

NORTH KOREA: Stand up for human rights

Don't disengage from human rights in North Korea.

HRW (17.12.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2rZDbEz> – The South Korean government should stop disengaging from ongoing human rights abuses by North Korea, a coalition of human rights and other groups said on December 16, 2019 in a joint open letter to South Korean president Moon Jae-in.

The International Coalition to Stop Crimes Against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK) and 76 nongovernmental groups, coalitions, and individuals from 22 countries, representing over 300 groups and individuals, said South Korea's recent decisions betray past efforts to push for human rights improvements for the North Korean people.

“President Moon Jae-in and his government are ignoring North Korea's grave human rights abuses in a misguided effort to mollify Kim Jong Un and improve relations with Pyongyang, but by doing so, they betray the long-suffering people of North Korea,” said Phil Robertson, Asia deputy director at Human Rights Watch. “President Moon should reevaluate this disturbing policy and reverse course before it's too late.”

In November, South Korea decided to end its past co-sponsorship of an annual resolution in the United Nations General Assembly condemning North Korea's rights record. The South Korean government also deported two North Korean

fishermen accused of killing 16 fellow crew members in the East Sea to face murder charges in North Korea. The deportation of criminal suspects from South Korea to North Korea is an unprecedented and shocking departure from previous practice, the coalition said. Serious concerns have been raised that the two men could face torture in detention, followed by the lack of a free and fair trial.

“President Moon Jae-in’s government is signaling to Pyongyang that South Korea’s priority is engagement in inter-Korean dialogue without any demands in return, even at the cost of overlooking severe crimes,” said Eun-Kyoung Kwon, secretary general at ICNK. “It is crucial that the South Korean government shows that it remains committed to the basic principles of protection of those most at risk in North Korea, and to do it needs to correct its current stance.”

The coalition urged President Moon to rejoin the resolution as a co-sponsor when member states vote on it at the General Assembly’s plenary session on December 18.

“If President Moon Jae-in really wants peace on the Korean peninsula, he cannot ignore the appalling human rights crisis in North Korea,” said Benedict Rogers, East Asia team leader at nongovernmental organization CSW. “Peace can only be achieved with justice, with an end to impunity, and with the basic rights and dignity of the people of North Korea respected and protected. It is essential to place discussion of human rights at the heart of engagement with North Korea and the human rights crisis in North Korea regularly on the agenda of the UN Security Council.”

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Advocates International Global Council

Asia Justice and Rights

Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances

Asian Human Rights & Humanity Association of Japan

Burma Partnership (Thailand)

Christian Lawyers Association for Paraguay

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

COMJAN (Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea) (Japan)

Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (USA)

Conectas (Brazil)

Council for Human Rights in North Korea (Canada)

David Hawk, Visiting Scholar, Columbia University, Institute for the Study of Human Rights, and author of Hidden Gulag

Free North Korea Radio (ROK) Freedom House (USA)

Han Voice (Canada)

HH Katakombs (ROK)

Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Without Frontiers (Belgium)

Inter-American Federation of Christian Lawyers

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

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NK Intellectual Solidarity (ROK)

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North Korea Freedom Coalition

Odhikar (Bangladesh)

Open North Korea (ROK)

People In Need (Czech Republic)

PSALT NK (Prayer Service Action Love Truth for North Korea)

PSCORE (ROK)

Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights (USA)

SARAM – Für Menschen in Nordkorea (Germany)

Students Alliance for Human Rights in North Korea (ROK)

Suzanne Scholte, Seoul Peace Prize Recipient & Defence Forum Foundation (USA)

The Simon Wiesenthal Center (USA)

The Society to Help Returnees to North Korea (Japan)

Tomoharu Ebihara

Tomoyuki Kawazoe, Representative, Kanagawa Association for The Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea / Member, Reporters Without Borders

World Without Genocide (USA)

Young Defectors' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (ROK)

Yuki Akimoto, Burmainfo (Japan)

NORTH KOREA: Why do North Koreans workers choose to be exploited by their own state abroad?

Paper presented on the occasion of the screening of "Dollar Heroes" at the European Parliament on 9 October()*

By Eun Kyoung Kwon, Director of Open North Korea and Secretary General of ICNK

HRWF (29.10.2018) – Over 100,000 citizens of the DPRK work in about 40 countries around the world including: Mongolia, Russia, Poland, Kuwait as well as China. Cumulatively, these workers earn approximately 900 million dollars a year.

North Korean overseas workers have to submit 70% to 95% of their earnings to the authorities in the form of 'state-assigned earnings' or a 'state fee.' They work over 8 hours a day, sometimes up to 20 hours according to former North Korean overseas workers.

Why do such many North Koreans come to work in foreign countries despite the fact that around 90% of their salaries will be confiscated by the state? In order to find this answer, we must investigate the system of forced labor in the

DPRK.

There is a law in North Korea which punishes the unemployed. Article 90 of the Administrative Punishment Law states that “those who do not take a job at a company where they have been dispatched to within 6 months, without fair reason, or those who do not report for duty at a company for over a month, will be sentenced to up to three months of forced labor in a labor-training camp (rodong dallyeondae). In serious cases, culprits may be sentenced to longer than three months.”

