

NORTH KOREA: Co-chairs urge President Trump to include human rights in North Korea negotiations

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (16.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2pVi6GI> – Reps. Randy Hultgren (R-IL) and Jim McGovern (D-MA), Co-Chairs of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, wrote to President Donald Trump on the strategic importance of incorporating human rights indicators into the Administration's ongoing denuclearization talks with North Korea. To further this objective, the Co-Chairs also urged the President to appoint a Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights Issues as provided for in the North Korea Human Rights Reauthorization Act of 2017. The letter follows a September hearing convened by the Commission on human rights in North Korea. The full text of the letter is below.

The bipartisan Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission was established in 2008 by unanimous consent in the United States House of Representatives to promote, defend and advocate for international human rights. The Commission undertakes public education activities, provides expert human rights advice and encourages Members of Congress to actively engage in human rights issues.

Dear Mr. President:

We commend your recent efforts to ensure North Korean denuclearization. A wholly denuclearized North Korea is imperative for the preservation of American safety and security and that of regional allies. To that end, the incorporation of human rights indicators into a credible, verifiable denuclearization deal with North Korea is strategic and could facilitate the long-term success of such an agreement.

At a Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing last month, security and human rights experts testified about how to raise human rights objectives in negotiations with North Korea and incorporate them as criteria for improved relations between our two nations. North Korea's steps to address human rights would demonstrate trustworthiness in negotiations with the United States. Follow-through on concrete human rights commitments would lend credibility to North Korea's security commitments in a variety of ways.

As a first step, we urge you to appoint the Special Envoy on North Korean Human Rights Issues provided for in the North Korea Human Rights Reauthorization Act of 2017. A Special Envoy with appropriate expertise on both human rights and national security could provide valuable insight for your administration and could engage directly with the North Korean government on improving human rights conditions.

Second, we recommend including several specific human rights issues and appropriate indicators in your negotiations with

North Korea as a measure of good faith. A primary concern is the protection of American citizens who visit North Korea. The North Korean regime's treatment of individual Americans demonstrates a disregard for the safety of the American people and a lack of respect for our nation as a whole. Ensuring necessary protections for American visitors would facilitate increased travel and information sharing between the people of both nations.

Facilitating family reunions for Korean Americans who have long been separated from their relatives in the North would also contribute to increased interactions between North Koreans and the outside world. Reunions should not take place solely in North Korea but should be available to all via a transparent process facilitated by the existence of open and ongoing lines of communication between separated families.

North Korea's verified compliance with international standards for humanitarian aid would provide reassurance as to the appropriate use of United States funds to North Korea and ensure that resources are reaching those who are in greatest need. The illicit diversion of food and aid to the military and the political elite exemplifies the defiant behavior of North Korea. Humanitarian workers must have access and be able to verify that aid reaches those for whom it was intended, including those held in prison and labor camps.

Revenue derived from the export of slave labor and exploitation of labor camps is used to enrich the North Korean government, which reportedly continues to develop military and nuclear capabilities. Verifiable steps to abolish forced labor and human trafficking would directly impact illicit funding sources for North Korea's aggressive military posture.

Lastly, the United States should pursue the termination of North Korea's information blockade against independent media outlets. Recommended actions could include permitting radio broadcasts or other messaging to provide people with useful ways to address problems they face in business, private markets, and agriculture along with information about individual universal freedoms.

In support of these recommendations, we also urge your administration to ensure that this year's United Nations General Assembly resolution on human rights in North Korea maintains the strength and resolve of last year's statement. A Security Council meeting on human rights in North Korea should also be held to continue to highlight the direct ways human rights are linked to security in this situation.

We also strongly urge you to work with the Chinese government to ensure that North Korean refugees are not forcibly repatriated.

As you made clear in your 2018 State of the Union Address, "No regime has oppressed its own citizens more totally or brutally than the cruel dictatorship of North Korea." In this spirit, we encourage the timely appointment of the Special Envoy so that human rights can be incorporated into denuclearization talks in a way that is both strategic for their success and reflects the universal freedoms that are accorded to all people.

Sincerely,

Randy Hultgren, M.C.
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Co-Chair, TLHRC
Chair, TLHRC

James

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Cc: The Honorable Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State
The Honorable Nikki Haley, United States Ambassador to the
United Nations

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