Thank you. Thank you, Chairman Kerry, Ranking

Member Lugar, distinguished members of the committee.

I’m pleased to be here today. We’re certainly gathering at a time

of increased tension and I would like to focus my comments today

on a slightly different topic as a representative of a nongovernmental

organization.

I’ve submitted comments for the record and I’ll try to summarize

in a few key points.

The first is that there is an ongoing continuous

engagement with U.S. nongovernmental organizations on meeting

critical humanitarian needs within the DPRK.

I’ve been involved in working on these issues since the emergence

of the serious famine in the mid-1990s when my organization,

Mercy Corps, responded to those very critical needs.

There have been a handful, perhaps a dozen, of NGOs that have

stayed engaged since then working on food security, health, water,

sanitation programs, and sponsoring delegations and exchanges

that work on technical, understanding, improved understanding

between our peoples.

This decade-plus of experience has enabled us to understand the

realities, the constraints, the opportunities of how we can work together,

and how we can understand the technical opportunities for

improving the lives of the North Koreans and improving mutual

understanding.

Since the famine of the mid-1990s where estimates of those who

died range from 280,000 to more than 2 million, the acute famine

has definitely subsided. However, chronic food shortages remain

and the U.N. estimated as of November of last year that there were

still approximately a 1.8 million metric ton food shortfall which

would leave 8.7 million of the most vulnerable without adequate

food intake and nutrition.

It’s not famine conditions but it’s chronic malnutrition. So my

second point is that the need remains.

My third point that I’d like to highlight is a brief description of

the USAID-supported food program that recently ended. This was

a groundbreaking program that shows us a way of how we can constructively

engage on meeting real humanitarian needs that we

understand exist. In 2008, USAID negotiated a protocol with the

DPRK government in which there would be provision from USAID,

500,000 metric tons of American food. Of this, 400,000 went

through the World Food Programme and 100,000 went to a consortium

of five NGOs.

Mercy Corps was the lead. We were joined by World Vision,

Global Resource Services, Samaritan’s Purse and Christian Friends

of Korea. All five of us brought more than a decade of experience

in working on the ground in providing humanitarian assistance to

North Korea.

The groundbreaking aspect of this program was that the agreedupon

protocol between the two governments served as the basis for

the NGO-negotiated agreement with our counterparts in the

DPRK. This enabled us to, in a more accountable way than ever

before, identify the need. We identified 900,000 children, elderly,

pregnant and lactating women in the two provinces of our designated

area as the beneficiaries of the food.

We were able to indicate at all points of the distribution who the

donor was and people were very clear that the food was a gift of

the American people. We had significant levels of access from the

port to the warehouses to the institutions, including household visits,

and we were able to field a team of 16 food monitors in-country

for the entire 9 months of the program.

Most importantly, this program serves how we can constructively

work with our North Korean counterparts to develop and deliver a

program that begins to meet international standards of food delivery

based on needs that we agree upon and an approach that we

jointly implement.

As I note in my testimony, regrettably, this program was ended

early at the request of the North Korean Government on March 31.

However, all five of the participating NGOs as well as our other

NGO colleagues continue our work, meeting humanitarian needs

within North Korea, still focused on the very real needs around

food security, health, water, sanitation.

We all believe that humanitarian engagement is vital to maintain.

The political tensions between the United States and DPRK

governments remain well known. Humanitarian assistance has

been one of the few areas of continuous positive steps forward

throughout the last decade. We believe these humanitarian programs

meet critical human needs and demonstrate the best of the

American people, maintain open lines of communication with the

North Korean people.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, Chairman Kerry and Ranking

Member Lugar, and distinguished Senators, thank you for the invitation to speak

today. We are gathering at a time of particularly high tension between the United

States and DPRK governments, as my expert colleagues will be able to address. I

would like to focus my comments today on the experiences of United States nongovernmental

organizations (NGOs) in addressing critical humanitarian needs within

North Korea.

I have been working on assistance programs in North Korea since my organization,

Mercy Corps, first became involved in 1996. Even in the face of shifting political

dynamics, humanitarian assistance has been effective through the last decade

at making continuous progress in meeting real human needs while also promoting

constructive communication with the North Korean people.

In particular, I would like to highlight the recent USAID-supported food program

that fed 900,000 North Korean children, pregnant women, and elderly who needed

food. A precedent-setting agreement between the United States and DPRK governments

gave the NGOs greater ability than ever before to ascertain need and

accountably deliver food to the most vulnerable through a 16-person in-country

team.

