

**NEW SATELLITE  
IMAGES SHOW  
BLURRING OF  
POLITICAL PRISON  
CAMP AND VILLAGES  
IN NORTH KOREA**

**AMNESTY  
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**Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 3 million supporters, members and activists in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.**

**Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.**

**We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and public donations.**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the ascension of Kim Jong Un as the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) in December 2011, there have been no noticeable improvements in the human rights situation. The North Korean government continues to engage in the systematic violation of almost the entire range of human rights. The establishment of an independent, robust Commission of Inquiry to investigate the grave, systematic and widespread human rights violations in North Korea — including crimes against humanity—is of the utmost need and urgency. As the UN Human Rights Council enters its 22<sup>nd</sup> session, Amnesty International calls on member states to support a Resolution establishing an independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate these serious human rights violations in North Korea.

The North Korean government has consistently failed to cooperate with the UN human rights mechanisms, including UN Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures. Amnesty International, like other international human rights organizations and monitors, is consistently denied access to North Korea.

In order to circumvent the unwillingness of the authorities to allow human rights investigators access, Amnesty International and others have used remote sensing tools to corroborate the information received by them. The satellite imagery has provided telltale signs of serious human rights violations in North Korea, including the use and expansion of notorious political prison camps (*Kwanliso*).<sup>1</sup>

Amnesty International commissioned satellite imagery analysis of the Ch'oma-Bong valley, 70km north-northeast of the North Korean capital, Pyongyang. The analysis demonstrates increased security in the form of controlled access points, raising of guard towers and construction of a perimeter in the vicinity of *Kwanliso* 14.

Analysis of new satellite images shows the North Korean government is blurring the lines between its *kwanliso* and the surrounding population.

## 2. FACILITIES OF TORTURE, NEAR SLAVERY, AND COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT

Hundreds of thousands of people—including children—are held in *Kwanliso* and other detention facilities in North Korea, where they are subject to grave, systematic and widespread human rights violations, such as forced hard labor, denial of detainee's food quota as punishment, torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Many of those held in political prison camps have not committed any crime, but are relatives of those deemed unfriendly to the regime, and are detained as a form of collective punishment.

In 2011, Amnesty International collected testimonies of former detainees and prison guards at prison camps in North Korea to obtain information about conditions and treatment within these detention facilities. Prisoners from the Yodok political prison camp (*Kwanliso* No. 15) told Amnesty International that inmates are forced to work in slave-like conditions and are frequently subjected to torture and other inhuman treatment. All those interviewed had witnessed public executions. In 2011, working with the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Amnesty International used satellite imagery to corroborate and demonstrate the significant increase in the scale of the Yodok *Kwanliso*. The prison camp is home to around 50,000 men, women, and children facing brutal conditions.

The government continues to deny the existence of political prison camps.

## 3. SUSTAINED AND SYSTEMATIC VIOLATIONS OUTSIDE CAMPS

While over a hundred thousand people face appalling human rights violations within the system of *Kwanliso* in North Korea, life for the ordinary

population also remains dominated by extreme forms of repression, food crisis, and the persistent threat of detention in the system of prison camps. Freedom of expression is virtually non-existent in North Korea, and there are severe restrictions on the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of association that are believed to have been imposed to prevent challenges to the government during a period of leadership transition.

North Korean citizens face heavy restrictions on travel, both abroad and within the country. Those who violate travel restrictions face severe punishment. These restrictions on movement are enforced in the context of a severe and persistent food crisis in North Korea, which has partly led to widespread malnutrition and food deprivation.

