

Syllabus SNU GSIS - Humanitarian aid to North Korea – Spring 2017

Research project in Korean Studies: Humanitarian aid to North Korea

Spring semester 2017

Instructor: Dr. Frédéric Ojardias

Time: Friday 9:00 am – 12:00 am

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Language: English

[Course description]

Humanitarian action in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) is a topic of broad political debates and controversies. International aid agencies willing to distribute any kind of assistance to North Korea have to comply with drastic constraints imposed by the North Korean regime, which considers aid as an ideological threat to its existence. From these constraints arises a dilemma: UN organizations and humanitarian NGOs may unwillingly help sustain a regime that is primarily responsible for the suffering of its own people; but by ceasing all aid activities in North Korea (as Doctors without Borders did in 1998), they deny assistance to a population that needs it.

Moreover, aid in North Korea is often politicized: donor countries tend to use aid as a political leverage and a diplomatic bargaining chip. This strategy, whose efficiency is debatable, significantly affects aid projects on the ground.

The instructor of this course is a former humanitarian aid worker in the DPRK; he spent almost a year in Pyongyang and in several North Korean provinces as a coordinator for a medical European NGO and then as a food monitor for the United Nations World Food Program (WFP). He will try to bring a different perspective to an issue that is often dealt from a theoretical angle only.

The course will provide a detailed account of the diverse types of aid delivered to the North, the various actors involved (NGOs, UN agencies, donor countries, North Korean regime) and the ongoing issues of the population needs' evaluation and aid projects' implementation and monitoring. Finally, it will discuss how to adapt this aid policy while North Korea's social and economic system is rapidly transforming through the rise of private markets.

[Requirements and grading]

All students are expected to be active participants during class, ask questions and make valuable contributions during debates. Critical thinking is expected.

1- Presentation (20% of grade)

Students are required to make one oral presentation about a chosen specific aid project in DPRK (for example, a program to support disabled people) or about a specific donor country. Each presentation will last approximately 30 minutes.

2- Class participation (30% of grade)

Students are expected to read all the required material before class and prepare questions, so they can participate actively to the class and contribute to the debates. The professor might ask question to students about reading material during class.

3- Midterm take home exam (20% of grade)

Students will write a short paper (3 pages max) that will be submitted at the middle of the semester. Take-home paper has to be submitted 24 hours after receiving it.

4- Final paper (30% of grade)

Students are required to submit a policy paper or a research paper (case study about a specific NGO active in DPRK, or about a specific assistance-related sector). Max 10 pages in length (Times New Roman, 1,5 spaced, notes and bibliography not included), due at the end of the semester. Students are recommended to discuss with the professor before choosing their paper topic.

If a student misses the class more than twice without (prior) due excuses, he or she will fail the class. Plagiarism will be severely punished.

At least one aid worker with experience in North Korea will be invited to join the class, share his experience and participate to the debate with the students; the schedule will be adapted to fit this opportunity.

[Course Schedule]

Week 1 - Introduction

Introduction to the course, definitions, various types of aid, figures.

Week 2 - History of assistance to North Korea

Cold War, aid from soviet and communist countries. Emergence of the famine, causes and consequences. Arrival of the first international aid agencies in DPRK. Dilemma.

Week 3 - Aid to North Korea : theoretical background

Aid and international relations. Definition of aid, principles of humanitarianism, proportionality, impartiality. Why do donor States give aid to DPRK? Why and how does DPRK accept it? North Korean discourse related to aid.

Week 4 - Assessment of humanitarian needs

What are the humanitarian needs in North Korea? How to assess them?

Week 5 - Donors to North Korea 1: United States, China, Russia

Donor states' interests and policies.

Week 6 - Donors to North Korea 2: South Korea, Japan

Donor states' interests and policies.

Week 7 - midterm exam

week 8 - Donors to North Korea 3: European Union, European States

Donor States' interests and policies.

Week 9 - Food aid

Most of aid delivered to DPRK is given under the form of food. Monitoring issues, problem of diversion, criticisms.

Week 10 - Medical assistance

Health is one of the most neglected sectors in North Korea. What kind of international assistance can be provided and how?

Week 11 - Agricultural assistance

Agricultural assistance projects: constraints and successes.

Week 12 - Development aid to North Korea - attempts and challenges 1

Beyond the famine and the humanitarian relief: how to foster development and change in North Korea? Is humanitarian relief still necessary? Development initiatives by public and private donors.

Week 13 - Development aid to North Korea - attempts and challenges 2

Capacity building, professional and educational trainings, study tours.

Week 14 - Temporary conclusion: aid, an efficient political tool in North Korea?

Most donor states tend to use aid for political leverage in North Korea. Does it work? What are the real consequences on the ground? How to design an efficient aid policy?

Week 15 - final exam