

NORTH KOREA: North Korean Workers in Poland: Warsaw continues providing hard currencies to Pyongyang

Human Rights Without Frontiers urges Warsaw to stop providing hard currencies to North Korea and discourages private companies in Poland from hiring North Korean workers.

HRWF (09.10.2017) – On 18 September, HRWF denounced the exploitation of North Korean Workers by private companies in Poland at the OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw. North Korean workers earn roughly 120USD per month; Pyongyang confiscates the rest of their salaries to support for its nuclear program, according to a 115-page report from the Asian Center at the University of Leiden, headed by Prof. Remco Breuker (<http://leidenasiacentre.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/rapport-slaves.pdf>).

Despite increasing international protests, Poland continues to issue work permits to North Korean workers and in turn, provide hard currencies to Pyongyang, despite warnings by the United Nations. The Polish authorities admitted last year that about 550 North Korean workers were active on their territory, with a total of 400 workers recorded this year. They claim that they did not issue work visas in 2016-2017, but Prof. Remco Breuker disagrees with Polish assertions. “Their own statistics tell a different story,” Breuker remarked. (<https://www.mpips.gov.pl/analizy-i-raporty/cudzoziemcy-pracujacy-w-polsce-statystyki/>).

HRWF recommendations at the OSCE/ODIHR meeting

Considering that the UN Security Council recently voted

unanimously to impose strict new sanctions on North Korea in order to prevent Pyongyang from acquiring hard currencies, including through its overseas workers,

Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon the Polish state

- *to explain the contradiction between the findings of the Asian Center of the University of Leiden, which gives evidence that Poland issued again 187 new work permits to North Korean workers in 2016 and the official statement of Poland's Delegation to the OSCE HDIM saying in 2016 that no work permit had been issued to North Koreans that year.*
- *to stop granting new work visas to North Korean workers;*

Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon the OSCE to collect data from its Participating States regarding the issuance of work visas to North Korean citizens and the status of their workplace conditions.

Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon the European Commission to start a full investigation of the situation in Poland and then, if necessary, to move on to the next level and start an infringement procedure against Poland in line with the legal avenues at its disposal.

Official answer of the Polish authorities communicated to HRWF on 18 September 2017

“The Polish government does not take an active part in the process of hiring North Korean workers nor does it promote such practices. The existing cooperation is based on private companies' independent agreements.

According to our data, there are currently around 400 North Korean citizens working in Poland and this number is systematically decreasing. The government institutions, such

as the National Labour Inspectorate and the Border Guard, oversee their employment conditions and ensure the Polish laws are respected in their workplace. To that end, these institutions regularly inspect the companies where the DPRK nationals are employed.

It is important to stress that in 2017 and 2016 Poland did not issue any work visas to North Korean citizens.

Poland, similar to other EU countries, does not have systemic solutions prohibiting North Korean citizens (or citizens from any other country) to take up work in Poland. In view of the fact that a general ban on entering Poland and taking up work for specific nationalities would be discriminating, we supported an introduction of systemic measures within the UN framework.

We welcomed the UN resolutions 2371 and 2375 adapted in this regard. Until the resolutions have been transposed into the EU legislation, issuing of the work permits for North Korean citizens by the District Labour Offices has been put on hold.”

HRWF Comment

The responsibility of Poland in the exploitation of North Korean workers on its territory is indisputable:

- Poland needs to grant visas to North Koreans who want to work on its territory. Poland therefore does take an active part in that process.
- The ineffectiveness of the labour inspection in this particular issue has been repeatedly denounced by Polish media and other investigators.
- Poland shows bad faith by stating it would be discriminatory to reject work applications from North Koreans. Other EU countries stopped granting work visas when they were shamed and blamed publicly.

HRWF urges Poland to stop providing hard currencies to North

Korea and private companies in Poland to stop hiring North Korean workers.

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