



THE EMBASSY OF THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Norrakungsv.39, 181 31 Lidingö. Tel:+4687673836, Fax:+4687673835, E-mail:koryo@telia.com

Did a North Korean Chemical Weapons Expert Actually Defect to Europe?

Amid media furor, there is little evidence for the defection of a North Korean chemical weapons expert.

By John Power

July 10, 2015, *The Diplomat*

International media have seized on claims that a North Korean chemical weapons expert recently defected to Europe, taking with him data on human experimentation. But evidence for the claims remains scant, with *The Diplomat* unable to corroborate key details of the initial news report.

On July 2, South Korea's *Yonhap News Agency* reported that a scientist, identified only by his surname Lee, had fled to Finland on June 6 via the Philippines.

According to the report, Lee brought with him 15 gigabytes of information on human experiments involving chemical agents such as sarin gas. Apparently disturbed by the tests, Lee was reportedly scheduled to present the evidence to the European Parliament later this month.

Despite this, *The Diplomat* has learned that no such individual is currently scheduled to testify before the legislative body.

"...There is no EP delegation nor committee meeting scheduled on this," said director-general for communication Václav Lebeda on Monday.

Lebeda said it is possible that a political group could be preparing to invite such an individual but added, "At this stage we don't have any confirmation of this, however."

The comments followed a similar response by spokeswoman Kristina Elefterie on Friday.

"I checked with committees' secretariats and for now there is no official EP committee meeting scheduled on this in July," she said.

The Finnish government has also denied any knowledge of the defection, according to media in the country.

The *Helsinki Times* reported Monday that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and Finnish Immigration Service have all been unable to confirm the story. While the immigration services have said they are unable to comment on individual cases, the foreign ministry denied knowledge of the case outright.

The sole source for the original *Yonhap* story, which was picked up by media around the world, was an unnamed advocacy group that campaigns for human rights in North Korea. Anonymous sources are the norm in South Korea's opaque media landscape.

The Diplomat was unable to identify the NGO quoted. Sokeel Park, a spokesman for non-profit Liberty in North Korea, expressed no knowledge of the case.

Unsubstantiated and thinly-sourced reports about North Korea are common both in and outside of South Korea. Last year, media around the world repeated ultimately discredited rumors that leader Kim Jong-un's uncle had been fed to a pack of ravenous dogs.

Defector testimony alleging human experimentation in North Korea is not new, however.

Im Cheon-yong, a former special forces soldier who defected in 1997, has claimed to have witnessed testing of chemical weapons on people, including children. -0-