

December 16, 2019

Moon Jae-in
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RE: ROK's stance on human rights in North Korea

Dear President Moon Jae-in,

We are writing on behalf of 66 non-governmental organizations, coalitions, and 10 individuals from 22 different countries from Asia, Africa, South and North America, and Europe, regarding your government's increasing disengagement with ongoing human rights violations by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

First, we were baffled by the South Korean government's decision not to co-sponsor a resolution on November 14 on the human rights situation in North Korea during a vote at the UN General Assembly (UNGA)'s Third Committee. Secondly, we are concerned about your government's November 7 deportation of two North Korea fishermen accused of murder, despite the obligation of the Republic of Korea (ROK) to provide due process and to protect anyone who would be at substantial risk of torture or other serious human rights violations after repatriation.

On November 15, the South Korean foreign ministry stated that the decision to drop the co-sponsorship was based on considerations of the overall circumstances in the Korean peninsula. While the ministry said the government's concerns about the human rights situation in North Korea are unchanged, and vowed to "make efforts to substantially promote the human rights of the people of the DPRK," it added the South Korean government will do so "through [the promotion of] peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula."

Your government's strategy, however, risks sending a message to North Korea's government that their crimes will go unsanctioned, as Pyongyang might get the mistaken impression that the South Korean government is willing to overlook their illicit behavior in exchange for increased willingness to engage in the inter-Korean dialogue. There is no reason to let up on public criticism of human rights abuses. Dialogue and public human rights criticism are not mutually exclusive. We note that the improvement in human rights protections cannot take place just with the promotion of dialogue, cultural exchanges or development projects. We are also concerned by an approach that wrongly assumes achieving peace or improving inter-Korean cooperation depends on avoiding all official discussion of North Korean human rights violations. Stepping back from these necessary human rights discussions will only embolden those in North Korea's leadership who are responsible for the worst abuses.

The UN Security Council debates in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 on North Korea's human rights abuses highlighted the intrinsic connection between human rights abuses in North Korea and regional peace and security. The Council's abandonment of these debates is a flawed approach since any durable solution for the Korean peninsula will require addressing Pyongyang's repressive rights record.

On October 24, 2019, at the UN General Assembly, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in North Korea, Tomás Ojea-Quintana, urged states to explore avenues for constructive dialogue and at

the same time to stop the sidelining of human rights concerns during negotiations. He noted that “integrating fundamental human rights into the current negotiations is crucial for the sustainability of any agreement for denuclearization and peace for the Korean Peninsula and beyond.”

We agree. In our view, silence and inaction on human rights only encourage abuses. We urge you to:

1. Re-join the list of co-sponsoring member states on the Third Committee resolution on the situation of human rights in North Korea ahead of its expected passage later this month in a plenary meeting of the UN General Assembly.
2. Take corrective action and guarantee South Korea will protect the right not to be returned to torture and other ill-treatment. The South Korean government should investigate the deportation of the two North Korean fishermen, publicize its findings and hold accountable the officials who violated the basic human rights of the two fishermen.
3. Underline your government’s disappointment with the UN Security Council’s ongoing silence on the human rights situation in North Korea, pointing out that debates in the council offer a valuable opportunity to speak out about Pyongyang’s egregious abuses as a threat to international peace and security.

We are aware that the DPRK considers human rights criticism confrontational. It has denounced the UNGA resolution as a “politically motivated reckless provocation,” and made other similar statements about the upcoming UN Security Council debate. Capitulating to North Korea’s bluster and keeping silent, however, will not encourage improvements in human rights conditions in North Korea. On the contrary, we believe the only way to ensure long term improvements is if the North Korean government continuously hears the same message about the need for change—the message that the international community will never fully welcome North Korea unless it commits to and implements human rights reforms and begins cooperating with all human rights mechanisms at the United Nations.

Thank you for your consideration. We would be pleased to discuss these matters further with your staff.

Sincerely,

Groups

1969 KAL Abductees' Families Association	South Korea
ALTSEAN-Burma	Thailand
Amnesty International	
Arakan Rohingya National Organisation	UK
Asian Federation against Involuntary Disappearances	Philippines
Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons	Kashmir
Association for the Rescue of North Korea Abductees	Thailand
British-North Korean Escapee Community	UK
Centro para la Apertura y el Desarrollo de América Latina	Argentina
Christian Solidarity Worldwide	UK
Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights	South Korea
Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence	Indonesia
Committee for Human Rights in North Korea	USA
Conflict Victims' Society for Justice	Nepal
Defence of Human Rights	Pakistan
Democratic Leadership Institute	UK

Families of the Disappeared	Sri Lanka
Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance	Philippines
HAK Association	Timor Leste
Health and Human Rights Information	Norway
HHK_Catacombs	South Korea
Human Asia	South Korea
Human Rights in Asia	Japan
Human Rights Watch	
Human Rights Without Frontiers International	Belgium
Indonesian Association of Families of the disappeared	Indonesia
International Child Rights Center	South Korea
International Christian Concern	USA
International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea	
International Commission of Jurists	
International Parliamentarians' Coalition for North Korean Refugees and Human Rights	
Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights	USA
Jubilee Campaign	UK
Justice Access Point	Uganda
Justice For North Korea	South Korea
Kanagawa Association for The Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea	Japan
Kenya Human Rights Commission	Kenya
Korea for All	Japan
Korean War POW Family Association	South Korea
Lawyers Associates	Nepal
Lawyers for human rights and unification of Korea	South Korea
Liberty in North Korea	USA
Life Funds for North Korean Refugees	Japan
LUMEN	USA
Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights	South Korea
NK Watch	South Korea
No Chain	South Korea
No Fence	Japan
North Korea Freedom Coalition	USA
North Korea Strategy Center	South Korea
North Korean Human Rights Network	Japan
Now Action & Unity for Human rights	South Korea
Open North Korea	South Korea
People for Successful Corean Reunification	South Korea
Refuge pNan	South Korea
Rohingya Human Rights Network	Canada
SARAM - Stiftung für Menschenrechte in Nordkorea	Germany
South And North Development	South Korea

Stepping Stones	UK
The 88 Project	Vietnam
Transitional Justice Working Group	South Korea
Unification Academy	South Korea
Unification Media Group	South Korea
Unification Strategy Institution	South Korea
Women4Nonviolence in Peace+Conflict Zones	Norway
World Without Genocide	USA

Individuals

David Alton, Lord	Independent Crossbench Member of the House of Lords & Co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea
Janak Bahadur Raut	Conflict Victims of Nepal
Bikash Basnet	Human Rights Advocate, Nepal
Sonja Biserko	Former Commission of Inquiry (COI) member on the situation of human rights in the DPRK & current chair at the Helsinki Human Rights Committee in Serbia
Edita T. Burgos	Chairperson, Free Jonas Burgos Movement, Philippines
Marzuki Darusman	Former UN Special Rapporteur/Commission on Inquiry (COI) member on the situation of human rights in the DPRK
Aileen Diez-Bacalso	Secretary General, AFAD & Franco-German Prize for Human Rights Awardee 2019, Philippines
Irina Krasovskaya	President, We Remember-Belarus
Yanghee Lee, Ph.D.	UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar / Former Chairperson of UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
Tomás Ojea-Quintana	UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK

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