

CONFIDENTIAL

R251



US Department of State  
 Bureau of Intelligence and Research  
 Brief  
 03/03/1998

RELEASED IN PART  
 B1, 1.4(D)

## North Korea: Countdown to Starvation? (U)

A DPRK official on March 2 warned that the nation's grain stocks would be depleted by mid-March, according to press reports. Aid workers had projected that these grain stocks would last at least until April-May. Nonetheless, the World Food Program (WFP) believes immediate assistance is necessary to help stave off "potential starvation." (U)

The UN earlier this year appealed for \$415 million of aid, mostly for food, on North Korea's behalf. Only the United States so far has responded. (U)

**Comment:** Outsiders cannot determine how much time--in weeks or months--North Korea has before its chronic shortage becomes acute. North Korea's estimate appears to be based on what is left from last fall's grain harvest alone, excluding commercial imports and aid deliveries. (C)

Though there is uncertainty about the size of last year's grain crop--estimates range from Pyongyang's claim of 2.1 million tons to  2.9 million tons--either figure substantiates a desperate problem. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has estimated North Korea this year will need as much as one million tons of aid grain. Pyongyang's calculations appear to leave out almost 300,000 tons of imports obtained as aid since October 1997, as well as food stocks held by peasant farmers and those on free markets. (C)

In an emergency, both China and South Korea would probably provide some food aid; President Kim Dae Jung in his inaugural speech pledged Seoul would "not be stingy in extending food aid to North Korea from the government and private organizations." Japan plans to complete its 1997 aid commitments (some 67,000 tons), but any new deliveries will be impeded absent signs of progress on the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea. (C)

Pyongyang, which has not yet aired a positive or negative view of Kim's installation, may have intended its announcement as a test of how Seoul is prepared to respond to the North's request, as well as to prompt additional international contributions to the WFP appeal. (C)

CONFIDENTIAL

[INR Home Page](#) | [Briefs](#) | [Intel Assessments](#) | [Viewpoints](#) | [Products by date](#) | [Products by country](#)