

Joint Open Letter on Human Rights in North Korea

October 10, 2021

Dear United Nations Member States,

The people of North Korea have suffered under the brutal rule of the Kim family regime since 1948. Every year on October 10th, people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are forced to celebrate the founding of the Workers' Party of Korea. This year will be no different.

It is critical that the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly intensify their scrutiny of the appalling human rights situation in North Korea. The plight of the people in the DPRK grows worse by the day. The international community needs to make clear to the DPRK leadership that those responsible for crimes against humanity and other grave human rights violations will someday be held accountable.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and the Workers' Party of Korea are directly responsible for the dire human rights situation in North Korea. The government has consistently prioritized maintaining power at the expense of basic rights of its people, including by developing nuclear armaments and intercontinental ballistic missiles while its population faces starvation.

The government's continuing efforts to suppress the right to freedom of expression, including by seeking to control the freedom of thought and opinion of the North Korean people, led to the [adoption](#) of the "DPRK law on rejecting reactionary ideology and culture" in December 2020. The [law](#) prohibits distributing media from South Korea, the United States and Japan and threatens violators with the death penalty. Simply watching such media content can result in a sentence of 15 years in an ordinary crimes prison camp (*kyohwaso*).

In April 2021, Kim Jong Un published a [letter](#) about "dangerous poisons," expressing his desire to stop foreign speech, hairstyles, and clothes among young people. Were the government to act on these pronouncements, it would be adding to its already poor record on privacy rights in North Korea.

In July 2021, the United Kingdom All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on North Korea released a [report](#) finding that the dire human rights situation in North Korea has remained dire since the landmark [2014 UN Commission of Inquiry](#) report. Both the UN Commission of Inquiry and the APPG found the DPRK to be committing crimes against humanity against the North Korean people. Specifically, the APPG found that DPRK officials continue to engage in murder, torture, slavery, persecution, and sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, sex trafficking, forced abortions and infanticide. Concerned governments should adopt a two-track approach of

accountability and engagement with the DPRK. Simply focusing on matters of either security or the platitudes of political dialogue are not sufficient. Mainstreaming both security issues and human rights concerns in bilateral and multilateral relations with the DPRK remains essential.

States should respond with action to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres's latest [report to the 76th session of the UN General Assembly](#), which describes the systematic and widespread violations against those considered a "threat" to the North Korean government, including wrongful imprisonment, torture, forced labor (from conscripted soldiers, the general population, a significant number of detainees, and children), and enforced or involuntary disappearances. It also raises concerns over food insecurity and the curtailment of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. The government has yet to respond to requests for country visits by the UN Special Rapporteurs on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation, and on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences.

The [2014 Commission of Inquiry report](#) found that the "gravity, scale and nature of [the human rights violations committed by the North Korean government reveal a State that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world." It recommended the international community to pursue "a multi-faceted strategy that combines strong accountability measures targeting those most responsible for crimes against humanity," and asked the UN Security Council "refer the situation in the DPRK to the International Criminal Court."

Concerned governments should press for a full range of available international accountability mechanisms that align with the Commission of Inquiry's recommendations.

We urge the UN Security Council to:

- Resume regular meetings on the situation of human rights in the DPRK as part of its official agenda. The Council's failure to keep the human rights situation in the DPRK regularly on the agenda for the past three years has precisely sent the wrong message to Pyongyang, that the government can continue committing grave violations against the North Korean people with impunity.
- Ensure that the Council meetings on North Korea's human rights situation also focus on accountability and the possibility of the Council referring North Korea to the International Criminal Court.

We also call on the UN General Assembly to continue to scrutinize the human rights situation in the DPRK.

It is crucial that the UN member states send a strong message to North Korea: action is needed so that the government's crimes cannot continue, and all those responsible for crimes against humanity and other human rights violations are held to account.

Yours sincerely,

1969 KAL Abductees' Families Association

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)

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Association for The Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea

Association for the Rescue of North Korea Abductees (ARNKA)

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

Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights

Committee for Human Rights in North Korea

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)

Families of Disappeared (FoD)

Global Rights Compliance

HanVoice

Human Asia

Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Without Frontiers

Humanists UK

International Christian Concern (ICC)

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

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights

Jubilee Campaign USA

Justice For North Korea (JFNK)

Lumen

National Secular Society, United Kingdom

Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights

NK Watch

North Korea Human Rights Network

Northern Research Association

Open North Korea

Peace and Hope International

People for Successful Corean Reunification (PSCORE)

Saram - Stiftung für Menschenrechte in Nordkorea

Southern African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (SACCORD)

Stepping Stones

The 88 Project

The Rights Practice

Transitional Justice Working Group, South Korea

Unification Strategy Institute

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

World Without Genocide