

Dolphin School Inaugural Earth Studies lecture raises awareness of human rights issues in North Korea

On March 7th, 2016, Dolphin School welcomed former British Ambassador to North Korea, John Everard and North Korean defector and human rights campaigner Young-il Kim to talk about Life in North Korea, at its inaugural Earth Studies lecture. It is the first time that the two have spoken at a British preparatory school.

An audience of over one hundred people, comprising of current and past Dolphin families, and representatives from local secondary schools including; Reading School, Leighton Park School and Holyport College, were treated to a fascinating account by the two speakers.

Tom Lewis, Head said, "The interest in our first Earth Studies lecture from Dolphin families and the local community has been phenomenal and we were both delighted and privileged to welcome John Everard and Young-il Kim to Dolphin to share their experiences on North Korea from a foreigner and native perspective. Earth Studies was introduced as part of our curriculum last September and has already proved popular amongst our pupils and parents, with its aims to explore aspects of current and global affairs, faith and belief, philosophy, society, sustainability and spirituality."

John Everard explained that "North Korea is a beautiful country with beautiful beaches but you won't spot a single tourist on the beach. The country is poor and reclusive but the people are compassionate and show immense patience." He went on to talk about how hard the lives of the people are and the extreme food shortage which means people go to great lengths to get food, such as fishing on the ice in the middle of winter. The promise of mechanism of transport by the leaders has never come to fruition and people are forced to manually plough fields and manage rice crops. John explained that propaganda in North Korea is rife, with hand painted posters adorning many buildings. North Koreans live in fear that the South Koreans and Americans are going to invade. The young are taught that the Americans are the enemy. Education in the Natural Sciences and Mathematics is good but the Arts is dominated by the ideology of the state and the life of the leaders, Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un.

Young-il Kim gave an impassioned account of how tough the regime is. He said, "to the outside world the scariest aspect of North Korea is the threat of its nuclear weapons but to those on the inside, even scarier is how society is tested to the limits of how it deals with human beings." He likened North Korea to an experiment, where they are testing how much they can control a human being. Young-il Kim went on to say "when you're in North Korea and you meet someone, you already know your whole conversation and what you can say about the government."

Young-il Kim explained that North Korean education is very strict and propaganda is important. You are taught all white people are Americans and Americans kill. In pre-school the first thing children learn to say is thank you to Kim Il-sung. Children are taught to revere their leaders and that if they do something wrong, they will get punished. All classrooms and households have pictures of the leaders. All men join the army for ten years and then the government chooses their future occupation. In the famine in the 90's, many people died and the sight of dead people on the streets was common. There were lots of public executions. Young-il Kim says, "if the government says you did something wrong, you did something wrong."

Young-il Kim is driven to improving the lives of people in North Korea. The purpose of visiting schools and universities in the UK is to raise awareness of the human rights issues that exist and to encourage the UK government to take a stronger stance on North Korea, to make the lives of the people better.

Notes on the speakers

North Korean defector **Young-il Kim** is the founder of the human rights organisation PSCORE. Since 2006 PSCORE has campaigned for Korean reunification, the protection of North Korean human rights and supported the integration of defectors into South Korea. In 2015 PSCORE Europe was established and works closely with the UK's North Korean community. www.pscore.org

John Everard served in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for 27 years, including as ambassador to Belarus, Uruguay and finally to North Korea (2006-2008). After retiring he was a visiting Fellow at Stanford University, and then coordinated the UN Security Council's Panel of Experts on North Korea for 18 months. He currently lectures, writes and broadcasts on North Korea and on international affairs.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Everard_\(diplomat\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Everard_(diplomat))