

# College Student learns the World isn't Nice

*The Guardian* [reports](#):

"North Korea has sentenced an American college student to 15 years' hard labour after finding him guilty of 'crimes against the state', in a ruling that is certain to increase tensions with Washington.

Otto Warmbier, a 21-year-old economics student at the University of Virginia, was found guilty of committing 'severe crimes' against the North Korean state after he was held for allegedly attempting to steal a political banner from a restricted area of the hotel where he was staying in the capital Pyongyang."

The trial lasted all of an hour according to the reports coming out of China.

"In a prepared statement read out before TV cameras, Warmbier said a member of Friendship United Methodist Church in Wyoming, Ohio, described as the mother of a friend, had offered him a used car worth \$10,000 if he could return with the banner as a 'trophy' from North Korea.

Church officials said they did not know the woman identified by Warmbier, adding that he was not a member of the congregation.

Warmbier, from Ohio, broke down in tears as he acknowledged and apologised for his alleged crime, which he described as 'the worst mistake of my life'.

Warmbier was arrested in early January, as he was about to board a flight from Pyongyang for Beijing at the end of a visit arranged by Young Pioneer Tours, an agency specialising

in travel to North Korea.

On its website, the US state department strongly discourages all travel to North Korea, with which Washington does not have diplomatic relations, and warns of the 'risk of arrest and long-term detention'.

Warmbier's parents pleaded with the North to show leniency, citing his youth and the fact that he had made a full confession in public."

North Korea and other despotic states are not playing around. While enormous leniency is given to college students here in the West, elsewhere that is not the case. Indeed, the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is littered with the carcasses of millions upon millions of people who were perceived as undesirable or a threat to the state in countries such as Russia, Mexico, Cuba, China, Cambodia, Germany, Italy, North Korea, Turkey, Rwanda, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Syria, Burma, Sudan, Serbia, etc.

Perhaps due to modern entertainment and communications and the general state of our society, American youth seem to think that most of the world is just like us or that America is totalitarian while the rest of the world is progressing. That is simply not the case.

The values and principles that have shaped the West over thousands of years and, in many ways, culminated in America are largely unique to us. While the rest of the world mimics some of our laws due to the global order created by the West in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they do not share our fundamental traditions or beliefs regarding human dignity and the individual. Sadly, there are many areas of the world where those in power would sooner put a bullet in your head or imprison you than tolerate any divergence from the order they have established through brute force.

Here is an [account](#) from Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S.

Permanent Representative to the United Nations, of what has been reported out of North Korea:

"A former prisoner of Prison Camp 15, Kim Young-soon, said she and other prisoners were so famished they picked kernels of corn from the dung of cattle to eat. She said, 'If there was a day that we were able to have mouse, that was a special diet for us. We had to eat everything alive, every type of meat we could find. Everything that flew, that crawled on the ground, any grass that grew in the field.'

Ahn Myong Chul, a former guard at Prison Camp 22, spoke of guards routinely raping prisoners. In one case in which a victim became pregnant and gave birth, the former guard reported that prison officials cooked her baby and fed it to their dogs. This sounds unbelievable and unthinkable; yet this is what a former guard told the Commission of Inquiry at a public hearing. His account fits a pattern across witnesses' testimonies of sadistic punishments meted out to prisoners whose 'crime' was being raped by officials.

The Commission estimates that between 80 and 120 thousand people are being held in prison camps like the ones where so many of these crimes occurred.

Many who testified before the Commission were tortured as punishment for trying to flee North Korea. One man who was sent back to the DPRK from China described being held in prison cells that were only around 50 centimeters high, just over a foot and a half. He said the guards told him that because the prisoners were animals, they would have to crawl like animals. A woman from the city of Musan told how her brother was caught after fleeing to China. When he was returned, North Korean security officials bound his hands and chained him to the back of a truck before dragging him roughly 45 kilometers, driving three loops around the city so everyone could see, his sister testified. 'When he fell down, they kept on driving,' she said.

Nor are the horrors limited to prison camps or those who try to flee. The Commission found 'an almost complete denial of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as of the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, information and association' in the DPRK."

It's not just North Korea, though that is perhaps the worst on display today. Much of the world has no respect or even belief in human dignity, let alone the various rights we have enshrined in our constitution. Yes, our country has sinned in the past and has plenty of blemishes, but what we have is truly unique and worth preserving. To do so, though, takes work and a deep understanding of the history of the West and the ideas that shaped our laws and culture – something our education system and society are failing to foster.

We hope that the U.S. government is able to arrange Otto Warmbier's return. Whether it happens or not, let him serve as a warning that the world is not nice.