



Korean-Americans including Hyung Jin Moon made condolence trip to Pyongyang via inter-Korean border

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Three Korean-Americans crossed the heavily fortified border into North Korea in December to pay their respects to the late North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, an official said Friday.

Moon Hyung-jin, the president of the Unification Church, offered condolences by visiting the Kumsusan Memorial Palace in Pyongyang where Kim's body was laid out in a glass coffin before a state funeral.

Moon, the youngest son of Unification Church founder Rev. Moon Sun-myung, was accompanied by Park Sang-kwon, the president of Pyeonghwa Motors, an inter-Korean joint venture in the North, and Joo Dong-moon, the president of The Washington Times. Both companies are owned by the church.

North Korea's state media reported their trip at that time and the three were initially thought to have traveled to Pyongyang via China. There is a regular flight service between the two communist countries.

The South Korean official, however, revealed Friday that the three crossed the inter-Korean border on Dec. 24 before heading to Pyongyang. Any trip to the North via the land border requires the South Korean government's approval.

South Korea had not disclosed their trip via the land border out of apparent concern that it could lead to a public backlash.

South Korea did not send an official mourning delegation to Pyongyang. Seoul only approved a condolence trip by private delegations led by two high-profile South Korean women who have ties with North Korea.

The revelation came a day after the North urged South Korea to offer an apology over its attitude toward Kim's death as a key condition to resuming stalled bilateral talks.

"Are the South Korean authorities ready to deeply repent of their crimes concerning the great loss to the Korean nation and make apologies for them?" the North's powerful National Defense Commission asked in a questionnaire to South Korea.