Mr. President, as

we are in the midst of North Korea

Freedom Week, I would like to speak

to the human rights situation in North

Korea. As we continually strive to protect

the freedoms that this country

holds dear, such as the freedoms of religion,

press, speech and assembly that

are recognized in our Constitution, we

must also concentrate on spreading

these freedoms to those who do not

enjoy them. As these rights should be

enjoyed by all people, not just Americans,

freedom must extend beyond our

borders to reach those who live in a

world unknown to many of us, one that

includes starvation and deprivation of

all freedoms. North Korea Freedom

Week gives us the opportunity to shed

light on the situation inside this oppressive

regime.

Several years ago in order to help

promote freedom throughout the

world, I began the Congressional Working

Group on Religious Freedom. The

purpose of this group is to focus attention

on issues of domestic and international

religious freedom. As a group,

we seek to uphold and help enforce the

meaning of article 18 of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, which

states: ‘‘Everyone has the right to freedom

of thought, conscience, and religion;

this right includes freedom to

change his religion or belief, and freedom,

either alone or in community

with others and in public or private, to

manifest his religion or belief in teaching,

practice, worship and observance.’’

As has been noted by human rights

groups and others, the human rights

situation in North Korea is severe.

Hundreds of thousands of North Koreans

have fled their country in hopes of

survival and in search of a free life.

However, even if they manage to escape,

they still live in constant fear of

repatriation and imprisonment. President

Bush has called North Korea’s

autocratic leader, Kim Jong Il, a ‘‘tyrant’’

who runs ‘‘concentration

camps.’’ Despite the country being embedded

in secrecy, unfortunate stories

of persecution, starvation, and public

executions for crossing the border manage

to be released to the rest of the

world. Such actions under this regime

are a terrible travesty.

While the North Korean constitution

provides for ‘‘freedom of religion,’’

such freedom does not exist. The U.S.

Commission on International Religious

Freedom said in their 2005 annual report:

‘‘By all accounts, there are virtually

no personal freedoms in North

Korea and no protection for universal

human rights. In pursuit of absolute

control of all facets of politics and society,

the government under dictator

Kim Jong Il has created an environment

of fear in which dissent of any

kind is not tolerated. Freedom of

thought, conscience, and religion or belief

remains essentially non-existent,

as the government severely represses

public and private religious activities

and has a policy of actively discriminating

against religious believers.

There are a growing number of reports

from North Korea refugees that any

unauthorized religious activity inside

North Korea is met with arrest, imprisonment,

torture, and sometimes execution

by North Korean officials.’’

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of

State’s 2005 Country Report on Human

Rights Practices sums up North Korea’s

actions by listing documented or

alleged human rights abuses over the

years. Such instances include:

abridgement of the right to change the

government; extrajudicial killings, disappearances,

and arbitrary detention,

including many political prisoners;

harsh and life-threatening prison conditions;

torture; forced abortions and

infanticide in prisons; lack of an independent

judiciary and fair trials; denial

of freedom of speech, press, assembly,

and association; government attempts

to control all information; denial of

freedom of religion, freedom of movement,

and worker rights; and severe

punishment of some repatriated refugees.

I also want to note President Bush’s

appointment last August of Ambassador

Jay Lefkowitz to the position of

Special Envoy for Human Rights in

North Korea. The Special Envoy post

was established under the North Korea

Human Rights Act, and with this appointment,

signaled the administration’s

intensified attention to human

rights in North Korea. I am confident

that Ambassador Lefkowitz will continue

to take steps toward ending

North Korea’s suppression of freedoms.

As we in the Senate continue to address

the persecution and the fears

that North Koreans face, it is my hope

that we will do all we can in order to

improve the conditions in this communist

state and to spread the freedoms

that we all enjoy.