

June 6, 2018

Kim Jong Un

Chairman, State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Building of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, Pyongyang
Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Dear Chairman Kim Jong Un,

As your government undertakes new efforts to increase its engagement with the rest of the world, we urge you to move rapidly to institute lasting improvements to the dire human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

In the Panmunjeom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity, and Unification of the Korean Peninsula that you adopted along with the president of the Republic of Korea (ROK), Moon Jae-in, on April 27, 2018, [you pledged](#) to improve inter-Korean relations by encouraging cooperation and exchanges between civil organizations, resolve the humanitarian issues that resulted from the division of the nation, and promote balanced economic growth. On April 20, you also said your [priority was improving the standard of living of your people](#).

We welcome increased dialogue but have yet to see actions on the part of your government that would signal clear improvements in the lives of DPRK citizens or in their basic rights and freedoms. As [40 international civil society groups](#) told President Moon in an April 9, 2018 letter, any real, long-term resolution of security issues on the Korean peninsula must include addressing the repressive rights record of your government and a strong commitment to fundamental and wide-ranging reforms. We accordingly urge you to:

1. Act on United Nations Human Rights Recommendations

The DPRK has signed and ratified several human rights treaties in addition to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the United Nations Charter

itself, all of which obligate your country to cooperate with a variety of UN institutions and treaty bodies and require much more engagement from your government.

During 2017, your government had some [limited re-engagement](#) with international human rights mechanisms, including the CRC Committee, the CEDAW Committee, and the visit of Catalina Devandas-Aguilar, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to the DPRK, a first for a UN thematic special rapporteur.

We urge you to increase engagement with these institutions, accept their recommendations, and implement related changes, including:

- Engaging with and responding to recommendations from the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly;
- Engaging with the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, including facilitating a country visit by him and other relevant UN rapporteurs;
- Continuing to engage with UN human rights mechanisms, including the upcoming UN Universal Periodic Review and a review under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Meeting your treaty commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights;
- Ratifying other human rights treaties, including the two Protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Protocol, and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and
- Opening immediate discussions with the UN about allowing a presence of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the DPRK to help with capacity building, development, and a framework to enable growth of an independent civil society.

2. Increase International Human Rights Engagement

You recently agreed with the United Nations on a strategic framework for cooperation (DPRK UN Strategic Framework for Cooperation) in all your cooperation projects between 2017 and 2021 to improve the well-being of the North Korean people, particularly vulnerable groups, and to apply a human rights-based approach intended to put people at the center of all decisions. As you discuss possible projects to develop railroad and infrastructure development with international organizations and governments around the world, we ask you to:

- End the use of forced labor in infrastructure and other development projects, including the use of construction brigades (*dolgyeokde*), which are military-like structures, with mandatory participation for those selected for it, who are forced to work primarily on national construction projects for buildings, roads, and other public infrastructure;
- Ensure all workers involved in development projects are fairly remunerated to ensure their rights to housing, food, health and child care, education, and other basic needs;
- Agree to meet with International Labour Organization (ILO) officials to discuss steps to **improve workers' rights throughout the country**;
- Apply for membership to the ILO; and agree to ratify the core labor conventions, including the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (No. 87), Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 98), Forced Labour Convention (No. 29), Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105), Minimum Age Convention (No. 138), Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182), Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100) and Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111);
- Allow visits by ILO officials including to manufacturing areas; Ensure that the right to work, the right to enjoy just and favorable conditions of work, and the right to form trade associations are fully respected for all workers, including in the civil sector, security forces, state-owned enterprises, hospitals and schools, university, and other education or social services; and
- Establish in law a minimum wage that ensures a decent living as required in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

3. Respond to Findings in the 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry

In 2014, a UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the situation of human rights in the DPRK [found](#) that the DPRK government has committed crimes against humanity in political prison camps and ordinary prisons; persecuted religious believers; targeted persons who try to flee the country, including persons forcibly returned by the Chinese authorities to the DPRK; and targeted those from other countries, in particular by staging international abductions.

On November 8, 2017, during a session with the CEDAW Committee, several members of your delegation flatly [rejected the findings of the COI](#). We urge you to:

- **Respond positively and substantively to the COI's findings and recommendations;**
- Take action against those responsible for crimes against humanity, religious persecution, and retaliation against persons who have left the country; and
- Allow access to UN and other independent monitors into the country.

4. Take Action to End Abuses in Detention and Prisons

As the COI concluded, detainees and prisoners in the DPRK are routinely subject to extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, inhuman treatment, rape and other grave sexual violence, enforced disappearance, and persecution on political, religious, and gender grounds. We urge you to:

- Take immediate steps to address poor conditions and abuses in the country's detention and prison facilities;
- Engage and allow access by relevant UN monitors to all prisons and detention facilities, including the pre-trial detention facilities (*kuryujang*) and temporary holding facilities (*jipkyulso*) near the northern border with China, by granting permission for visits by relevant UN special procedures;
- Take steps to release detainees and prisoners held for activities that should not be criminalized under international law, such as exercising freedom of speech and religion; and
- Permit prison visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross, other relevant UN bodies, and international non-governmental groups.

