



Prisons of North Korea¹

Camp 14 Kaechon

39.5715602,126.0622053

The Kaechon political prison camp (개천 제14호 관리소), also known as Camp 14, was established in 1959 and is located in the center of the country, approximately 40 miles north of Pyongyang, in South Pyongan Province. Situated on the north bank of the Taedong River, the camp is directly across the river from the Pukchang political prison camp (Camp 18) and near Mount Purok. The Kaechon political prison camp is located 12 miles to the southeast of the



Kaechon reeducation labor camp (개천 제1호교화소). The DPRK government maintains different systems of labor camps – the kwan-li-so, or political prison camps, and the kwo-hwa-so, or reeducation labor camps – among other types of detention facilities.

Kaechon is approximately 60 square miles in area and is said to hold 15,000 prisoners, all serving life sentences. The camp appears to have been operating since at least the 1960s.

Like all political prison camps in North Korea, Kaechon is designed to segregate from the general prison population those considered “enemies of the State” and “unredeemable” because they have committed political crimes and to punish them for those crimes through unending hard labor. Those sent to the camp include officials perceived to have performed poorly in their job, people who have criticized the regime, and anyone suspected of engaging in anti-government activities. However, some Kaechon prisoners are victims of the regime’s “three generations of punishment,” in which three generations of a prisoner’s family are also sent to the camp and may die there without having committed a crime themselves.

Kaechon is essentially one large total control zone, meaning all prisoners are serving life sentences. Economic activities that employ prisoners as slave labor include mining, textiles, farming, and raising livestock. Induced starvation is common among prisoners, who are driven to catch and eat rodents, frogs, and snakes.

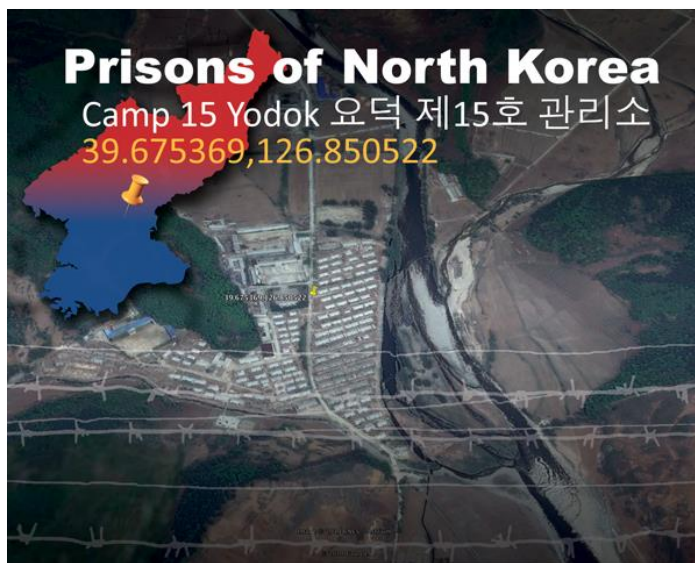
¹ The DPRK government maintains a number of different types of detention centers. This listing describes the operations and conditions typically associated with the kwan-li-so, also known as political prison camps. Information on other types of North Korean detention facilities can be found in the DPRK section of the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.



Camp 15 Yodok

39.675369,126.850522

The Yodok political prison camp (요덕 제15호 관리소), also known as Camp 15, is located 68 miles northeast of Pyongyang in Yodok County, South Hamgyong Province. Situated in a mountain valley formed by the Ipsok River, the camp is bordered by mountains on all sides. Yodok is approximately 145 square miles in area and is said to be surrounded by a 10-to-14-foot-tall barbed wire and electrified fence. 25-foot-tall watchtowers appear to be spaced at half-mile intervals. Reports suggest that 1,000 heavily armed guards and dogs patrol the camp. The only access to Yodok is through the Chaebong Pass. Reports emerged in 2014 suggesting that Yodok was being emptied and overhauled in order to create a model “prison” as part of a campaign to whitewash the regime’s egregious human rights record.



Like all political prison camps in North Korea, Yodok is designed to segregate from the general prison population those “enemies of the State” that have committed political crimes and to punish them for those crimes through unending hard labor.

Yodok’s total control zone includes two prison labor colonies, Pyongchang-ri and Yongpyong-ri, which hold North Koreans accused of crimes against the state or who are otherwise politically unreliable. While total control zone prisoners are never released, those held in Yodok’s “revolutionizing zone” can be released after serving their sentences for political crimes deemed to be “less serious.” Revolutionizing zone prisoners tend to come from privileged families. Other sections of the camp reportedly include Kouek, a secluded area reserved specifically for executions. Because prisoners have been released from Yodok’s revolutionizing zone, many former prisoners have testified about the camp.

