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NORTH KOREA Artist and defector to address parliamentary hearing

North Korean artist and defector Kim Hye Sook will address the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on North Korea tomorrow, as part of a three-day visit to the UK which includes meetings with MPs, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Kim Hye Sook, 49, spent 27 years in a prison camp before defecting to South Korea in 2009. She was originally imprisoned at age 13, along with her family, because her grandfather had gone to South Korea, in line with North Korea's "guilt by association" policy. She later married and gave birth to a son and daughter in the camp, but lost her husband and children to accident and illness.

An escape attempt to China in 2005 ended in her forced repatriation to North Korea in 2007, after which she was detained in Bukchang prison camp from January to June 2008. Kim Hye Sook escaped from North Korea again in June 2008 and sought refuge in South Korea in April 2009, where her art work about North Korea's prison camps has been exhibited, and her memoirs, "A Concentration Camp Retold in Tears" were published, in Korean.

Some of her art work will be on display during the APPG meeting, which will be chaired by Lord Alton and open to the public. Kim Hye Sook will give a powerful testimony of the conditions in North Korea's prison camps, and the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the regime against its people. Another North Korean defector, Kim Joo-il, who is based in the UK, will also address the hearing, along with representatives from Amnesty International.

Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director at Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "This parliamentary hearing is a vital opportunity to once again turn the spotlight on the world's most brutal system of repression, North Korea's prison camps. The first-hand testimony of survivors of the prison camps will help highlight the crimes against humanity perpetrated by North Korea's regime. We believe the time has come for the UN to establish a commission of inquiry to investigate these crimes, and to end impunity in North Korea, and this hearing will be a compelling contribution to helping achieve this objective."