This program provided an important model for how we might normalize humanitarian

assistance based on international humanitarian standards. It also demonstrated

the spirit and goodwill of the people of the United States toward the people

of North Korea.

Many U.S. NGOs, including my organization Mercy Corps, first became involved

with the DPRK in 1996 during a time of serious famine. The NGOs mobilized to

provide urgent relief assistance to the people of North Korea as news of the famine

surfaced, with strong support from private donors.

In 1998, the USG embarked upon its first large food assistance program in response

to the famine, which continued through the year 2000. A group of U.S. NGOs

known as the Private Voluntary Organization Consortium (PVOC) monitored a portion

of that food assistance. The lessons we learned from that 3-year food program

proved invaluable for designing and implementing the most recent food program.

Since those famine years, approximately a dozen U.S. NGOs have remained continuously

engaged in providing humanitarian assistance. We have worked to build

and maintain relationships within North Korea that have enabled us to work ever

more effectively. Our programs address basic human needs such as health care and

disease prevention, water and sanitation and food security. We have sent and received

many dozens of delegations over the years, providing both technical education

and, importantly, enabling people-to-people connections that seek to improve mutual

understanding and communication.

We have all relied upon private funding and the interest and support of our communities.

For Mercy Corps, dedicated volunteers in our hometown of Portland, OR,

have been steadfast supporters. They have given technical and financial assistance,

traveled to North Korea and provided hospitality to visiting groups of farmers and

members of our North Korean partner agency.

As a result, many NGO workers have developed an understanding of the opportunities,

constraints and realities of operating within North Korea. We have been able

to work with the Health and Agricultural Ministries, as well as with provincial and

county officials. We have also helped North Koreans better understand how we operate

and deliver needs-based programming. We are all mission-driven organizations

dedicated to provision of humanitarian assistance as well as to the importance of

building bridges of understanding between people.

The acute famine has subsided since the late nineties, but North Korea remains

highly food insecure. In November 2008, the U.N. estimated that this year’s food

gap would equal approximately 1.8 million metric tons. This means that over 8.7

million elderly, pregnant and lactating women, children in nurseries, kindergartens,

and primary schools, children in residential institutions and in pediatric wards

would require food assistance to meet their basic food needs.

In 2008, officials from USAID, the National Security Council and the Department

of State, working with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK,

negotiated a protocol that outlined the delivery of 500,000 MT of food over 12

months according to international standards for food programs. This groundbreaking

protocol served to significantly normalize humanitarian assistance programs in

the first USG food program since 2000.

For this program, 400,000 MT of food was allocated to the U.N. World Food Program,

while 100,000 MT were allocated to a consortium of five U.S. NGOs. All five

NGOs—World Vision, Global Resource Services, Christian Friends of Korea, Samaritan’s

Purse, and Mercy Corps as lead—brought more than a decade of experience

in humanitarian work inside North Korea, with significant understanding of the culture

and longstanding relationships.

The U.S. NGOs negotiated a separate Letter of Understanding (LOU) with the

Korea America Private Exchange Society (KAPES), our partner agency within the

DPRK, based upon the protocol agreement between the two governments. The LOU

outlined in much greater detail the specifics of how the program would operate. The

official protocol and resulting LOU equipped us to mount a program based on identified

humanitarian need and international standards, with significant levels of access

to all points of food delivery.

Key provisions of our LOU included an initial needs assessment effort, signage

at all distribution points that indicated the food was a gift from the American people

and USAID, an agreed upon list of institutions and individuals targeted to receive

food, the ability to track the food as it went from port to warehouse to distribution

point, all the way to the beneficiary’s home with a minimum of 24 hours notice; and

the inclusion of Korean speakers on our team. We established two offices in the provincial

cities of Huichon and Sinuiju plus a main office in the diplomatic compound

in Pyongyang. These provisions are well in line with international standards.

The program began with a rapid food security assessment in June 2009, conducted

over an 18-day period in our two target provinces of Chaggang and North

Pyongyang (see attached map). The 10-person team interviewed county officials, the

heads of kindergartens, nursery schools, orphanages and warehouses and conducted

household visits. This assessment affirmed chronic levels of malnutrition within the

DPRK. Critical key findings included:

The DPRK public distribution system is the primary source of food for most

North Korean citizens, with a stated provision of 600 grams of cereals per person

per day. Rations had been reduced to 350 grams in April, then down to 250

grams in May and 150 grams in June, providing each recipient with a handful

of rice or corn per day;

Cereal stocks were anticipated to be exhausted by the end of June 2008, in 24

of the 25 counties surveyed;

A decade of food insecurity had resulted in chronic low birth weights, cases of

malnutrition among children under 5 years of age and greater vulnerability to

other illnesses.

