

May 7, 2018

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President  
United States of America  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Re: North Korea human rights

Dear President Trump:

During your State of the Union (“SOTU”) Address, the whole world watched as you elevated the role that human rights should play with respect to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (“DPRK”). We were heartened to see that you highlighted stories from the North Korean community, showcasing how each of their stories “is a testament to the yearning of every human soul to live in freedom”. We could not agree more. Now, as the United States discusses a proposed summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, we urge you to include human rights issues in all discussions with the DPRK including in the summit agenda.

We strongly believe that the United States and others in the international community should not hold back on condemning human rights abuses in an effort to support diplomatic dialogues. The US, in close collaboration with rest of the international community, should bring diplomatic engagement and pressure on behalf of the people of the DPRK with regards to human rights issues. This would be consistent with both the imperative to protect and promote human rights, and the United States’ efforts to protect the Korean peninsula from the effects of nuclear weapons.

As you described during the SOTU Address, any discussion about the nuclear threat North Korea poses cannot be separated from how the DPRK treats its own people. The United Nations Security Council has recognized in several recent debates and resolutions that human rights abuses in the DPRK are an important element of any discussion on the DPRK’s nuclear weapons as the North Korean government continues to prioritize nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles over the basic needs of its own people. In December 2017, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad al Hussein, said that “the international security crisis regarding the DPRK’s military actions is inseparable from concerns about the human rights situation of ordinary people in the country.” On March 12, 2018, at the UN Human Rights Council, Tomás Ojea-Quintana, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in DPRK, urged UN member states that “any advancement on the security dialogue should be accompanied by a parallel expansion of human rights dialogue.” Any resolution of security issues on the Korean peninsula should require addressing the DPRK’s repressive human rights record and pressing the North Korean government to commit to fundamental and wide-ranging reforms.

During 2017, there were some limited but important steps taken by the DPRK to re-engage with UN human rights mechanisms, creating a window of opportunity. According to Special Rapporteur Ojea-Quintana “the momentum is there for the negotiations to use and to bring the human rights issues into the discussion.” Mr. President -- we recommend that you use that opportunity, and urge the DPRK to improve its human rights record.

We ask that you include the following issues in the agenda of all meetings with the DPRK, including your summit with Kim Jong Un:

1. Acting on United Nations Human Rights Recommendations

The UN Commission of Inquiry on DPRK found systematic and widespread human rights violations in North Korea, in many instances constituting crimes against humanity, including:

- The existence of a prison camp system where individuals deemed political enemies of the state, sometimes along with their entire families, are held indefinitely;
- Torture, forced labor, starvation and other ill-treatment, as well as executions used routinely in these camps and other penal facilities;
- For the vast majority of North Koreans, the denial of universally recognized human rights, including police interfering with religious activities, and to freedom of movement, expression, and association.
- The deliberate and systematic closing off of North Koreans from contact with the rest of the world by preventing them from traveling, unsupervised communications, and denying them access to outside information.

We recommend that you urge the DPRK to immediately implement the following steps by:

- Opening all government detention facilities, reeducation and forced labor camps, and prisons to visits by international observers, and taking steps to release any detainees held for activities that should not, under international law, be criminalized, such as exercising their rights to freedom of speech and religion and belief, or attempting to leave or leaving the country without permission.
- Engaging with and responding to recommendations and opinions from the UN Human Rights Council and the Commission of Inquiry on the situation of human rights in the DPRK and 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 special mechanisms.
- Continuing to engage with UN human rights mechanisms, including the upcoming Universal Periodic Review and under the Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; accepting UN recommendations and implementing changes on the ground; and signing and ratifying key human rights treaties, including International Labour Organization conventions and the Convention against Torture.

2. Appoint a Special Envoy for DPRK Human Rights Issues

We urge you to appoint a Special Envoy for North Korea Human Rights Issues. By elevating the issue to a Special Envoy role, the position would coordinate a whole-of-government US strategy on bringing international pressure to bear on Pyongyang for improvements in human rights both at the summit and in conjunction with the United States' allies and partners. That responsibility should also include the following:

- To establish a regular US-North Korea human rights dialogue and ensure that it is principled, follows clear benchmarks, and is accountable. Such meetings should be followed by reports to Congress and public briefings about their content and agreements on next steps, which should include follow-up meetings at the highest levels of each government.
- Advocate further information and personal exchanges and promote the rights to freedom of expression, information and movement.

### 3. Separated Families and Abductions

An estimated one million Koreans have been separated or forcibly removed from their families through displacement during the war, enforced disappearances and abductions, or following escape from the DPRK. The Japanese government has also identified several Japanese citizens who were abducted by the North Korean government and has stated that this remains the most important question for Japan during the US-North Korea summit. Currently, there are over 30,000 North Koreans in South Korea, Japan, and other countries with no legal way to communicate with family members in North Korea.

We recommend that you urge the DPRK:

- Press North Korea to respect the right of every person to leave any country, including his/her own, and to return to her/his country, including by granting exit visas to all persons who hold or have held South Korean or other foreign nationality and their family members who wish to leave North Korea for South Korea or other countries.
- Urge the DPRK to engage constructively on the issue of abductions and to commit seriously to investigate and respond to the allegations made against it.

### 4. Humanitarian Assistance

According to the UN World Food Program (“WFP”), around 70 percent of the population in the DPRK are food insecure. This affects children, and pregnant and nursing women the hardest. 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, WFP said it needed US\$25.5 million for the following six months to aid North Korean women and children.

Humanitarian aid is an international responsibility and is necessary to protect human life and rights. At the same time, oversight is crucial to ensure that aid goes to those who need it most and is not diverted to the DPRK military or others, regardless of whether it is provided directly by the United States, the United Nations, or through private institutions.

We recommend that you

- Provide necessary humanitarian aid and urge the DPRK government to accept international or domestic humanitarian aid, with proper monitoring consistent with international standards of transparency and accountability. These standards include access throughout the country to determine needs and the ability to visit places where food and other aid is delivered.

Thank you for your consideration and we would be happy to discuss these issues further with you or your staff. If you would like to arrange a meeting please contact Francisco Bencosme, Amnesty International’s Asia Advocacy Manager at [FBencosme@aiusa.org](mailto:FBencosme@aiusa.org).

Sincerely,

Amnesty International USA  
ALTSEAN-Burma  
Committee for Human Rights in North Korea  
Human Rights Without Frontiers Int’l (Brussels)  
Korea Future Initiative  
Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice

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Midwest Alliance for North Korean Refugees  
One Free Korea  
People for Successful COrean Reunification  
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World Without Genocide