The North Korean economic system is, as everybody knows, a state-planned economy where enterprises, factories, and other workplaces must operate in accordance with the state economic plan, regardless of their realistic capacity. The salary system is also included in the state plan.

In fact, the state-designated monthly wage for most employees is around 2,000 North Korean won, only enough to purchase 500 grams of rice. Therefore, many North Korean people go to their workplaces not to earn a living but to avoid punishment for the crime of unemployment. No North Korean expects to receive a living wage from their company. Perversely, North Korean companies extort money and resources from their employees. It is how and why the companies exist.

Let's imagine how the North Korean people survive with 2,000 won of monthly wage, which is equivalent to 500 grams of rice. The solution used to be the food distribution system, but now it is markets. Through producing, selling, and circulating goods privately in markets, a North Korean can earn a living

wage. However, to work in markets, one must escape from duties at their assigned workplace. In order to avoid the punishment for unemployment, market operators pay monthly bribes to their employers. The amount of bribe is at over score times their monthly wage. About 30% of company employees pay bribes in order to attend to their private businesses.

These days, markets are home to thriving private businesses such as transportation, distribution, manufacturing and various other companies. But, working for these private businesses is not fully authorized as an official occupation in North Korea.

Many state-run enterprises and factories don't operate efficiently enough to make a profit, however, their role is to supervise and control employees' political beliefs. This is conducted through weekly self-criticism meetings and more than three times of political lectures for a month organized by the Workers Party committee. If an employee wants to skip such political activities, they must offer over 100,000 won per month in bribes to the company.

In addition, all workplaces are required to provide labor and resources for national construction projects. When a state-planned construction project is undertaken, employees of factories and enterprises across the country will be mobilized to provide labor for the project.

Laborers are mobilized for constructions through a systemized rotation process in a company. However, if you offer over 400,000 North Korean won a year, you can avoid the

mobilization. The monthly salary is around 2,000 won.

Therefore, it is poorer employees who are most likely to be mobilized for national construction projects. For the duration of the project, they will continue to receive insignificant remuneration from their companies but, more damagingly, be deprived of the opportunity to earn money through market activities for the entire duration of the construction project. There is no additional compensation.

In terms of resources for the construction, enterprises have to provide most of the construction materials, with the authorities only supplying cement, sand, and gasoline. The remaining necessary materials are the responsibility of the local employees to provide.

Since Chairman Kim Jong Un took office, the state has been actively pursuing construction projects. In Pyongyang, they built Scientists Street, Changkwang Street, and Ryeomyung Street and, in the northern city of Hyesan and Chongjin, new apartment complexes, and a few tourist resorts in a coastal city. For these projects, authorities do not appropriate a budget for labor and most construction materials, as they are the responsibility of enterprises and their employees.

There is another forced labor system, which is used also for major national construction projects and can be considered a contemporary form of a slavery. It is the permanent *dolgyeokdae*, a shock brigade or a military-style construction youth brigade. It is set up as a supplementary military service, but designed for meeting the labor needs of national

construction projects.

The structure and management of this dolgyeokdae brigade are almost the same as that of the People's Army. The dolgyeokdae is a formal alternative to military service, with a service period of seven years, as opposed to 10 year service period for the army.

Technically, members of dolgyeokdae receive a salary, though it is around one third of normal workers' salaries. However, of the 30 former dolgyeokdae members I have met in South Korea, none received salaries during their service, for almost ten years.

Due to the dire working situation and high intensity labor requirement, only the most vulnerable class of people are dispatched to dolgyeokdae after their graduation from high school.

To summarize, a workplace of North Korean workers exists not to provide for the economic lives of employees but to extort money, resources and labor from employees and control their political lives and ideological beliefs. These are ordinary practices for North Korean workers, including those who work in foreign countries.

North Korean workers in foreign countries can pick up construction contracts as a second job after work and during the weekends. Experienced engineers can even leave their own workplace to work contract jobs. Like in North Korea, however,

they must pay massive bribes to managers in order to leave their workplace during the daytime.

This system puts double or triple burden of labor on shoulders of N. Korean workers both in the country and foreign countries. To bring an end to forced labor, the North Korean government must decriminalize unemployment, recognize private businesses as a legally valid profession to allow citizens to earn a living privately, and importantly dismantle the *dolgyeokdae* system in the long run.

There is one additional point that I'd like to speak on.

While the money that North Koreans earn overseas makes its way into state coffers, the little money that they earn through contract jobs functions as a driving force for vitalization of markets and has a stabilizing effect on people lives.

I don't expect North Koreans to return to the dire situation while operating a strict state-planned economy as they suffered until the early 1990s. We expect people's economic activities in markets to become more vitalized and to bring comparative stability to their lives. (It is one of a few solutions for human rights improvement in the DPRK.) (As the human rights situation improves, the path for normalization of the country will become clearer.)

