

Crisis in North Korea deserves greater awareness



Chris Boning

This is about people dying. Those are words spoken by Maxine Wolfe, a member of the legendary AIDS activist organization ACT UP, but I'm going to borrow them for this column.

On Sunday, I attended a screening of the film "Crossing," the moving story of a North Korean man whose journey to China on a search for medication for his sickly wife goes horribly awry. "Crossing" was sponsored by both the University and Kirksville High School chapters of Amnesty International in conjunction with Liberty in North Korea, a human rights organization working to bring

justice to the suffering citizens of that country.

The representatives from LiNK, who drove to Kirksville from their headquarters in California, said the film was based on interviews with 100 North Korean refugees, although they warned those in attendance that what is depicted in the film is actually much tamer than what can, and usually does, happen to individuals fleeing North Korea.

This disclaimer did not make the film any less difficult to watch, and I found myself peering at my shoes during a scene in which a soldier beats a pregnant woman and a scene showing the gory results of a well-intentioned remedy the protagonist's son devised to help an ailing friend.

Still, none of this compared to LiNK representatives' accounts after

the film about their experiences working with the organization. One of these individuals, who has been to North Korea to help translate for refugees, said food is so hard to come by that people have been known to practice cannibalism and sometimes sell human meat in the marketplace.

I contemplated leaving the room at this point as I felt the bile rising from my stomach. However, I could not even stand up because while I felt nauseous, I also felt immobilized — mobilized by disgust and helplessness. I was simply overwhelmed by the suffering happening in a country that for so long has existed in my mind as a sort of dead, blank spot lingering on the other side of the world.

North Korea is seldom mentioned in the Western media unless it is

in the context of nuclear weapons development, but what really should be capturing our attention is how few people there have basic rights and freedoms, or on a more fundamental level, how few people in North Korea have enough food to eat.

Indeed, the United Nations World Food Programme noted that about 6.5 million North Koreans, nearly a quarter of the population, are short of food, and that widespread malnutrition has "probably left an entire generation of children physically and mentally impaired," according to the LiNK Web site. In fact, one LiNK representative who was present Sunday said the North Korean government recently had to change the height requirement for the military because the population is literally shrinking from malnutrition. The reason for the food shortage is because the North Korean government has imposed agricultural policies that have led to over-farming, an effect of which is lower grain yield, according to the LiNK Web site.

Excuse my turn of phrase, but there also is a shortage of human rights in North Korea: At least 200,000 political prisoners, many of whom will die, are being held captive in concentration camps operated by the government, and the rights of free speech, press, assembly, emigration, worship and due process are practically unknown there, according to the LiNK Web site.

For those who are interested in doing something about the crisis in North Korea, an easy step would be to find out even more information and spread awareness. Organizations can request to host screenings of "Crossing," and it's always possible to donate to LiNK or similar groups such as the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, or the Citizen's Alliance for North Korean Human Rights.

Whatever it is, just do something. Because this is about people dying.

Chris Boning is a junior communication studies major from St. Louis, Mo.

Criminalizing "sexy texting" offers no solutions for teens



Jackie Gonzalez

For the technologically oblivious, "sexting" essentially means "sexy texting" — anything from a sexually explicit text message to some nude photos sent via e-mail. A national survey found that 39 percent of teenagers have participated in this sexting trend, according to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, with 20 percent having sent nude or semi-nude photos of themselves to significant others.

Lately the court system has been dealing with attempts to set a precedent to thwart this kind of behavior among children, as many refer to sexting as child pornography.

Monday, a judge prevented a Pennsylvania prosecutor from incriminating three Pennsylvania teens with child pornography charges for having sexually suggestive photos of themselves on their

cell phones. Although the prosecutors agreed to drop charges if they enrolled in a "re-education" program, the girls claimed that this was a violation of their First Amendment rights.

When we approach sexting as a crime, we are missing the point of child pornography laws: to protect children.

By treating sexting like child pornography instead of utilizing laws to protect children from abuse by others as intended, the courts are punishing children for past mistakes.

