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CHINA | Parliamentary resolution protests forcible repatriation of North Korea refugees

A UK Parliamentary resolution has expressed “grave concern” about China’s policy of forcible repatriation of North Korean refugees, and “outrage” at the recent forced repatriation of at least 41 North Koreans.

The Early Day Motion, tabled by Fiona Bruce MP, urges China to desist from further repatriations and to allow safe passage for North Korean refugees to third countries.

The motion notes that China is a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention and the Convention against Torture or Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, both of which oblige countries to respect the principle of *non-refoulement* and refrain from repatriating people to countries where they face a substantial risk of torture or persecution. The motion also calls on China to recognize that North Koreans, whether economic migrants or political refugees, are *refugees sur place*, as defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, on account of the likely consequences they may face if returned to North Korea.

Furthermore, the motion notes that the North Korean regime announced in December 2011 its intention to “annihilate” up to three generations of a family if a family member fled the country during the 100-day period of mourning for the death of Kim Jong Il, and that in 2010 the DPRK Ministry of Public Security issued a decree which made defection a “crime of treachery against the nation”. It “notes widespread reports of arrest, imprisonment, torture and execution faced by North Korean refugees upon their return to the DPRK” and that “North Korean refugees suspected of having contact with South Koreans, converting to Christianity, or possessing a Bible face especially severe punishment” upon their return to the DPRK. It calls on China to allow the United Nations access to all North Korean refugees in China, and urges North Korea to “desist from arresting or persecuting” those who have been forcibly repatriated by China.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, “We warmly welcome this motion and express our deep appreciation to Fiona Bruce MP and other Parliamentarians for their efforts on this important issue. The international community must do everything possible to ensure that no more North Koreans are forcibly sent back by China to a dire fate in their country. At the same time, amidst all the grave threats and horrific track record that the North Korean regime has in its treatment of repatriated refugees, we note that Kim Jong Un’s regime announced an amnesty for political prisoners, and we await details of this with great interest. If Kim Jong Un wishes to signal to the world that his regime is changing, the best possible message it could send would be to release political prisoners, close the prison camps, stop the torture, open up the country, allow religious freedom and freedom of conscience and ensure that those who are forcibly repatriated by China are well treated and not subjected to arrest, imprisonment, torture or death. Fewer people would flee North Korea if the promised amnesty becomes a reality and if the regime reforms. It is in China’s interests to encourage such a process of reform, and so we urge China to use its power and influence responsibly.”