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Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Republic of Korea: the North Korean Defector Resident Registration Certificate, including purpose, issuance procedures, and duration; prevalence of fraudulent certificates

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Sources indicate that there is a document in the Republic of Korea (South Korea) called the North Korean Defector Resident Registration Certificate (Canada 26 Aug. 2013; LiNK 2 Sept. 2013; Republic of Korea 6 Sept. 2013) [also known as a Certificate of Residence of North Korean Defectors (Canada 26 Aug. 2013) or North Korean Defector Registration Certificate (LiNK 2 Sept. 2013)]. In Korean, the certificate's name is reportedly written as "북한이탈주민 등록확인서" (Canada 26 Aug. 2013; LiNK 2 Sept. 2013; Republic of Korea 6 Sept. 2013). In 2 September 2013 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Director of Research and Strategy at Liberty in North Korea (LiNK), a US- and Seoul-based NGO that provides emergency assistance and resettlement services to North Korean refugees, provided a sample copy of this certificate, which is attached to this Response.

Sources indicate that the purpose of the certificate is to prove that the bearer is a North Korean defector so that they may benefit from assistance (Canada 26 Aug. 2013; LiNK 2 Sept. 2013; Republic of Korea 6 Sept. 2013). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an official at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Ottawa said that the certificate gives the bearer access to assistance according to the Settlement Assistance Act (ibid.). The Director of Research and Strategy at LiNK explained that resettled refugees from North Korea receive special assistance

from the South Korean government, foundations and other organizations, and that the certificate acts as proof of their status, allowing them to benefit from such programs and grants (LiNK 2 Sept. 2013). An official at the Canadian Embassy in Seoul, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, similarly stated that the certificate gives the bearer access to various benefits, such as tuition exemptions or discounts, priority for renting long-term government housing, and employment opportunities for counselling North Korean defectors (Canada 26 Aug. 2013).

The Canadian official said that the certificates are issued by the Ministry of Unification or by residence protection managers of the city, county or district in which the individual resides (*ibid.*). According to the LiNK representative, the certificates are issued by residence protection officers who work in the local government and are responsible for the "residence, identity paperwork or administrative work" for the North Korean defectors who live in that area (2 Sept. 2013). The South Korean embassy official said that the residence protection managers typically issue the certificates to the North Korean defectors living in their area, but that the Ministry of Unification issues the certificate if the residence protection manager is unable to do so (Republic of Korea 6 Sept. 2013).

The South Korean embassy official said that the procedure is for the North Korean defector to visit the relevant local authorities and apply for the issuance of the certificate (*ibid.*). The certificate is then issued after the person's identity is confirmed (*ibid.*). Further details about the procedures for issuing the certificates could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The certificate reportedly does not include a period of validity (Canada 26 Aug. 2013; Republic of Korea 6 Sept. 2013). According to the LiNK representative, residence protection for North Koreans lasts for five years, so the use of the certificate would decrease after the five-year period is over (2 Sept. 2013).

Two sources indicate that the certificates are issued to all North Korean defectors (Han Voice 3 Sept. 2013; Canada 29 Aug. 2013). However, the South Korean embassy official noted that the certificates are issued at the North Korean defector's request (Republic of Korea 6 Sept. 2013).

The South Korean embassy official said that, as of 6 September 2013, there have been no cases in which fraudulent certificates were used (Republic of Korea 6 Sept. 2013). The Canadian official did not have information about whether there are fraudulent North Korean Defector Resident Registration Certificates in circulation, but stated that they believe that forged certificates are "not prevalent" in South Korea (Canada 26 Aug. 2013).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Canada. 29 August 2013. Embassy in Seoul. Correspondence from an official to the Research Directorate.

_____. 26 August 2013. Embassy in Seoul. Correspondence from an official to the Research Directorate.

HanVoice Support Association. 3 September 2013. Correspondence from the Executive Director.

Liberty in North Korea (LiNK). 2 September 2013. Correspondence from the Director of Research and Strategy to the Research Directorate.

Republic of Korea. 6 September 2013. Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Ottawa. Correspondence from an official to the Research Directorate.

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful: International Crisis Group; Institute for Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University; Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Ottawa. A representative from the National Committee on North Korea and a professor at Columbia University were unable to provide information.

Internet sites, including: ecoi.net; Factiva; Korea Institute for National Unification; Republic of Korea - Korea.net, Ministry of Unification; US Korea Institute at School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University; UN - Refworld.

Attachment

The North Korean Defector Resident Registration Certificate [북한이탈주민 등록확인서]. Sent in 2 September 2013 correspondence from the Director of Research and Strategy of Liberty in North Korea (LiNK) to the Research Directorate.

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