I'm using the term "child" only in the sense of the law. But really, let's stop referring to 17-year-olds as children. Most people are well aware of the rapid sexualization of adolescents. In 2007, there was the story about sixth graders in Indianapolis having sex in a classroom. In February, there was the story of the 13-year-old British boy becoming a father, impregnating a 16-year-old girl when he was only 12. Just a few clicks on MySpace and you can find dozens of pages covered in sexually explicit photos from obviously very young girls.

The point is that teenagers shouldn't

be tried as adults in a courtroom when their decisions reek of naïveté, childishness and irresponsibility. In a March 30 article in the USA Today, the attorney on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union, which is now defending the Pennsylvania teenagers, said the girls "didn't distribute these photos. They've been victimized."

Isn't it funny how photos that apparently were never sent to anyone get spread around the Internet? Clearly, there is a hint of dishonesty within this statement. I'm sure this is a typical reaction to finding nude or raunchy photos of yourself online.

As a result, these "children" are victims of their own stupidity. They are being punished for having gossipy friends, boyfriends with the need to brag or a nasty breakup. What about the constitutional right to privacy? For these teenagers, as long as there was no intent to distribute their photos, this is a private matter. And for those who do send pictures or texts to significant others, the fact that there seems to be an assumption that no third party will be involved should be related to one's right to privacy as well.

Instead, we need to look beyond punishing these kids and move to education and awareness, not only of the hazards of being so sexually open as a young girl. There needs to be some way to educate teenagers that the consequences of sending a nude photo can and will go beyond the act itself.

Sexing shouldn't be reviewed with the same scrutiny as child pornography, but it still needs to be looked at from a psychological standpoint. The act of sexting and its further implications are likely to be overlooked by youth, and will continue to be disregarded until adolescents are re-educated in the non-mandatory, open-discussion sense. Punishments will only further the interests of something so taboo. Come on, we were all kids once.

Jackie Gonzalez is a senior communication major from San Diego, Calif.

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Tru Rants

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Why should I have to pay a \$30 graduation fee to a university I have already paid close to \$25,000 to? Way to go, Truman!



Why on earth is it so hard to graduate from this place? I finish one requirement just to have two more thrown at me. All I want to do is get out of here.

Ethical treatment of pets benefits animals, citizens



Zach Vicars

As I was driving through the snow Saturday, I saw something that almost made me slide off the road: a young golden retriever shivering violently, tethered to a three-foot chain.

I got out of the car, trudged through the snow and went to check on the dog. He was sopping wet and ice crystals were forming on his coat. I noticed that he had wound up his chain, so I loosened it, allowing him just enough slack to take shelter in his dog house. I felt as if I'd done my good deed for the day, but rage welled up in me that someone could treat an animal in that way.

The idealist in me wanted to unclip that dog from his chain and carry him into the back of my truck, taking him to a home where he would be kept warm, fed and loved, instead of left out in the cold with no food, water or attention. That seemed like the just, ethical decision to make. I realized, however, that such action would not solve the problem, because as tragic as this case of injustice was, it is far from isolated. The truth is, if you walk just a few blocks from campus, you'll see animals that are chained, caged or allowed to roam freely without supervision. Often they are left out for extended periods of time and are seemingly neglected.

For those of you who have little pity

for our four-legged friends, you must understand that such hapless treatment is not only unjust and cruel to the animals, it also is a danger to citizens.

While I was riding my bike just last week, a pit bull approached me and jumped up on me. The owner came rushing after her dog, panting and apologizing. I had no problem dealing with the animal, but I imagine that if the dog had encountered a young child, the owner might have owed much more than an apology.

Clearly, there is a pattern of behavior in Kirksville that immediately needs to be addressed. And this behavior does not relate to the animals themselves but to their irresponsible owners.

The first course of action is for well-meaning citizens to get involved. It's important for responsible pet owners to model the proper way to care for an animal. If you have a dog, take him on a walk through town, demonstrating how easy it is and the reward that one gets from providing for an animal's needs. Or, if you don't own a dog, take time out to volunteer at the local Humane Society. These neglected animals need people willing to play with them — maybe you'll even get attached enough to adopt an abandoned pet.

