



A group of North Korean women in the streets of Dandong, China in March 2023 being overseen by a government minder. The use of such workers in China is in violation of United Nations sanctions. Photo: Living in North Korea/The Outlaw Ocean Project, March 2023

## High Liner, Sysco suspend ties with plant accused of using North Korea's forced labor program

The companies cut ties following an investigation that revealed workers faced 'pervasive sexual abuse' at seafood facilities.

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By [Rachel Sapin](#) 

Leading Canada-based seafood supplier High Liner Foods and US broadline distribution giant Sysco have both suspended their relationships with a Chinese processor that has been accused of using forced labor from North Korea at its facility.

The allegations, which were published recently by the Outlaw Ocean Project, showed that as recently as December there were between 50 to 70 North Korean workers at Dalian Haiqing Food Co. Ltd. in Dandong. High Liner Foods was the consignee for shipments of seafood, including pollock and cod, from Dalian Haiqing between August 2017 and August 2023, according to the Outlaw Ocean Project.

The nonprofit group said in publicly available email exchanges with High Liner, Trident and Sysco in January it has been conducting "on-the-ground" investigation's into the plant's workforce, noting Haiqing has been using state-sponsored North Korean workers since at least 2021.

Trident Seafoods has also stopped working with the supplier.

High Liner Vice President of Communications Jennifer Bell said in a response to being contacted about the issue in January, the company "met with the supplier on several occasions and received repeated written and verbal confirmations from the supplier that North Korean labor is not being used in their plants."

Dalian Haiqing has responded to the allegations, saying it does not employ "overseas North Korean Workers," according to email exchanges published between it and the Outlaw Ocean Project.

Bell said High Liner suspended operations with plant following the "disturbing nature of the allegations" that included correspondence with North Korean women who have worked for Haiqing.

Most of the North Korean workers in China are women, according to the Outlaw Ocean Project. In interviews for the investigation, they described a broad pattern of abuses including violence, debt bondage and pervasive sexual abuse by managers. Of 20 female North Korean workers interviewed for the investigation, 17 of them said they faced sexual assault by plant managers, including forced prostitution.

Last year, High Liner stopped working with Yantai Sanko Fisheries after Outlaw Ocean connected the company to the use of Uyghur forced labor in China to produce seafood.

According to trade records obtained by Outlaw Ocean Project, Sysco Central Texas Warehouse was the consignee for shipments of seafood from Dalian Haiqing between June 2018 and March 2021.

"Sysco instructed suppliers to suspend production of our products at all facilities associated with Dalian Haiqing Food as we investigate these allegations," Ramit Plushnick-Masti, Sysco's senior communications manager, told the nonprofit in January after being contacted about the allegations.

Sysco has already terminated its contract and relationship with China-based processing plant Shandong Haidu following the Outlaw Ocean Project's linking of the processor to forced labor.

As of February, the Outlaw Ocean Project has contacted over 160 companies – including processing plants, seafood importers, auditing firms and grocery stores – in connection with its investigation into North Korean workers at Chinese factories.

At least 15 seafood processing plants in Liaoning province near the border with North Korea have used over a thousand North Korean workers since 2017, according to the report.

They include Dandong Taifeng Foodstuff, Donggang Haimeng Foodstuff, Dandong Hailong Foodstuff, Donggang Xinxin Foodstuff, Dandong Taihua Foodstuff, Donggang Luyuan Food, Donggang Julong Food, Dandong Omeca Food, Dandong Jinlin Food, Donggang Jinhui Foodstuff, Donggang Yixing Food, Donggang Huiyuan Food, Dandong Galicia Seafood, Dandong Yuanyi Refined Seafoods and Dalian Haiqing Food.

At least 10 of the 15 plants have collectively shipped more than 120,000 tons of clams, salted pollock filets, squid and other types of seafood to more than 70 importers in the United States. (Copyright)

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