## 4. NEW SATELLITE IMAGERY ANALYSIS

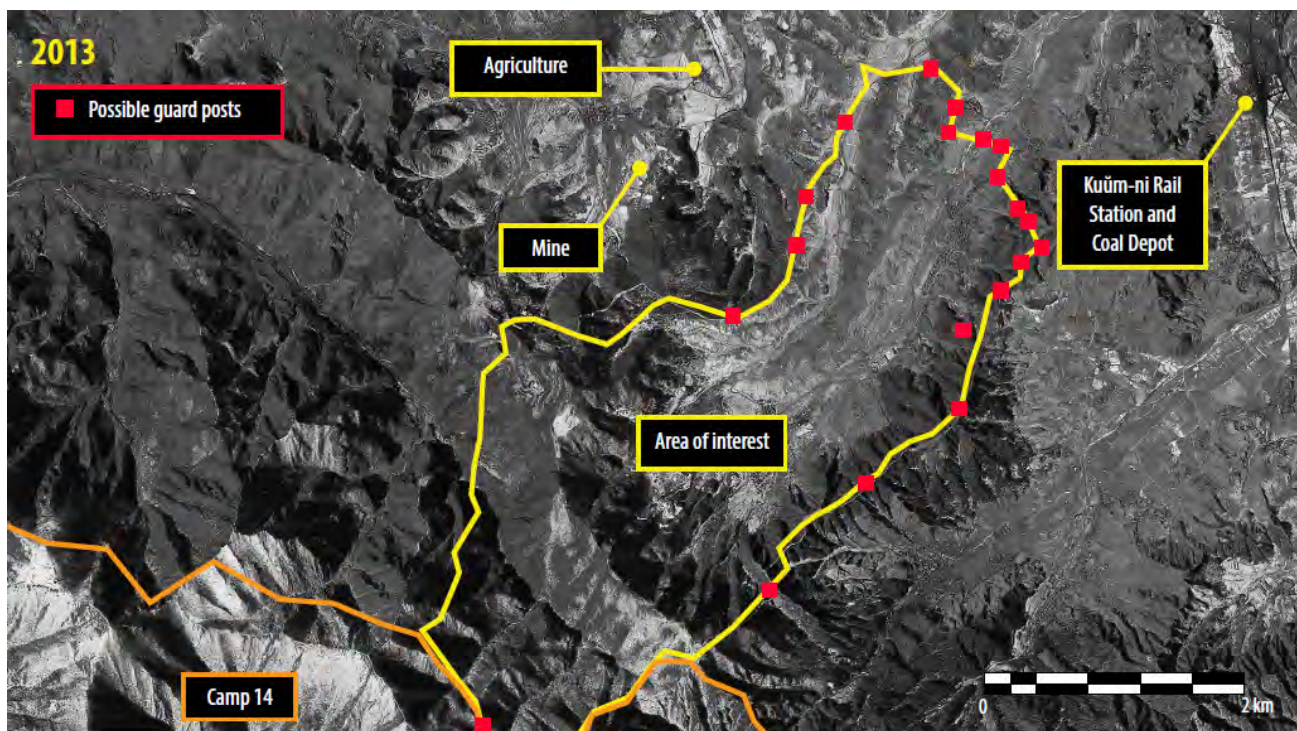
In response to speculation<sup>2</sup> of the construction of a new North Korean political prison camp 70km north-northeast of Pyongyang, Amnesty International's Science for Human Rights program commissioned satellite imagery acquisition and analysis of the area adjacent to *Kwanliso* 14 located in Kaechun, South Pyongan Province.

Satellite imagery taken from 2006 to February 2013 was examined to determine the nature of observed activity in a valley northwest of *Kwanliso* No. 14. The commercial satellite company DigitalGlobe examined the areas for features that would suggest a new prison camp and provided information on characteristics of the area and its facilities requested by Amnesty International.

Over the period, the valley experienced an observable increase in security. A 20km perimeter was established, encircling the Choma-Bong valley, sharing over 3km of its eastern border with *Kwan-li-so* No. 14. By 2010, the full perimeter was established, with 20 probable guard posts erected.

The perimeter is constructed in most places of simple posts, and other demarcation. The perimeter (perimeter noted in yellow) in total, probable new guard posts, and its position in the valley (and position relative to *Kwanliso* 14) can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1 © DigitalGlobe 2013



DigitalGlobe Panchromatic Imagery, February 7, 2013, 39 38 02 N, 125 59 52 E

In 2008, the first entrances to the Choma-bong valley with a check point was observed, with expansion of the entrance in 2010, 2011, and in 2013 to include a guard station, new buildings, and an entrance arch (Fig. 2)