The second and most important step to providing a safe, vibrant community for people and animals is to make sure that the legislation set forth to protect animals is in fact put into action.

At this point, the conservative in me begins to lurch in repulsion. Normally I would be completely opposed to governmental legislation deciding how a person deals with his or her property, but in the case of animals — in the

case of living beings — I'm willing to make an exception. I believe it is the government's responsibility to make sure people treat their animals ethically or have them taken away.

It is completely unacceptable for people to lock their animals up, leave them out in the cold or not provide them with the basic needs of food and water. Such people should not have procured an animal in the first place and should not be allowed to continue mistreating a living, breathing being. In these cases, it's important that people of authority confiscate the animals and take them to a place where they can be given proper care.

Although I'm not willing to go so far as to encourage readers to kidnap chihuahuas and Boston terriers while the owners are away at work, I do challenge readers to report signs of animal abuse or neglect. If a dog is constantly making noise, roaming the streets unattended or left chained outside overnight, call animal control and make a report. You can only do good by making that call. The pattern of behavior is unhealthy for both owner and animal.

It's sad, however, that the situation has come to this. If the world ran the way it should, the conscience of animal owners would not allow them to treat their dogs or cats in such unethical ways. But because we live in a world where people act irrationally and immorally at the drop of the hat, it's important that sensible people look out for the animals — and other creatures — that are not in a position to help themselves.

Zach Vicars is a freshman physics major from St. Louis, Mo.

French strikes provide lesson in political activism



Megan Klco

If you attended your lecture class this morning, you are better off than approximately 45 percent of French university students. University staff and students throughout France have been on strike since early January after a policy shift imposed by President Sarkozy changed professors' professional status and instituted a planned 200 job cuts, according to an article in The Guardian.

The university strikers are a weekly presence on the streets of Aix. The strike has manifested

itself in everything from halted classes, to refusal to return student grades, to street marches and demonstrations. During one protest, they actually taught classes with whiteboards and microphones out on the main street of Aix, completely blocking pedestrian traffic.

Professors aren't the only ones raising a hubbub. Strikes against Sarkozy's economic policies have affected airports, railways and sea-ports. The two nationwide "general strikes" that have taken place since January manifested themselves in almost every major French city.

As an American, all of this protest has taken some getting used to. I've raised a picket sign in front of court steps in my day,

but such widespread and well-organized dissent is completely foreign to me. When I spoke to one demonstrator about the strikes at the university, she tried to explain to me delicately that the French constitution grants its citizens the right to protest.

In the U.S., mobilization rarely makes it further than a fiery Facebook petition.

I honestly was offended when I couldn't seem to communicate that we have the same right in the States, we just don't use it with the same intensity and frequency. Aren't we supposed to be the land of the free and the home of the brave? And here this French woman was telling me Americans don't stand up for their rights. Was this lady calling me a sissy?

But the more I consider my generation's political apathy, the more

I have to side with my new French friends. Watching students my age organize street marches and demonstrations to protect the quality of their public education rings home my American generation's inability to mobilize.

In the U.S., youth political dissent shares more in common with street graffiti scribbles of "Sarcozizi" ("zizi" being French slang for a part of the male anatomy) than with organized demonstrations. We're quick to poke a joke or two at our leaders' expense, but our mobilization rarely makes it further than a fiery Facebook petition.

That's not to say that political action among our peers is unheard of. The students who took part in Storm the Capital in February are proof of our power in numbers, and they should be applauded for taking it upon themselves to protect

and improve higher education. Nor am I suggesting that the French and American political situations are one and the same — they aren't. It would be impossible with my limited understanding of the French political system to compare it accurately to our own.

But, having finally rid ourselves of the most unpopular president in modern U.S. history, in the midst of a misled and failing war effort and the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, I wonder: Where is all the outrage? We students will be graduating in the next few years into a job market that's at its worst in decades. More than ever, these are our lives and our futures in the hands of state and national leaders. Shouldn't we have a hand in protecting them?

Megan Klco is a senior painting major from Liberty, Mo.