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NORTH KOREA: An exceptional report of Korea Future Initiative about religious persecution

Government raises 'strong concerns' about North Korea after report into horrific persecution

Christian Today (03.12.2020) – <https://bit.ly/33R7Jbt> – The Government has voiced “strong concerns” about religious persecution in North Korea after the release of a report documenting the horrific abuse of Christians and other people of faith in the hermit communist country.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon said reports from religious and human rights groups outside the country point to “severe punishment” for people of faith, including arrests, beatings and imprisonment in political camps.

“The UK continues to have strong concerns about the lack of freedom of religion or belief in North Korea,” Lord Ahmad said in a letter to Lord Alton.

He added that the evidence presented by a new report from the Korea Future Initiative (KFI) contains “disturbing accounts” of religious freedom violations in North Korea.

The report is based on 117 interviews with survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators of religious persecution between 1990 and 2019.

In total, 273 victims of religious freedom violations were identified by investigators, 215 of whom were Christians.

Women and girls accounted for nearly 60 per cent of documented victims. One victim was just three years old.

The report documented criminal charges for practising a religion, taking part in religious activities in China – where many North Koreans try to defect to – possessing religious items like a Bible, having contact with religious people,

attending places of worship, and sharing religious beliefs.

The victims faced arbitrary arrest, detention, interrogation, imprisonment, torture, sexual abuse, public trials and execution.

KFI said that 76 of the victims are still believed to be in the North Korean penal system.

“In each documented case, the religious adherence or association of the victim was not deemed incidental to the documented violations. It was considered by investigators to be fundamental,” the report reads.

“Factual findings contained in this report will undoubtedly be of concern to the international community.

“The right to religious freedom is inalienable, universal, and fundamental. It is a human right to which all North Koreans are inherently entitled.

“Threats to this freedom pose a danger not just to North Korean citizens, but to the common principle that every human is born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

The report details horrifying abuse. In one instance, a Christian was held in a 4ft by 3ft cage heated with electricity for 12 hours until he passed out. Even when unconscious, he was then beaten.

Elsewhere, the report documented forced abortions in which babies born alive were then suffocated to death. The women were then made to return to manual labour the day after the abortion without adequate rest or medicine.

In a foreward to the report, Il-lyong Ju, an exiled human rights advocate, called on the international community to help bring the perpetrators to justice.

“Religious freedom is a fundamental freedom for all humanity. Living in North Korea meant that I could never experience this freedom,” said Ju.

“We, the people of North Korea, instead experience two systems of violations that disable our humanity.

“First, we experience physical human rights violations. These strip us of agency over our own bodies. Second, we experience mental human rights violations. These force us to relinquish our inner-thoughts and beliefs.

“Those of us who do not yield to our persecutors must face the consequences, including the suffering of three-generations of our families.

“For this reason alone, religious freedom is a benchmark for all other freedoms in North Korea. Without religious freedom, there can be no other rights that allow us, the people of North Korea, to reclaim our humanity.”

Responding to the report, Lord Ahmad said that two entities

involved in administering the North Korean penal system were facing sanctions under the UK's new Global Human Rights sanctions regime – established in response to the Bishop of Truro's independent review into Christian persecution last year.

“Defending the right to freedom of religion or belief for all is a priority for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office,” said Lord Ahmad.

“The Korea Future Initiative's (KFI) new report contains disturbing accounts of violations of freedoms in North Korea, and we regard it as a valuable contribution towards ensuring that human rights violations in North Korea are documented for accountability and deterrence purposes.

“My officials would welcome the opportunity to discuss KFI's report with them in greater detail.”

Photo: Commuters make their way through a subway station visited by foreign reporters during a government organized tour in Pyongyang, North Korea October 9, 2015. REUTERS/Damir Sagolj.

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