

1 Ekwan E. Rhow - State Bar No. 174604
erhow@birdmarella.com
2 Naeun Rim - State Bar No. 263558
nrin@birdmarella.com
3 Christopher Jumin Lee - State Bar No. 322140
clee@birdmarella.com
4 BIRD, MARELLA, BOXER, WOLPERT, NESSIM,
DROOKS, LINCENBERG & RHOW, P.C.
5 1875 Century Park East, 23rd Floor
Los Angeles, California 90067-2561
6 Telephone: (310) 201-2100
Facsimile: (310) 201-2110

7 Attorneys for Relator
8 Christopher Philip Ahn

9 **UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**
10 **CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA, WESTERN DIVISION**

12 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

13 Plaintiff

14 v.

15 CHRISTOPHER PHILIP AHN,

16 Relator.

CASE NO. 2:19-cv-5397 FLA (JPR)

REDACTED

**DECLARATION OF
CHRISTOPHER PHILIP AHN**

[Filed concurrently with Relator's
Opposition To Extradition Filed By The
United States; Declaration of Naeun
Rim; Declaration of Christopher Jumin
Lee]

Date: April 9, 2021
Time: 10:00 a.m.
Courtroom: 690

Assigned to Hon. Jean Rosenbluth, U.S.
Magistrate Judge

22
23
24
25 **REDACTED**
26
27
28

DECLARATION OF CHRISTOPHER PHILIP AHN

I, Christopher Philip Ahn, declare as follows:

1. I have personal knowledge of the facts set forth herein, which are known by me to be true and correct. If called as a witness, I could and would competently testify.

2. I was born in Southern California and raised by my United States Air Force veteran father to not only be proud of my Korean heritage but also grateful for the opportunities that America had given our family to become successful and live comfortably. Growing up, my grandmother would tell me stories about how she and her family were rescued by American soldiers during the Korean war and how America saved South Korea from North Korean aggression. These and other experiences in my life inspired me to enlist in the Marines, where I served for six years before being honorably discharged. My time in the military included a deployment to Iraq, where I served in military intelligence.

3. I met Adrian Hong in a social setting for the first time through mutual friends in 2009. I knew of Adrian as a human rights activist who was committed to advancing human rights in North Korea. He was a proponent of coordinating an organized effort to empower North Koreans to take control of their own society by finding ways to enable them to communicate with each other and with the outside world. At the time I met him, he was already well-known for helping many North Koreans escape from the regime. He had just become a TED Fellow and was often featured in publications about human rights issues.

4. Over the coming years, I stayed in contact with Adrian based on our shared interest in North Korean human rights. He started an organization called Cheollima Civil Defense, which later became Free Joseon. On a few occasions, Adrian called me and ask me to help on specific tasks related to helping with North Korean defections. Those periodic tasks were the extent of my involvement with the group.

1 5. Because North Koreans who live abroad are constantly surveilled,
2 helping them escape safely takes planning and coordination. My involvement
3 usually entailed making travel arrangements for people, escorting them from one
4 place to another, and making sure they ended up at the next leg of their intended
5 destination. I was never told the entire plan, which I understood to be for safety
6 reasons. It was common for me to be coordinating with people I was meeting for the
7 first time and whose names I would never learn. I was grateful for these
8 opportunities to make a small difference. Once my task was over, I would return to
9 my normal life in America, which revolved around my family and my work.

10 6. Throughout this time, I never had any reason to believe that Adrian or
11 his organization were involved in forcing anyone to defect against their will.
12 Whenever I was called upon to assist, it was always to facilitate the defection of
13 someone who had reached out to Adrian for help.

14 7. I came to believe that Adrian was working in conjunction with the
15 United States government and other governments for these missions. In 2011, while
16 I was visiting Washington D.C., I attended a meeting between Adrian and several
17 U.S. government officials. During this meeting, Adrian and the U.S. officials spoke
18 collaboratively about ways to further empower North Koreans and improve
19 defection efforts. It made sense to me that the complicated and sometimes high-
20 profile defections Adrian was facilitating could only be done with the knowledge
21 and authorization of various governments. This belief was confirmed in 2017, when
22 two agents from the United States Central Intelligence Agency showed up in a
23 different country to assist me in the process of helping several North Koreans
24 proceed to their next destination during a highly sensitive defection.

