

Hello and welcome back. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. On today's program, we talk about two serious subjects. The United Nations says some very bad things have been happening to people in North Korea. A recent report says these acts are as horrible as some of the Nazi atrocities of World War II. We will have complete details.

Then we turn to Japan. Some person, or perhaps more than one, has been damaging all the copies of a very famous book that they can find in libraries. So far, who and why remain a mystery.

So we invite you to listen carefully to As It Is to hear about what is happening in the world, and improve your American English at the same time.

A United Nations commission says North Korean officials - and possibly even North Korean leader Kim Jong Un - should be tried for crimes against humanity.

A report released in February by the U.N.'s Commission of Inquiry on North Korea compares many of the abuses to crimes committed by the Nazis during World War Two.

"... the abductions, of the public executions, and of the fact that many people simply disappear."

Michael Kirby is the commission's Chairman.

"The suffering and the tears of the people of North Korea demand action, and that is the proposal of the Commission of Inquiry."

The Commission's results come from a year-long investigation. It interviewed 80 witnesses. These people confirmed similar stories from other alleged victims.

The Commission also used satellite pictures of alleged prison camps in North Korea. North Korea says these camps do not exist. Amnesty International also used testimony from people who survived the camps in North Korea to prove their claims of human rights abuses.

"When my parents starved to death, I didn't have coffins for them. I wrapped their bodies with straw, carried them on my back, and went to bury them myself. And the children ... I lost all my family."

"Women will go through a blood test to check for pregnancy and any diseases you get through having sex. They would force abortion after the pregnancy test. Pregnant women get sent to labor camps to carry loads up and down the hills which cause the women to lose the babies."

Amnesty's Roseann Rife hopes the new report will make a difference.

"This may be the best chance we have to get the North Korean government to take action to improve the human rights situation. So it is critical that the United Nations make the best use of this report."

North Korea refused to cooperate with the inquiry. North Korean officials told Reuters News Agency they reject the findings in the report.

But the commission said that it sent North Korean leader Kim Jong Un a letter detailing the evidence. The commission also warned the leader of North Korea that he could be held responsible for crimes committed under his rule.

Again, commission leader Michael Kirby:

"Now the international community does know. Now the international community will know. There will be no excusing a failure of action because we didn't know."

The United States issued a statement about the report. Officials say it gives strong evidence of serious and widespread human rights violations.

The commission wants the North Korean alleged abuses sent to the International Criminal Court.

Famous Books Damaged in Japan

Japanese police are searching for the people who destroyed hundreds of copies of Anne Frank's "Diary of a Young Girl" in dozens of libraries across Tokyo.

Since the end of January of this year, more than 30 libraries in the Tokyo area have reported damage to nearly 300 books dealing with the teenager killed during the Holocaust. Anne Frank's famous diary tells about her time spent in hiding during the Nazi German occupation of the Netherlands during the Second World War.

Her diary reads like a normal teenager's diary. In other words, it is full of her thoughts about herself and her hopes for the future.

It also tells of her daily struggles for survival, and her fear of being discovered. In the end, the Germans did find her family, and they were sent to concentration camps. In 1945 Anne died of typhus while in the Bergen-Belsen camp in Germany. She was only 15 years old.

Her father Otto was the only member of the immediate family to survive the war. He published Anne's diary in 1947. Anne's "Diary of Young Girl" has sold millions of copies and has become a symbol of the Holocaust.

Rabbi Abraham Cooper is an associate Dean with the Simon Wiesenthal Center. The Simon Wiesenthal Center is one of the largest international Jewish human rights organizations. Rabbi Cooper says that he feels this is not the act of just one person.

“Obviously you’re not talking about one or two incidents. You’re talking about a wide geographic area. We’re talking about some sort of organized effort.”

Toshihiro Obayashi is the deputy director of the central library in Japan’s Suginami area. Mr. Obayashi said that “each and every book which comes up under the index of Anne Frank has been damaged at our libraries.” He adds that nothing like this has ever happened before.

Rotem Kowner is professor of Japanese history and culture at the University of Haifa in Israel. He says that “Diary of a Young Girl” is probably one of the most popular books for youth in Japan, and has been throughout the postwar years.

Rabbi Cooper agrees. He says “The Diary of Anne Frank” makes best-seller lists in Japan year after year.

“Whoever did this understands the importance of Anne’s message, of who she was, what happened to her, the lessons we should be learning from the Nazi era and the Second World War.”

He also believes that those who attacked the memory of Anne Frank did so for nationalistic reasons.

“There is a huge internal debate and struggle within Japan, and of course across Asia, of coming to grips with what happened in the era of Imperial Japan and the atrocities that took place in Asia, and the current tensions between especially China and Japan. A lot of it surrounds unresolved questions of history, of apology, remorse et cetera.”

But Japan’s government has criticized the attacks on Anne Frank books. Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga says the damage done to the books “shameful.”

This all comes at a time when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is also being criticized for his nationalist policies. Beijing and Seoul were quick to criticize Prime Minister Abe’s recent visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. This is a monument to the Japan’s war dead that also includes the remains of 14 convicted war criminals.

Before we leave you, let's take a quick look back in time. On this date in 1781, the planet Uranus was discovered by an Englishman named William Herschel. 74 years later, Percival Lowell was born. He was an American astronomer whose work helped in the discovery of Pluto.

And 75 years ago today, a baby boy was born in Brooklyn, New York, to the Sedaka family. Neil Sedaka went on to write over 500 songs. I can remember hearing him sing "Breaking Up is Hard to Do" during the early years of rock and roll. But I always dreamed about the woman whose picture Neil kept on his wall.

Don't go away. There are more Learning English program to come, and world news at the beginning of the hour on VOA. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington.