Prisoners are typically assigned to one of seven work groups within a work unit, which is overseen by a security guidance officer. Yodok includes a gypsum quarry and a gold mine, and many prisoners are killed or injured in mining operations. Other enterprises have included textile plants; a distillery for corn, acorn, and snake brandy; logging; and a coppersmith workshop.

Men found to have engaged in sexual activity are physically punished, and nearly all pregnancies discovered by guards are forcibly aborted.

In 2014, it was confirmed that detainee housing and related support buildings were razed and the former revolutionizing zone is no longer used to house detainees. According to the testimonies of former prisoners and guards, “regular” farmers and miners from adjacent villages, not prisoners, now work in the camp. It is possible that the camp is still partially functioning and holding detainees.



Camp 16 Hwasong

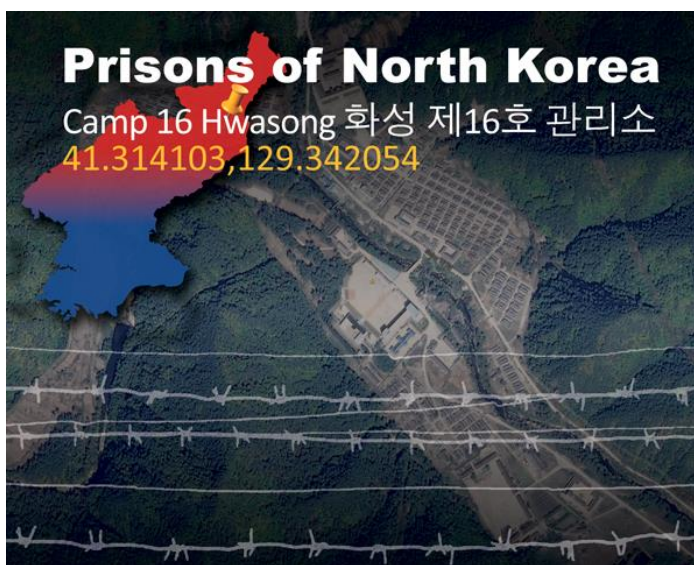
41.314103,129.342054

There is little information available on the total control zone Camp No. 16 (Hwasong political prison camp).

Located in Hwasong County, North Hamgyong Province, 385 kilometers northeast of the capital of Pyongyang, there are no known former prisoners or camp officials available to testify about conditions in the camp. The limited information about the facility has been drawn from testimony by local

residents. Camp 16 is reported to be a total control zone divided into three sections for prisoners whose crimes differ in severity. Unconfirmed reports suggest prisoners may be used in the construction of the Punggye-ri nuclear test site. This camp site also has hydropower capabilities and light agricultural and mining industrial activities along the waterway.

The National Human Rights Commission of [South] Korea has estimated there are approximately 20,000 prisoners in Camp 16. Some NGOs report that prisoners from Camp 22 may have been transferred to Camp 16 in 2012. Satellite imagery analysis does show some modest construction at Camp 16 around that time, but more information would be necessary to conclude whether the expansion was the result of a growing prisoner population.





Camp 18 Pukchang

39.559722,126.079722

Camp 18, also known as Pukchang political prison camp, was located on the other side of the Taedong River from Camp No. 14 in South Pyongan Province. Unlike the other camps, which are run by the Ministry of State Security, Camp 18 was administered by the Ministry of People's Security. Civilians from outside the camp were employed as administrators over various subsections of the facility. Defectors have reported the camp was approximately 28 square miles and could hold roughly 27,000-30,000 prisoners. The camp has reportedly been under construction since 2006, though it appears to continue to hold prisoners



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Many Camp 18 detainees were relatives of prisoners of Camp 14. Prisoners were allowed to live together with family members and, in some instances, to marry and have children. Detainees were required to work in coal mining, brick making, cement making, and in a glass factory and distillery.

Large numbers of prisoners died of malnutrition, disease, and work accidents, and administrators ordered public executions for escape attempts. While the camp was fully operational, some prisoners were released from imprisonment but continued to reside at the camp where they had access to mail, local markets, and domestic travel permits. These individuals were separated from prisoners by an electrified barbed wire fence and were also granted access to small plots of land for personal farming.

Over the years, there were at least two large scale prisoner releases from Camp 18, resulting in a relatively large number of witnesses, both prisoners and guards, within the defector community.



Camp 22 Hoeryong (2012)

42.545675,129.914436

NGOs report that the Hoeryong (회령 제22호 관리소) political prison camp, also known as Camp 22, held an estimated 50,000 prisoners at its peak in the 1990s. In mid-2012, sources inside North Korea reported that the camp had closed. Satellite imagery analysis conducted by NGOs surmised that the location remained inhabited and active, but defector consensus has concluded that Camp 22 is no longer operational. Media reports indicate that many of the camps prisoners were transferred to Camp 16 (Hwasong political prison camp), but several thousand prisoners remain unaccounted for.



