



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on January 2, 2023

Amid Food Shortage, North Koreans Mandated to Donate ‘Patriotic Rice’

Notwithstanding wide-ranging food shortages in North Korea, the government is forcing its people to donate several kilograms of “patriotic rice” for use by the military, party officials, scientists, and needy people, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported.

People who have not donated their designated quantity by the end of 2022 could be publicly lambasted and sent to political reeducation. Worse still, they could be sent to labor camps, RFA said.

Various people are privately complaining about being forced into donating at a time when many families are facing challenges feeding themselves.



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“They say, ‘I don’t even have rice to eat today. What can I possibly offer as patriotic rice?’” a resident of the northwestern province of North Pyongan told RFA’s Korean Service on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.

“They told residents to sacrifice from their conscience and patriotism,” the source said. “If I have true patriotism, will rice rain down from the sky?”

Such an order for rice donation hailed from the Central Committee, which reiterated to the people that North Korea’s recent missile launches showcase the party’s well-being and the increasing dignity of the country. Yet the committee failed to admit the country’s food shortage.

“It praised North Korea’s national power and status, saying it had risen to epic highs, and it said to the people that our food problems must be solved through patriotism,” said a North Korean source cited by RFA. “The directive also highlighted cases where farmers and ordinary citizens donated more than their quota of patriotic rice.”

The rice harvest in the hermit nation fell in 2022 owing to frigid temperatures and heavy cloud cover that decreased sunlight in July, which is prime rice growing season, based on yearly estimates done by South Korea’s Rural Development Administration of North Korea’s agricultural production. The South Korean agency estimated that North Korea’s overall crop production fell by 180,000 tons to 4.51 million tons.

According to the North Korean source, as rice is inaccessible in the local market and private sales of grains are banned, every neighborhood has clandestine vendors that sell it in small amounts.

Central government orders dictate the quantity of rice that each citizen must donate according to their station in life. Most citizens will have to donate 5 kilograms (11 lbs), whereas farmers must donate between 10 and 15 kilograms. Students and the elderly must donate between 2 and 7 kilos.

The authorities are instructing the people that donating even 1 gram of rice beyond the prescribed



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amount is patriotic, the source added.

“The authorities threatened the farmers saying [they] could be subject to systematic ideological criticism and punishment at disciplinary labor centers ... for at least six months, but no more than a year,” said the source.

Farm workers had until December 30 to complete their donations, the source said.

“Patriotism has been enforced in the past. But this year, farming has not been good compared to the previous years,” the source said. “So, residents are nervous about food.”

Moreover, the central government issued official documents to discuss the directive with the title, “Let us imitate the loyalty of the soldiers of the People’s Army and fulfill our civic duty by fulfilling our dedication of patriotic rice,” a resident of the northeastern province of North Hamgyong told *RFA* on condition of anonymity to speak freely.

The directive dictated farmers to give 1 kilogram more than the “recommended” donation.

Many farmers grumbled, saying, “The rice storage container at home is empty, so how can we take responsibility for the rest of the country?” a second North Korean source said.

Besides, the explanatory document lauded soldiers who tightened their belts and donated from their own rations. However, the people viewed that message as blatant propaganda, the second source remarked.

“In response, the people were critical of the authorities for launching so many missiles recently, even at a time when food shortages are so bad they cannot properly feed the army,” the second source added.

Residents are even clandestinely critical of their leader Kim Jong Un, who briefly after succeeding his late father 11 years ago pledged that they would be able to eat well, and has constantly promised this during his rule, the second source said.

“They say that the promise made by the Highest Dignity has gone nowhere,” the second source said, using an honorific term to refer to Kim. “The food crisis has worsened because of the wrong policies of the authorities.”

Many citizens have expressed their fury towards government threats of public humiliation, political reeducation, or even detention at labor camps by government officials should they fail to meet the predefined quota by end 2022.

“The authorities threatened the farmers saying [they] could be subject to systematic ideological criticism and punishment at disciplinary labor centers ... for at least six months, but no more than a year,” an unnamed resident from the northwestern province of North Pyongan told *RFA*.

Based on a September 2022 report by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, North Korea is among 45 countries globally requiring external assistance for food to feed its population owing to economic restrictions and an expected poor harvest that year.

In its quarterly [report](#) “Crop Prospects and Quarterly Global Report Food Situation” issued, the FAO examined the grain production and food situation of low-income countries worldwide.

Additionally, the 47-page report pointed out that high inflation rates and tough macroeconomic environments are worsening food insecurity conditions globally, especially in low-income food-deficit countries.



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“In the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, persisting economic constraints, exacerbated by expectations of a reduced 2022 harvest, may worsen the food insecurity situation, with large numbers of people suffering from low levels of food consumption and very poor dietary diversity,” the report mentioned, using the country’s official name.

Persistent food shortages and reliance on international food assistance are not fresh news in North Korea, a diplomatically alienated communist country plagued by its centrally controlled planned economy, its dictatorial leadership, its *juche*, or self-reliance ideology, as well as harsh weather.

Furthermore, the hermit country has been classified as a country lacking general access to food and in need of external food aid since the FAO started its research on the topic in 2007.



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