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February 13, 2020

Shinzo Abe
Prime Minister of Japan
Cabinet Secretariat
Government of Japan
1-6-1 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku
Tokyo 100-8968
Japan

Re: Joint Open Letter on Japan's Recent Disengagement in Addressing Human Rights Abuses in North Korea

Dear Prime Minister Abe,

In advance of the March session at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) session, we are writing on behalf of 54 non-governmental organizations, coalitions, and concerned individuals from Japan, Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe and North America about your government's recent disengagement on human rights issues in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea).

At the outset, we recognize the crucial role Japan has played, under your leadership in past years as a main sponsor of North Korea resolutions at the HRC, including resolutions that established the 2013 [UN Commission of Inquiry](#) (COI) on the situation of human rights in North Korea and later accepted its findings. The COI concluded that the North Korean government carried out repeated crimes against humanity against North Koreans—summary executions, torture, systemic rape, among other atrocities—as well as crimes against foreign nationals, including Japanese citizens, who were subject to abductions in past decades.

Japan's leadership helped sustain unprecedented international pressure on the North Korean government, including several debates on the country's human rights record at the UN Security Council between 2014 to 2017. This heightened UN focus on North Korea highlighted some of the intrinsic connections between human rights abuses in North Korea and

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regional and international peace and security, and put new pressure on North Korea to cooperate with UN mechanisms and address human rights issues, including the issue of North Korea's abductions of Japanese and other foreign nationals. Without your leadership and Japan's support, these positive developments would not have occurred.

In this context, we were deeply troubled by the Japanese government's decision last year to [no longer serve as lead sponsor](#) on a North Korea resolution adopted by the HRC, a decision your government never explained adequately. In March 2019, your chief cabinet secretary, Yoshihide Suga [indicated](#) that your government changed its approach "based on a comprehensive examination of the outcome of the second U.S.-North Korean summit and the situations surrounding the abduction and other issues" related to North Korea, and added that the government will continue to urge Pyongyang to improve its human rights record. An [unnamed Japanese official](#) told Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun the same month that since the North Korean government is so highly sensitive to international criticism, it was worthwhile to test an alternative and softer approach to see whether it might yield diplomatic results. In May 2019 you stated publicly that you would like to [meet North Korean leader Kim Jong Un without preconditions](#), a [shift from your previous position](#) that any summit would have to yield progress on the abduction issue.

We are aware that the North Korean government often reacts in a hostile manner when confronted with criticism of its human rights record. Softening pressure on the Kim Jong Un government, however, is unlikely to improve human rights conditions or resolve the abductions issue. Capitulation only rewards North Korea's bluster. It sends a message that human rights abuses can continue without consequences.

Dialogue and public human rights criticism are not mutually exclusive. In our view, raising North Korea's human rights record is necessary as a practical matter to achieve progress on abductions of Japanese citizens. It is precisely by identifying abductions as atrocities—as the COI did—that Japan can convince North Korea to confront their actions. North Korea's reaction to the COI report proved how sensitive Kim Jong Un is to report on his government's human rights record, and how important it is to continue such pressure to make him address criticism. By contrast, decreased international pressure has only reduced the political cost to North Korea of not rectifying its horrific rights record.

It is also now clear that the international community's interests in denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula by necessity require progress on human rights. This is because human rights and weapons counter-proliferation efforts are inextricably linked, as many [foreign policy experts](#), [religious leaders](#), and [human rights advocates](#) have pointed out.

On October 24, 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in North Korea, Tomás Ojea-Quintana, speaking at the UN General Assembly, [urged states](#) to explore avenues for constructive dialogue with North Korea while refraining from sidelining human rights issues during negotiations. He noted that “integrating fundamental human rights into the current negotiations is crucial for the sustainability of any agreement for denuclearization and peace for the Korean Peninsula and beyond.”

We agree completely.

We urge you take corrective action and embrace again your government’s human rights-oriented policy in North Korea, by leading on this year’s UN HRC resolution on North Korea and again prioritizing human rights issues in negotiations with its government.

Thank you for your consideration. We would be pleased to discuss these matters further with your staff.

Sincerely,

Signature organizations and individuals (as of February 13, 2020)

(Individuals – international, 6) *alphabetical order*

David Alton, Independent Crossbench Member of the House of Lords, U.K.

Sonja Biserko, Former Commission of Inquiry (COI) member on the situation of human rights in the DPRK & current chair at the Helsinki Human Rights Committee in Serbia

Marzuki Darusman, Former UN Special Rapporteur/COI member on the situation of human rights in the DPRK

Yanghee Lee, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar / Former Chairperson of UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Vitit Muntarbhorn, Professor Emeritus; former UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK

Tomas Ojea Quintana, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in North Korea

(Organizations & Japanese individuals, 48) *alphabetical order*

Yoichiro Amameishi, Musashimurayama City Council, Japan

1969 KAL Abductees' Families Association

Action for Korea United, Japan

ALTSEAN-BURMA

Asia Justice and Rights, Indonesia

Association for the Rescue of North Korea Abductees (ARNKA), Thailand

Centro para la Apertura y el Desarrollo de América Latina, Argentina
Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, South Korea
CIVICUS
Christian Solidarity Worldwide, UK
Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, U.S.
FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights
Health and Human Rights Info, Norway
Human Rights Concern-Eritrea, Eritrea
Human Rights in Asia, Japan
Human Rights Without Frontiers International, Belgium
Improving North Korean Human Rights Center, South Korea
International Child Rights Center, South Korea
International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea
International Solidarity for Freedom of Information in North Korea, South Korea
Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea, Japan
Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, U.S
Kanagawa Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea, Japan
Makoto Kurosaka, Professor, Osaka University of Economics, Japan
Lawyers for Human Rights and Unification of Korea, South Korea
Liberty in North Korea, U.S.
Life Funds for North Korean Refugees, Japan
Teruaki Masumoto, Former Secretary General of the Committee for Families of Victims
Kidnapped by North Korea, Japan
Miyazaki Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea, Japan
NO FENCE, Japan
Now Action & Unity for Human Rights, South Korea
Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights, South Korea
NK Watch, South Korea
No Chain, South Korea
North Korea Freedom Coalition, U.S.
North Korea Strategy Center, South Korea
North Korean Human Rights Network, Japan
Open North Korea, South Korea
People for Successful Corean Reunification, South Korea
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, U.S.
Saitama Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea, Japan
Shonai Blue Ribbon, Japan
Society to Help Returnees to North Korea, Japan
Southern African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, Zambia

Transitional Justice Working Group, South Korea
Unification Academy, South Korea
Unification Media Group, South Korea
Unification Strategy Institution, South Korea

CC:

Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi
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2-2-1 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku
Tokyo 100-8919

Minister in Charge of the Abduction Issue Yoshihide Suga
Cabinet Secretariat
1-6-1 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8968