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<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/seoultrain/>

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SEOUL TRAIN GRIPPING EXPOSÉ INTO THE LIFE AND DEATH OF NORTH KOREANS AS THEY TRY TO ESCAPE THEIR HOMELAND

Film to Have Its Television Premiere on PBS's *Independent Lens*
the Emmy Award-winning Series Hosted by Edie Falco
on Tuesday, December 13, at 10 PM (Check Local Listings)

(San Francisco)—With its riveting footage of a secretive underground railroad, **SEOUL TRAIN** is a riveting documentary about the life and death of North Koreans as they try to escape their homeland. **SEOUL TRAIN** is the definitive exposé into this growing and potentially explosive humanitarian crisis. It portrays not only the human toll, but also the complex geopolitics of a crisis that threatens to undermine the stability of East Asian peace. **SEOUL TRAIN** will have its television premiere on *Independent Lens*, hosted by Edie Falco, on Tuesday, December 13, at 10 PM (check local listings).

By combining vérité footage, personal stories, and interviews with experts and government officials, **SEOUL TRAIN** depicts the flouting of international laws by major countries, the inaction and bureaucracy of the United Nations, and the heroics of activists who put themselves in harm's way to save the refugees. Today, there are an estimated 250,000 North Korean refugees living underground in China. They escaped a food crisis and other persecutions at home that have claimed the lives of approximately 3 million in the past 10 years. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stands idly by, the Chinese government—in direct violation of international laws to which it's a party—systematically arrests and forcibly repatriates hundreds of these refugees each month.

Defecting from North Korea is a capital offense, and repatriated refugees face human rights abuses ranging from concentration camps and torture to forced abortion and summary executions. For a lucky few refugees, however, there is hope. A group of multinational activists has taken it upon themselves to create an underground railroad. Via a network of safe houses and escape routes, the activists—at great personal risk—help the refugees in daring escapes to freedom over thousands of miles of Chinese territory. This is an odyssey in which betrayal and deceit lurk around every corner, and the price of getting caught likely means death. It's an epic tale involving years on the lam living in underground shelters, North Korean and Chinese agents, double-crosses, covert border crossings, and the terror of what happens if they get caught.

In order to capture the essence and urgency of the current crisis, the stories of several refugee groups are told through actual footage. The filmmakers follow these refugees from their arrival in China—before they begin their escape attempts—as they recount the horror they left behind.



We also hear their fears of being caught and sent back to North Korea, where they know their doomed fate. We watch as they make their respective escape attempts, and in the dramatic conclusion, we see the outcomes: Some make it to freedom; others, including an eight-month-pregnant Nam Chun-mi, get caught by the Chinese and are sent to their demise. As if the current problem were not bad enough, estimates are that upon the fall of Kim Jong-il's regime, millions of refugees will flood into China across the shallow Tumen and Yalu rivers that divide the two countries.

In **SEOUL TRAIN**, we meet the activists on the front line, learn of the risks they take for their refugees and for themselves, and see firsthand the toll their work takes on them. We also hear from the Chinese government, which articulates why the country claims the North Koreans are not refugees; from the UNHCR as to why it has failed to save even one North Korean refugee; from members of U.S. Congress that have publicly challenged both the People's Republic of China and the UNHCR; and from other experts (academics and NGOs) on the crisis at hand as they foretell the impending disaster.

The companion website for **SEOUL TRAIN** (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/seoul-train>) features detailed information about the film, including exclusive filmmaker Q&A interviews, filmmaker and cast bios, and Learn More links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features video previews and a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions.

CREDITS

Director/Producers	Jim Butterworth & Lisa Sleeth
Director	Aaron Lubarsky
Editor	Aaron Lubarsky
Photography	Lisa Sleeth, Jim Butterworth, Ishimaro Jiro, Ahn Chol, Oh Young-phil & Chun Ki-won
Original Music	David Harris

PARTICIPANTS
(IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Senator Sam Brownback, Chairman, U.S. Helsinki Commission. Brownback pushes for human rights reform throughout the world, including North Korea, China and Sudan. He's also the original sponsor and Senate champion of the recently enacted North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 (H.R. 4011) and the Darfur Accountability Act (S. 495).

