by the partner organizations.

The World Food Program (WFP) has projected a shortage of 1.66 million metric tons of food for 2008. This program aims to meet the pressing needs of the North Korean people, providing much-needed nutrition, giving many children the chance to have a healthy childhood, and working to keep thousands of people alive. The situation has become increasingly difficult in the past several months after floods devastated harvests, global food prices skyrocketed, and barriers to food exports emerged. The WFP recently reported that prices of staples like rice and maize have doubled in the past year. A team of nine experts from the partner organizations, including 2 GRS staff, returned from a needs assessment in North Korea confirming severe food shortages and acute needs.

We have had excellent cooperation with the Korea America Private Exchange Society (KAPES) in the assessment, planning, and logistical issues facing this kind of massive program. They have shown a great willingness to make this food assistance program work. All of the NGO partner organizations have histories of working productively in North Korea and proven track records of providing humanitarian assistance to people in need there. In addition, GRS, Mercy Corps, and World Vision were involved with the Private Voluntary Organizations Consortium that monitored food from 1997-2000, and bring that experience to this new program.

We see this successful beginning as the result of KAPES' eagerness to make this program work and a product of the many years that the partner organizations have spent building relationships and trust with them.