There are no known former prisoners of the camp that have escaped from North Korea. The only testimonies about the camp have come from former guards and local residents who observed the camp operations from outside.

According to former camp guard Ahn Myong-chol, the camp was nearly 31 miles long and 25 miles wide. While Ahn was assigned to the camp in the early 90s, there were roughly 1,000 guards and 500-600 administrative agents. It is surrounded by an inner 3300-volt electric fence and an outer barbed wire fence. Public executions were held weekly in the camp until the 1990s, when camp administrators, allegedly fearing riots, moved the executions to a secret site known as “Sugol.”

In his testimony about the camp, Ahn recalled his shock upon first arriving at the camp and observing prisoners that he likened to walking skeletons, “dwarfs,” and “cripples” in rags. He estimated that between 1,500 and 2,000 prisoners, mostly children, died annually of malnutrition during his years there. Ahn also described brutal abuses committed in the camp’s punishment chamber, which another former guard has described as “a prison inside the prison.” In this chamber, prisoners were forced to sit on their knees for extended periods of time while being beaten by guards. Guards severely beat prisoners for even the slightest movements. Ahn noted that prisoners detained in the punishment chambers were often crippled after three months and dead within five months.

Ahn and other former guards have testified to the brutality that they were encouraged to demonstrate while punishing prisoners. Former guards have confessed that they were taught not to view prisoners as humans. However, the number of deaths from beating prisoners was so high that at one point, the guards were encouraged to be less violent.

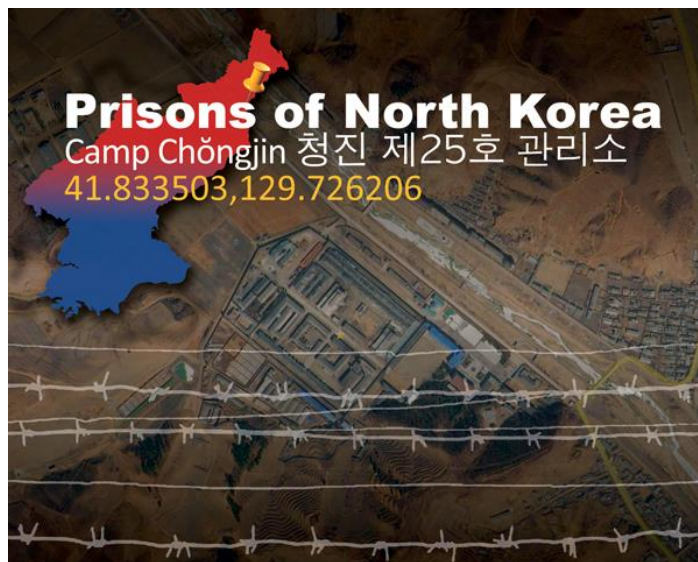
The razing of guard posts and fences suggest the shift from a prisoner workforce to a local workforce.



Camp 25 Chongjin

41.833503,129.726206

According to NGO reports, the Chongjin political prison camp (Camp 25) covers nearly 247 acres of land in North Hamgyong Province and has an estimated population of 5,000 prisoners. Satellite imagery analysis shows that the camp perimeter grew 72 percent between 2009 and 2010. New guard posts, an air defense site, a high security walled building, a security area, and possibly a leadership memorial building were added to the camp. When Camp 22 (Hoeryong political prison camp) closed in 2012,



NGOs speculated that some prisoners were transferred to Camp 25. Recent NGO reports indicate enhanced levels of economic interaction between the camp and adjacent areas, possibly indicating the increased economic importance of Camp 25 prison labor. Primary industry is focused on agriculture and livestock, a furniture factory and a lumber yard.

The camp appears to be a well-maintained and high-functioning prison with light industrial factories.

NGOs report that Chongjin is a total control zone prison holding only offenders, while other camps hold the offenders and their families. The camp facilities appear to be more like a traditional penitentiary, where offenders are detained collectively in prison cells versus the individual units in collective farms found in other camps. The sole known camp witness has testified that there are solitary cells in the prison used for long term prisoners rather than short term punishment.

The United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea brought to light the deplorable situation inside North Korea. The Commission’s excellent report gives us all the opportunity to hear and read the harrowing testimony of North Korean witnesses to the deeply disturbing crimes committed by the regime against its own people.

The “Voices of North Korea” highlights personal stories that are at once all too familiar to many North Korean escapees, yet unimaginable to those of us living elsewhere. Now that the world has heard their voices, it is more important than ever to act on behalf of the suffering.

Learn more, 2016 Democratic People’s Republic of Korea Human Rights Report:
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=265344>