Marine Buissonnière, Secretary General. Médecins Sans Frontières International, Doctors Without Borders (MSF/DWB). Now the Secretary General for all of MSF/DWB, until 2003, Buissonnière was the regional representative for MSF in Seoul.

Chun Ki-won, Underground Railroad Activist. This mysterious and secretive pastor works the underground railroad with more success than any other single activist. He has traveled and initiated new routes that have brought more than 400 North Korean refugees to safety (or approximately 10 percent of the total number of North Koreans that have made it to South Korea since the end of the Korean War in 1953). A former businessman, Chun was initiated into the North Korean refugee crisis during a business trip to the Yanbian area of China, near the North Korean border, where he saw the body of a North Korean that had been shot in the back trying to cross the Tumen River.



Dr. Chung Byung-ho, Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Hanyang University, South Korea. As an anthropology professor, Dr. Chung is an unbiased, respected expert on the effect of the food crisis upon North Koreans. He describes the famine in North Korea as one of the worst in modern history, even amongst socialist regimes, and says that “at the age of seven, North Korean children and South Korean children have about a 12-centimeter [4.8-inch] height difference.” Dr. Chung is acutely aware of the crisis; he oversees the six-month reeducation program for North Korean children that have made it to South Korea.

Kong Quan, Director-General, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). Kong Quan represents the official view of the Chinese government: that not one North Korean defector is a refugee, that they’re all economic migrants that come to China to work.

Kim Sang-hun, Underground Railroad Activist. Possibly the most covert member of the underground railroad, Kim specializes in facilitating the escape of “high value” North Korean defectors that provide evidence against the Kim Jong-il regime for a future International Criminal Court tribunal. A retired U.N. official, Kim makes only a cameo appearance in SEOUL TRAIN because of the secrecy of his activities.

Ruud Lubbers, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. A hero of Dutch politics and appointee to his post overseeing the UNHCR, Lubbers resigned his position on February 20, 2005, amid allegations of sexual harassment. In **SEOUL TRAIN**, Lubbers appears annoyed and disinterested as he makes passing reference to the plight of North Koreans in China.

Moon Kook-han, Underground Railroad Activist. Moon Kook-han specializes in making political statements as he leads refugee groups out of China. In 2001, he rushed a family of seven into the UNHCR office in downtown Beijing. With the Han-mi family, he stormed the Japanese consulate gates in Shenyang, China. He was also helping the ill-fated MoFA Seven, who were arrested by the Chinese and sent back to North Korea, where it is presumed some, if not all, have since died in concentration camps.

Tim Peters, Underground Railroad Activist and Founder and Director, Helping Hands Korea. Gentle and soft-spoken, Tim Peters is the glue that holds much of the underground railroad together. The Michigan native is the moral compass of the effort, supporting the activities of the underground railroad with funding, organization and guidance. Peters has lived in South Korea off and on for more than 28 years, dedicating himself to the service of the North Koreans. He is the founder and director of Helping Hands Korea and the Ton-a-Month Club, which provides more than a ton of food per month to North Koreans in the remote northern reaches of the country. To date, he has far surpassed that goal and is, in fact, three years ahead of plan.

Tarik Radwan, Immigration Attorney. An immigration attorney specializing in refugee issues, Radwan has dissected the agreement between the UNHCR and China. He has concluded that there are several legal measures available to the UNHCR to force China’s compliance with international refugee law, but that the UNHCR has chosen not to use them.

Ron Redmond, Chief, Media Relations and Public Information Service, UNHCR. As the UNHCR spokesman, Ron Redmond attempts to explain the UNHCR’s perceived apathy toward the growing crisis of North Korean refugees. He explains that without the support of U.N. member states, the UNHCR is rendered powerless, and he calls into question the political will of member states, namely the United States, to address the issue.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Suzanne Scholte, Vice-Chairman, North Korea Freedom Coalition

A human rights activist fighting on behalf of North Koreans, Suzanne Scholte has directed her relentless energy to marshal U.S. policymakers to care about this issue, and she was one of the instrumental behind-the-scenes players in the passage of the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 (H.R. 4011).

