

## Vision Worth Living For

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "If a man has not found something worth dying for, he is not fit to live." This past fall was the time of awakening for me.

Ever since my freshman year at UC Berkeley, I discovered a passion for helping the North Korean people. As a Korean-American blessed with all the comforts and opportunities of America, the knowledge that many of my fellow Koreans languished their lives away in prison camps or starved to death bothered me. However, I realized that I was uniquely situated to help them gain the chance at a life that they never had. I just had to find a way to channel my passion into purpose, into action.

Since I could do little in California but study the quandaries over North Korea, I decided to temporarily move to Washington, D.C.—America's center of foreign policy—to experience the politics behind America's policy decisions on North Korea myself. During my semester interning at the House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, I met with North Korean defectors who shared their stories of torture, starvation, and slavery. Many of these defectors spoke of their personal experience with penal labor camps or how they witnessed human traffickers along the Chinese-North Korean border illegally sell defectors into sexual slavery. As these North Korean women are captured by Chinese police and repatriated to North Korea, their Chinese-Korean offspring are often abandoned by the Chinese fathers who either do not have the resources or the desire to care for the children. Deprived of their heritage, families, and the citizenship rights that the Chinese Nationality Law guarantees them, these stateless children are reduced to beggars in a land where their lives are worthless. Without citizenship or the household registration necessary to receive government education and health care, the children are often reduced to living off local garbage.

There may be as many as 100,000 such orphans in China, yet recent reports on the humanitarian crises afflicting North Korean refugees illustrate that little is known about or done for these orphaned and stateless children. The injustices I learned about and the lack of resources and effort exerted to help the needy deeply troubled me. However, I also learned the important lesson of civil communication and negotiation during my time at the Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C. truly functions through connections. I witnessed how Congress operates behind the way it is portrayed on TV. I listened to Congressmen debating U.S. foreign policy objectives and absorbed Congressional office culture as I helped staffers and wrote memos about Congressional hearings. I learned that no one in D.C. holds absolute power, but that every representative, senator, diplomat, and think tank expert relies on personal relationships built up over time and cooperation or compromise to make changes.

Thus, though D.C. awakened me to the practical ways in which I could contribute to the causes that impassion me, so too it gave me greater wisdom in the manner to approach my vision for North Korea. Living at Washington, D.C., was an invigorating experience. Aside from the freezing weather, working in D.C. made me feel alive like I have not felt for a while, and my experiences there gave me greater direction in my desire to work globally as a diplomat to civilly and democratically engage others to help poor North Koreans.