25 8. On the morning of February 22, 2019, I traveled to Madrid at Adrian's
26 request. I was not told what the task was until I arrived on the ground, which was
27 standard based on my past experiences. When I got there, Adrian explained [REDACTED]
28 [REDACTED] had asked

1 for help defecting [REDACTED]. Adrian also told me that [REDACTED]
2 [REDACTED] wanted to defect, but [REDACTED]
3 [REDACTED].
4 Adrian said [REDACTED] had asked us to stage the defection as a kidnapping to protect
5 against any retaliation.

6 9. I was aware that defectors, especially diplomats, are terrified that their
7 actions will result in retaliation against their family in North Korea and that this fear
8 is used to hold them hostage while they are abroad. I was also aware that the news
9 had reported just days ago that North Korea had repatriated the daughter of Jo Sung
10 Gil, the former North Korean ambassador to Italy who defected in late 2018. Based
11 on this context, I believed Adrian when he told me that [REDACTED]
12 had consented to us staging this mission as an involuntary kidnapping. Based on my
13 prior experience, I had no reason to believe that Adrian would ask me to force
14 anyone to defect or physically harm North Korean refugees against their will.

15 10. Contrary to what has been reported in the media, I was not asked to go
16 to Madrid for any expertise in military combat. I have no special combat training
17 other than the standard training I received after enlisting in the Marines. Adrian
18 asked me to be there to help keep [REDACTED] calm if [REDACTED] started to panic.
19 Defecting can be frightening for North Koreans when they become paranoid that
20 they will be found out. I was often tasked with the role of acting as a communicator
21 and calming people down in these situations because I had experience being
22 responsible for the care and safety of others in high intensity situations during my
23 deployment to Iraq.

24 11. Knowing North Korea to be a surveillance state, we had every
25 expectation that the embassy would be covered with security cameras and that the
26 North Korean government would be able to see everything we were doing. I
27 personally did not carry any weapons, but I was aware that the group had weapons.
28 My understanding was that the purpose of these items, which included fake guns,

1 was to make the “kidnapping” look real, not to hurt anybody. [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]

3 12. When we arrived at the embassy, one of the North Korean officials let
4 Adrian in and left the door open. I believed this had been done on purpose to allow
5 us to enter. We then entered the embassy, and several members of our group went
6 through the motions of tying people up. My right hand was fractured, so I did not
7 participate in staging any restraining. I did not hit anyone or commit any violence or
8 take any property while in the embassy. Based on what I saw, the others were taking
9 great pains to make the restraining look real without actually hurting anyone. I
10 believed any resistance from the North Koreans was being performed due to North
11 Korean surveillance.

12 13. A little less than an hour after we arrived, the Spanish police rang the
13 doorbell. Adrian went to the door to speak to them, and they told us a woman had
14 jumped out of the window and reported a disturbance at the embassy. This was the
15 first time we learned about this. None of us had seen the woman or known she
16 jumped out of the window. The police left after a few minutes. After this incident,
17 the energy in the embassy changed, and the North Koreans grew increasingly
18 distressed.

19 14. Adrian and a few others [REDACTED]. I did not go
20 with them and did not hear what was discussed. I waited for them for several hours
21 and grew concerned. The phone in the embassy kept ringing during this time. The
22 ringing of the phone seemed to terrify the North Koreans, who were viscerally upset
23 and seemed to be convinced the phone ringing was proof that they were all being
24 monitored.

25 15. Eventually, Adrian came out and told me that [REDACTED] had changed his
26 mind and did not want to go through with the defection. The visit from the police
27 and the phone ringing had alarmed him, and [REDACTED] now believed that North Korean
28 state security knew what was going on. [REDACTED]

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

[REDACTED]

16. [REDACTED].

I got in one of these cars, and we departed the embassy. At the time we left, it was dark, and I did not notice any police cars outside.

17. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] As we were leaving, I understand someone from the group sent an email to the Spanish government to let them know [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

18. I returned to my home in California without incident. I learned from Adrian that he had spoken to the FBI about what happened. He asked if I would be willing to speak to them, and I said yes. In mid-March, the FBI came to my home to interview me about what happened in Madrid. Sometime afterwards, the FBI called me and warned me that there were credible threats of death against me from North Korean agents, and that I should be careful. I learned that Adrian also received this warning, and that is why he took his family into hiding. These events happened before we knew the United States had issued warrants for our arrest.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.



CHRISTOPHER PHILIP AHN