Figure 2 © DigitalGlobe 2013



DigitalGlobe Panchromatic Imagery, April 10, 2008, 39 38 57 N, 123 58 23 E

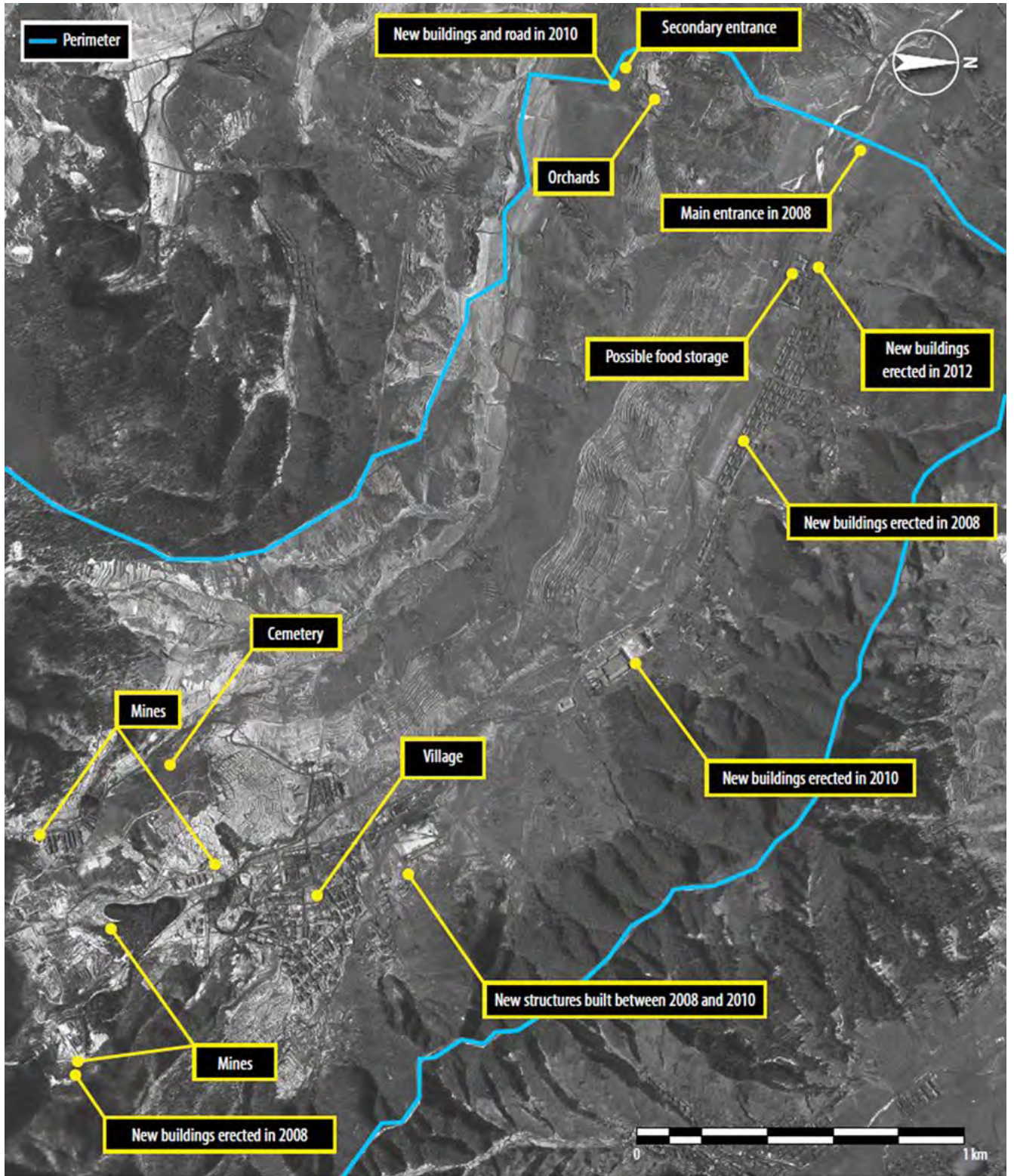


DigitalGlobe Panchromatic Imagery, February 7, 2013, 39 38 57 N, 123 58 23 E



Figure 3 shows the area most populated within the perimeter (perimeter noted in blue).

*Figure 3 © DigitalGlobe 2013*





Over the period, marginal increases in mining were observed, as well as construction of new buildings that appear to house workers (Fig. 4). With the construction of new buildings and mining-associated housing, the population could have increased by 750-1500 people.