As a result, we identified a group of 900,000 ‘‘most vulnerable’’ beneficiaries within

the 25 counties where the NGOs would operate, focusing on children under 5

years of age, pregnant and lactating women, and the elderly.

Over the next 9 months, we fielded a team of 16 program monitors who lived for

up to 8 months in country, 12 of whom lived in the two provincial field offices over

the tough winter months. This team was supported with dozens of visits by technical

support personnel.

We trained more than 100 provincial and county officials in handling food as it

transited from the port to their areas. We encountered numerous problems associated

with moving large amounts of food, including bag miscounts, spillage and warehouse

storage issues. Importantly, we were able to work with local officials to remedy these situations. Our ability to identify and jointly solve problems as they arose

was an important positive feature of the program.

We brought in 12 vehicles for the program, which were plated with yellow license

plates that read AF1 through 12, signifying either American friends or American

food, depending upon the translation—or both together as we sometimes heard.

Our teams saw undeniable need among the people we served, and they also heard

many thanks from the thousands of North Koreans with whom they interacted. During

household visits, team members were welcomed graciously and usually offered

the warmest seat of the house as a gesture of respect.

Throughout the program, we frequently had to reaffirm or clarify key provisions

of the LOU. Many times there were differing interpretations of critical issues. However,

we were able to work constructively with our DPRK counterparts to solve

problems as they arose and, as a result, meet the food needs of nearly a million of

the most vulnerable, with a greater level of accountability and certainty than ever

before.

I would like to share a few critical factors that contributed to the success of this

program—factors that have been the foundation of most NGO humanitarian programs:

Significant knowledge of the culture and country, including longstanding relationships

with individuals within KAPES, enabling us to understand and solve

problems that surfaced along the way;

Ability to focus on technical level problem-solving;

Consistency in interaction and focus on humanitarian issues;

Follow through on commitments;

Flexibility when possible, within an overall framework based on humanitarian

need and action.

The food program was, regrettably, prematurely ended on March 31, 2009, at the

request of North Korean authorities. The NGOs at that point had brought in 71,000

MT of the 100,000 MT allocated, with 50,000 MT distributed according to the negotiated

agreements. At the time of the program closure, 21,000 MT had not been fully

distributed, with 4,000 MT still at the port and the remainder in transit or in country

warehouses. KAPES has since reported to us that these remaining commodities

have been delivered according to the negotiated implementation plan with the exception

of 4,000 MT that were reportedly used for food for work activities in the two

provinces. We have not been able to confirm this distribution plan through independent

program monitoring.

The program, despite the disappointing early end and many challenges, set new

precedents for working in the DPRK with normalized assistance programs that meet

international standards. Above all, we believe we served to demonstrate the compassion

and goodwill of the American people through provision of much-needed food as

well as through thousands of conversations and individual contacts.

All of the five NGOs that participated in the food program continue to work in

the DPRK with ongoing programs focused on health, water sanitation, and food

security. Three of the participating NGOs have made return visits to the DPRK

since the closure of the food program to move forward ongoing assistance programs,

with excellent cooperation from relevant authorities.

We believe continued humanitarian engagement is vital to maintain. The political

tension between the USG and DPRK governments is well known. Humanitarian

assistance has been on the few areas of continuous, positive steps forward through

the last decade. These humanitarian programs meet critical human needs, demonstrate

the best of American values and maintain an important channel for people-to-

people connection.

Well, from the perspective of the last 13 years,

there’s no question that North Korea’s better off than it was in the

mid-1990s when they were gripped with a very serious famine.

Things have definitely improved since then, but as I noted, there’s

still a significant food insecurity, particularly when you go into the

rural areas, which is what our programs have focused on.

You know, we are not dealing at the highest

political levels. So I would actually defer to my colleagues who may

have better informed opinions than I do on that.

Actually, Senator Corker, if I can just add on to

that, it is undeniable that the recent food program that we just

conducted had very high levels of approval and support and that

was in and of itself, I think, important evidence of the desire for

ensuring that there was well-being.