Dr. Norbert Vollertsen, Underground Railroad Activist

Norbert Vollertsen is a German medical doctor who has worked on numerous underground railroad operations. Prior to becoming an activist, Vollertsen provided medical relief within North Korea, stating, "Children were dying in front of my eyes." Notwithstanding his controversial tactics, his efforts have brought the plight of North Koreans to the world's attention.

Jim Butterworth (Director/Producer) is co-founder and co-principal of Incite Productions as well as a technology entrepreneur. He founded and has led several successful companies, including an early Internet company and one of the top-performing venture capital funds from 1999 to 2002. He is also one of the pioneers in the development of streaming audio and video over the Internet and holds six patents in the field. Butterworth holds a B.S. in industrial and systems engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology and an M.B.A. from the Amos Tuck School at Dartmouth College. **SEOUL TRAIN** is his debut film.

Lisa Sleeth (Director/Producer) is co-founder and co-principal of Incite Productions and a registered nurse specializing in high-technology critical care and public health education. In addition to working in the intensive care unit in her hometown, she has dedicated her career to providing humanitarian assistance. She has participated in medical relief efforts on five continents, including the treatment of Kosovar refugees in Albania for the United Nations. She is highly skilled and experienced in working with NGO personnel, with refugees and in unsecured, volatile areas. Sleeth holds a B.S. in nursing from Washington State University. **SEOUL TRAIN** is her debut film.

Aaron Lubarsky (Director/Editor) is a critically acclaimed documentary filmmaker whose work has screened at numerous festivals and theaters and on broadcast television worldwide. In 2003, Lubarsky won the Prime Time Emmy for Outstanding Nonfiction Picture Editing for HBO's *Journeys with George*. He also received an IDA Award and a student Academy Award for his film *Wayne Freedman's Notebook*, and his film *Uncle Eugene* won the Documentary Golden Gate Award at the San Francisco Film Festival. Lubarsky holds a B.S. in political science from UC Davis and an M.A. in documentary film production from Stanford University. He has also worked as an editor at LucasFilm.

Incite Productions is a Colorado-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that produces high-quality documentaries on global human rights issues, with particular emphasis on persecution, intolerance, discrimination, human trafficking and refugees. **SEOUL TRAIN** is the debut film from Incite Productions.

ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

A film festival in your living room, *Independent Lens* is an Emmy Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. Hosted by Edie Falco, the acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of independent producers, which has prompted *Television Week* to call it "entertaining as hell and better than any other documentary series around."

Presented by Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independentlens. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

ITVS funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since ITVS's inception in 1991, its programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing television audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the CPB, a private corporation funded by the American people.

PBS, headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, is a private, nonprofit media enterprise owned and operated by the nation's 349 public television stations. Serving nearly 90 million people each week, PBS enriches the lives of all Americans through quality programs and education services on noncommercial television, on the Internet and through other media. More information about PBS is available at www.pbs.org, the leading dot-org Web site on the Internet.

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The images found in this release and more are available to the press as high resolution downloadable photos with captions and credits at www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos/

PAGE 1:

Left: Han-mi looks on as her mother is wrestled to the ground by Chinese guards at the Japanese Consulate in Shenyang, China.

Photo: Yonhap News Agency / ITVS

Center: North Korean children scrounge for food.

Photo: ASIAPress / ITVS

Right: Nam Chun-mi, one of the 12 North Korean refugees activist Chun Ki-won is smuggling out of China.

Photo: Incite Productions / ITVS

PAGE 2:

Left: A Chinese soldier tries to stop 25 North Korean refugees from rushing into the Spanish Embassy to obtain asylum.

Photo: Yonhap News Agency / ITVS

Center: A North Korean refugee, holds up a banner that reads "We Want Freedom, Help Us."

Photo: Incite Productions / ITVS

Right: SEOUL TRAIN FILMMAKERS, Jim Butterworth & Lisa Sleeth in Tiananmen Square, Beijing.

Photo: Incite Productions / ITVS



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