**Figure 4 © DigitalGlobe 2013**



DigitalGlobe Panchromatic Imagery, April 10, 2008, 39 38 44 N, 125 59 02 E



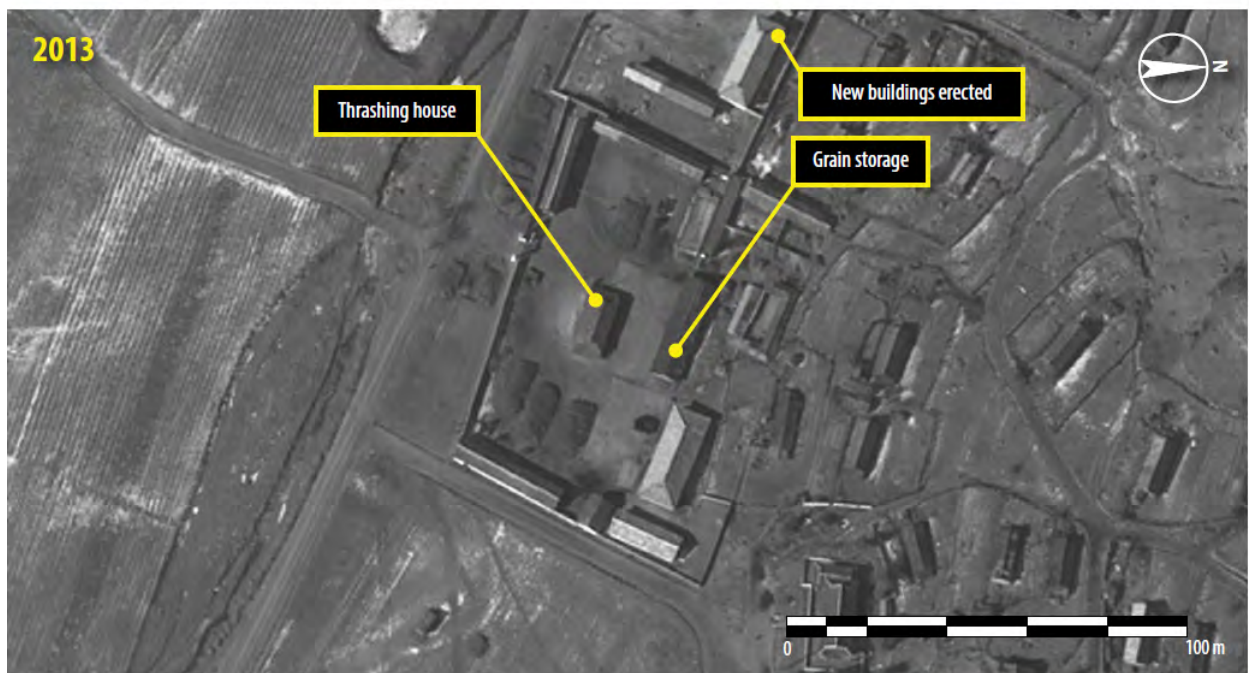
DigitalGlobe Natural Color Imagery, September 23, 2011, 39 38 44 N, 125 59 02 E

In imagery secured on 7 February, 2013, new buildings and a new gated facility were observed adjacent to a potential existing food storage area within the controlled perimeter (Fig. 5).

**Figure 5 © DigitalGlobe 2013**



DigitalGlobe Natural Color Imagery, September 23, 2011, 39 38 45 N, 125 58 50 E



DigitalGlobe Natural Color Imagery, February 7, 2013, 39 38 45 N, 125 58 50 E



## 4. IMPLICATIONS AND CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Based on the satellite imagery analysis and patterns of the widespread, systematic and grave human rights violations that persist throughout North Korea, Amnesty International believes there is reason for concern for the population within the perimeter of Choma-bong valley. The analysis demonstrates increased security in the form of controlled access points, raising of guard towers and construction of a perimeter in the vicinity of *kwanliso* 14. The activity points to a tightening in the control of movement of the local population adjacent to *kwanliso* 14, thus muddying the line between those detained in the *kwanliso* and the valley's inhabitants. This raises fears for the current conditions the population within the perimeter face and the North Korean government's future intentions with regard to them.

Amnesty International notes that probable guard towers identified by DigitalGlobe analysts are concentrated toward the populated area of the valley and the controlled access points, rather than toward the shared perimeter with political prison camp No. 14, indicating their use is more likely for confinement or monitoring of the population within the valley, rather than for security purposes related to prison camp No 14. Far from dismantling the infrastructure of widespread and systematic imprisonment and other human rights violations that has persisted in North Korea in the form of the horrendous prison camps, there appears to be an increase of control and repression even for those outside these camps.

Further, the increases in mining activity observed by DigitalGlobe analysts, as well as the construction of new worker housing and a potentially corresponding increase in the worker population within the perimeter, raises concerns about the status of this population, whether they are being forced to work in the mines and the conditions in which they live and work.

The increased security in the form of controlled access points, raising of guard towers, construction of a perimeter in the vicinity of a *kwanliso* and the increased mining activity is cause for concern especially in the context of testimonies by survivors of *kwanliso* that have consistently claimed serious human rights violations such as forced hard labor, denial of detainee's food quota as punishment, torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment are imposed on the inmates within these facilities.

The creation of this orderly perimeter—along with the controlled access points and guard towers—blurs the lines between the tens of thousands who

suffer in North Korea's system of political prison camps – the *kwanliso* - and the rest of the population.

Amnesty International calls for unfettered access to the area for independent human rights monitors, including both the Choma-bong valley as well as *kwanliso*<sup>14</sup>.

Further, Amnesty International reaffirms its call for member states to adopt a resolution at the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council to establish an independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate the grave, systematic and widespread human rights violations in North Korea including the abysmal conditions in the *Kwanliso*.

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<sup>1</sup> “North Korea: Images reveal scale of political prison camps,” May 4, 2011. <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/north-korea-images-reveal-scale-of-political-prison-camps> (Accessed February 25, 2013)

<sup>2</sup> Melvin, Curtis. “Speculation time: A new kwan-li-so?.” North Korean Economy Watch (blog), January 18, 2013. <http://www.nkeconwatch.com/2013/01/18/speculation-time-a-new-kwan-li-so/> (Accessed February 25, 2013).

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