5. Involuntary Separated Families and Abductions

According to victim groups, families in many countries – including South Korea, Japan, the United States, China, Lebanon, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Romania – have relatives in the DPRK, including civilians, who were forcibly separated through displacement during the Korean War (1950-1953), soldiers who were imprisoned by the DPRK during the war, and persons who were abducted by DPRK agents on foreign territory, particularly in Japan and the ROK. We urge you to:

- Establish regular reunion meetings of separated families of any foreign national with relatives in the DPRK;
- Respect the right of freedom of expression and movement of foreign nationals;
- Allow regular exchanges of letters or phone calls and visits between separated family members;
- Respect the right of all persons to leave any country, including their own, and to return to their country, including by granting exit visas to all persons who hold or have held foreign nationality and their family members who wish to leave North Korea for another country;
- Engage in broader discussions with Japan, the ROK, and other countries on the issue of abductions and commit to investigate all allegations; and

- Allow foreign nationals to identify and collect the remains of deceased family members held in the DPRK.

6. Prioritize Covering People's Basic Needs and Accept Humanitarian Aid

According to UNICEF, in December 2017 an estimated [18 million people](#) in the DPRK were experiencing food insecurity, while 200,000 children were acutely malnourished. One in three children under five years of age, and almost half of the children between 12 and 23 months, were anemic. In October 2017, the UN World Food Program (WFP) said it needed US\$25.5 million for the following six months to [aid North Korean women and children](#). UNICEF faces a shortfall of US\$9.6 million to cover its programs in the DPRK in 2018. In 2017, the ROK government gave permission to national humanitarian groups to provide aid to your country, which the DPRK rejected, and pledged to donate US\$8 million to UNICEF and the WFP, at a time to be established.

The [UN Security Council expressed concern](#) that your government prioritizes the “development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles by diverting critically needed resources away from the people in the DPRK at tremendous cost when they have great unmet needs.” As the WKP resolution on April 20 also stipulated, the DPRK “will concentrate all efforts on building a powerful socialist economy and markedly improving the standard of people's living through the mobilization of all human and material resources of the country,” we urge you to act upon that and:

- Take immediate steps to prioritize the well-being of your people by supporting or creating mechanisms to cover their basic needs, especially the most vulnerable populations, including young children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, persons in detention or prison, and pregnant and nursing women and girls;
- Commit resources to ensure access to clean water, sanitation, hygiene, food security, hospitals and essential medicines, and equal access to schools and quality education; and
- Accept international or national humanitarian aid, with proper monitoring consistent with international standards of transparency and accountability to ensure it is delivered to its intended recipients, including access throughout the country to determine needs and the ability to visit places where food and other aid is delivered.

Finally, as you have pledged to focus on improving the lives of ordinary people in the DPRK, we urge you to take strong and quick action to show the people of the DPRK and the world that your government is sincere in ending 70 years of rights abuses and acknowledging the horrific suffering of the North Korean people.

Thank you for your consideration and we would be pleased to discuss these matters further with DPRK officials.

Sincerely,

1969 KAL Abductees' Families Association, South Korea

African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, The Gambia

Amnesty International

Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR)

Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)

Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos, Perú

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

Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), Kashmir

Centro para la Apertura y el Desarrollo de América Latina (CADAL), Argentina

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (NKHR), South Korea

The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK), United States

Conflict Victims' Society for Justice, Nepal

Defence of Human Rights Pakistan, Pakistan

Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearances (FIND), Philippines

HAK Association, Timor Leste

Han Voice, Canada

Helping Hands Korea_Catacombs, South Korea

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland

Human Rights in Asia, Japan

Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Without Frontiers, Belgium

I(d)reas, Mexico

Indonesian Association of Families of the Disappeared (IKOHI), Indonesia

International Christian Concern (ICC), United States

International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED)

International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK)

International Commission of Jurists

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights (JBI), United States

Justice for North Korean Refugees, Japan

Kenya Human Rights Commission, Kenya
Kontras, Indonesia
Lawyers Associates, Nepal
Liberty in North Korea (LINK), United States
Now Action & Unity for Human Rights (NAUH), South Korea
NKnet, South Korea
No Fence, Japan
North Korea Freedom Coalition, United States
North Korea Strategy Center (NKSC), South Korea
Now Action & Unity for Human Rights (NAUH), South Korea
Odhikar - Bangladesh
Open North Korea, South Korea
People for Successful Corean Reunification (PSCORE), South Korea
Rafto Foundation for Human Rights - Norway
Refuge Phan, South Korea
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, United States
Saram -Stiftung für Menschenrechte in Nordkorea, Germany
Stepping Stone, UK
Transitional Justice Working Group, South Korea
Unification Academy, South Korea
Unification Media Group, South Korea
World Without Genocide, United States

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