



9.7.2011

NORTH KOREA CSW recruits global coalition of human rights organizations and legal experts for Tokyo conference

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) joined Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Open North Korea in spearheading a conference in Tokyo today that united over 25 international human rights organizations and legal experts from the Aegis Trust and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), to discuss the formation of a coalition to campaign for a United Nations (UN) investigation into crimes against humanity in North Korea.

The conference in Tokyo was attended by over 25 human rights organizations from across Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America, including Amnesty International, and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), who will form the International Coalition to Stop Crimes Against Humanity in North Korea, which will be launched tomorrow. Delegates at the conference heard first-hand testimonies from two survivors of North Korea's prison camps, and Charles Robert Jenkins and Oh Kil Nam, whose families were abducted by the North Korean authorities.

In his opening remarks, Benedict Rogers, CSW's East Asia Team Leader, hailed the historic and international nature of the coalition: "This is an historic initiative – the first time so many people from so many different organizations from such a broad range of countries have come together, not only for a conference on North Korea but for a cause: stopping crimes against humanity in North Korea."

"North Korea is one of the worst human rights situations in the world – and one of the most overlooked. It became clear to me that we would only stand a chance of securing the change we want – an end to the regime's crimes against humanity – if all of us, around the world, unite and work together. That is why we're holding this conference; that is why tomorrow we will launch the coalition. It also became clear to me that we need to internationalize the issue. It is no longer a concern simply for Koreans and perhaps Americans and Japanese. These are crimes against humanity and all of humanity must be involved."

In a statement of support, Lord Alton, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea, praised the international scope of the coalition and spoke of his conviction that "what is needed with North Korea is a contemporary equivalent of the Helsinki process we pursued with the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War: a combination of international pressure, an uncompromising alertness to security concerns, and a constructive, critical engagement in which human rights are placed firmly on the table."

Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, Chief Prosecutor in the case against Slobodan Milosevic, was unable to attend but sent a statement to the delegates: "It is vital that the international community ends its silence and begins to take meaningful action to end these systematic violations, and the establishment of a worldwide coalition of human rights organizations and campaigners to help inform and awaken the conscience of the world is a very necessary step towards that."