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May 3, 2016

Mr. Kim Jong-Un
Supreme Leader, Democratic People's Republic of Korea
First Secretary of the Worker's Party of Korea
Kumsoosan, Miam-dong, Daesung district
Pyongyang, Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Re: 7th Congress of the Worker's Party of Korea

Dear First Secretary Kim Jong-Un,

As you prepare for the 7th Party Congress of the Worker's Party of Korea on May 6, I am writing to urge you to ensure that meeting sets a new path for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) by making a commitment to respect the rights of all North Korean people. The DPRK should do so by collaborating with the international human rights mechanisms of the UN, including the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council, to address the many serious rights crimes committed by the government since the founding of the DPRK almost 68 years ago.

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that investigates and reports on basic rights abuses in over 90 countries, including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the United States, the Republic of Korea, and many other countries around the world in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East. We work on a wide range of issues related to civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. Much of our work includes documenting and exposing abuses including the use of torture and inhumane treatment; restrictions on freedom of expression, association, assembly, and movement; discrimination; abuses against women and children; violations of the rights of workers; lack of fair trials; and arbitrary arrest and punishment.

Human Rights Watch has noted your New Year's speech emphasizing that the Worker's Party of Korea must maintain "the improvement of people's living conditions as the most important among numerous state affairs," a theme you have

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mentioned on numerous other occasions as well as part of your *byungjin* policy to improve both the North Korea's economy and its nuclear defense. We are therefore concerned by reports

that recent efforts to prepare for the holding of the 7th Party Congress appear to rely, in significant part, on uncompensated forced labor.

On February 25, the state-run newspaper Rodong Sinmun reported the launch of a 70-day "battle" to prepare for the congress. The party organized task forces to get people, usually including women, children, and prisoners, to demonstrate loyalty by working harder but without compensation for their efforts. We are also aware that the government has urged people through various means such as billboards, posters, and speeches to fulfill their "battle plans" to produce required products.

The practice of using forced labor for projects by state agencies has been on the rise since the introduction of the market system to the DPRK in the late 1990s. Most North Koreans have performed forced labor at some point during their lives. Former North Korean students told Human Rights Watch that their schools forced them to work for free on farms twice a year, for one month during the ploughing and seeding period, and again for another month at harvest time. Many men and women also told Human Rights Watch that they had been forced many times to participate in mass mobilizations to build roads, construct or fix buildings, farm, or work in manufacturing to produce needed products in advance of major national events.

The government should immediately end this systemic use of forced labor, and commit that the DPRK will formally join the International Labor Organization as a member state, and immediately ratify and fully implement ILO Conventions 29 and 105 to prevent use of forced labor in the future.

In February 2014, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Human Rights in North Korea found that crimes against humanity, including enslavement, deliberate starvation, torture, forced abortions, and other sexual violence, have been committed "pursuant to policies at the highest level of the state."

We regret that the DPRK government has rejected the COI report. However, we were glad to learn that Ambassador So Se-Pyong, head of the DPRK delegation at the UN Human Rights Council, pledged in September 2014 during the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for the DPRK, that your government would continue cooperation and dialogue with relevant international organizations with the aim to address the socio-economic needs of the people. At that time, Ambassador So also pledged to maintain constructive and cooperative dialogue in the field of human rights,

and take practical measures in the protection of children, women, and other vulnerable groups.

Human Rights Watch strongly urges you and the incoming leadership of the Worker's Party of Korea to take immediate and comprehensive measures to stop the systematic use of forced labor and the many other rights abuses enumerated by the COI, and to allow for independent and impartial international investigation and prosecution of crimes against humanity uncovered by the COI. I urge you, as first among the new leaders of the Workers People of Korea, to take these steps to show that the DPRK government is ready to take action to end the rights abuses and acknowledge the grievances of the North Korean people.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Roth
Executive Director

CC:

Ja Song Nam, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations, New York

So Se Pyong, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations, Geneva