

Disabled Killed in N. Korea: Defector

By Jack Kim, Reuters News Agency

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SOUL—North Korea has no people with physical disabilities because they are killed almost as soon as they are born, a physician who defected from the communist state said yesterday.

Ri Kwang-chol, who fled to the South last year, told a forum of rights activists that the practice of killing newborns was widespread but denied he himself took part in it.

“There are no people with physical defects in North Korea,” Ri told members of the New Right Union.

He said babies born with physical disabilities were killed in infancy in hospitals or in homes and were quickly buried.

The practice is encouraged by the state, Ri said, as a way of purifying the masses and eliminating people who might be considered “different”.

The group urged the South Korean government to change course away from “silent diplomacy” and immediately begin taking action to pressure the North to improve its human rights record.

The South Korean government has refused to join international condemnation of human rights abuses in the North out of concern that such a move could rattle ties with Pyongyang, which considers any criticism of its human rights as deeply offensive.

“The government should stop trying to avoid upsetting Kim Jong-il,” said another defector, Kim Young-sun, 67, referring to North Korean leader. “It should try to upset Kim Jong-il.”

Kim Young-sun is a survivor of the North’s Yodok prison camp, notorious for its forced labor and life sentences for people charged with conspiring against the Kim Jong-il leadership.

North Korea has called itself a people’s paradise and said criticism of its human rights was motivated by the goal of toppling Kim Jong-il.

South Korea has come under fire from human rights groups and some countries for abstaining in votes on United Nations measures to condemn the North’s human rights record.