If North Korea follows through on promises of complete denuclearization, Kim Jong Un will expect economic development with much international support in near future. This support

should be given for the sake of the people's betterment and the international community must make it clear that forced labor cannot be involved in any way and that all laborers must be compensated with a fair salary and work in enhanced working conditions.

The 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review is coming in May next year. I hope the stakeholders and relevant officials at the EU accept my suggestions for your recommendations to the DPRK, so that North Korea can implement practical solutions to end the forced labor.

() The conference and screening of the movie "Dollar Heroes" had been organized at the European Parliament by MEP Laszlo Tokes with Human Rights Without Frontiers.*

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NORTH KOREA: crimes against humanity demand justice

ICNK Backs Recommendations of new UN Reports

ICNK (07.03.2017) – The International Coalition to Stop Crimes Against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK) today announced its support for two new UN reports calling for the international community to hold the North Korean government accountable for crimes against humanity.

The Group of Independent Experts on Accountability, appointed by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights at the request of the UN Human Rights Council last year with a specific mandate to explore approaches to accountability, asserted that “investigation and prosecution of serious crimes is critical.” They called for “measures to ensure the right of victims to reparations, the right of victims and society to know the truth about violations, and guarantees of non-recurrence of violations.”

“The North Korea government and its leaders should face justice for their crimes against humanity, which continue to this day,” said Phil Robertson, Deputy Asia Director at Human Rights Watch. “We urge the United Nations Human Rights Council to respond positively to the Special Rapporteur’s call that the recommendations of the group of independent experts be implemented without delay.”

The independent experts stressed the need to consider creating an ad hoc international tribunal even with a referral to the

International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC provides an important way to hold accountable those most responsible for gross rights abuses, but given the pervasive impunity in the DPRK, the experts argued the prosecution of some high-level perpetrators at the ICC should be complemented by other criminal accountability processes. "A dedicated international tribunal for the DPRK would allow the temporal, territorial, personal and subject-matter jurisdiction to be calibrated to meet the needs and aspirations of the victims," the experts argued.

The independent experts, Sonja Biserko, a Serbian human rights activist who served on the UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights in North Korea, and Sara Hossain, a lawyer in the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, contended that "given the severity and complexity of the human rights situation in the DPRK, a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach is required to addressing violations." They also make concrete recommendations to the Human Rights Council, to strengthen the OHCHR field office in Seoul with additional resources to "receive, preserve and consolidate information and evidence pertaining to the human rights situation in the DPRK, through a central and independent repository, for use in any future accountability mechanism."

"The two independent experts deserve backing for their hard work and strong recommendations for achieving accountability for human rights violations in North Korea," said Eunkyong Kwon, Secretary-General of the ICNK. "Member states of the Human Rights Council should now step up to provide support and provide resources to the OHCHR Seoul office to support initiatives on extending research and ensuring effective analysis for holding perpetrators accountable."

In a separate report, the new UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the DPRK, Tomas Ojea Quintana, emphasized that "addressing human rights violations, particularly allegations of crimes against humanity, requires that perpetrators be held

accountable.” He called for a “two-track strategy” of engagement with the DPRK on human rights where possible, and the pursuit of accountability. “These two tracks are mutually reinforcing, and a dual approach is necessary to produce tangible and sustainable improvement in the situation of human rights.”

The Special Rapporteur endorsed the group of independent experts’ recommendations and urged “all relevant stakeholders” to act and “to ensure that serious human rights violations, especially those amounting to crimes against humanity, do not go unpunished.” He called on the Human Rights Council to implement the recommendations of the group of independent experts “without delay, ensuring that perpetrators of gross violations are held responsible and supporting all victims in their quest for truth and justice.” He further urged the United Nations “as a whole” to address “the grave human rights situation in the [DPRK] in a coordinated and unified manner.”

“Six years ago we joined together with over 40 other human rights organizations to establish the ICNK with the specific purpose of seeking accountability and justice for crimes against humanity in North Korea,” said Benedict Rogers, East Asia Team Leader at Christian Solidarity Worldwide. “The UN Commission of Inquiry and its report were a landmark step on the path to accountability. The time to end the culture of impunity surrounding North Korea’s crimes against humanity is long overdue.”

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The International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea is a joint effort of over 40 human rights groups worldwide that seeks to protect the human rights of North Koreans and to hold the Pyongyang government accountable for its abuses and violations of the human rights of the North Korean people.

Members and supporters of the Coalition include:

Advocates International Global Council
Asia Justice and Rights
Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances
Asian Human Rights & Humanity Association of Japan
Burma Partnership (Thailand)
Christian Lawyers Association for Paraguay
Christian Solidarity Worldwide
Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (USA)
Conectas (Brazil)
Council for Human Rights in North Korea (Canada)
Freedom House (USA)
NK Watch (ROK)
Free North Korea Radio (ROK)
Han Voice (Canada)
HH Katacombs (ROK)
Human Rights Watch
Human Rights Without Frontiers (Belgium)
Inter-American Federation of Christian Lawyers
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Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights (USA)
SARAM – Für Menschen in Nordkorea (Germany)
The Simon Wiesenthal Center (USA)
The Society to Help Returnees to North Korea (Japan)
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