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NORTH KOREA Defector highlights suffering in prison camps to UK leaders

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) hosted North Korean defector Shin Dong Hyuk on a 14-day visit to London in which he met several high profile political and religious leaders, to raise awareness of the suffering of the North Korean people at the hands of Kim Jong-il's regime.

Shin Dong Hyuk met Jeremy Browne, the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), John Bercow, the Speaker of the House of Commons, Baroness D'Souza the Lord Speaker of the House of Lords, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams. Shin also met MPs and members of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission and Kerry McCarthy MP, Shadow Minister of State with responsibility for East Asia, and addressed a meeting organized by the Henry Jackson Society in Parliament.

Jeremy Browne, Minister of State at the FCO, said, "It has been inspiring to meet with Shin Dong Hyuk, and to hear about his experiences of 23 years in a political prison camp: a timescale most of us find impossible to imagine."

"This is a real triumph of hope over adversity. North Korea has an appalling human rights record and the secretive nature of the regime in North Korea often makes it difficult to verify events within the country with any certainty. However, testimonies such as Mr. Shin's give us an insight that we would not otherwise get. I hope that through his words to Parliament and through his many international meetings, Mr. Shin will be able to keep raising awareness of human rights in North Korea."

"North Korea remains a country of concern for the UK Government. We use every opportunity to raise our concerns with the North Korean Government directly, both with their Embassy in London and through our Embassy in Pyongyang."

Shin Dong Hyuk was born inside one of North Korea's brutal prison camps and imprisoned there with his family as punishment for his parent's crimes, a system known as "guilt by association". At the age of 14 he was tortured by the prison authorities after a failed escape attempt by his mother and brother, and later forced to watch their public execution. There are currently 200,000 prisoners in North Korea's prison camps, many of whom are Christians. Shin shared his testimony at a number of speaking engagements at churches in London and Belfast.

CSW and over 40 members of the International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK) signed a letter to Kim Jong-Il, which was delivered to North Korea's embassies and diplomatic missions around the world on a Global Day of Action on 6 October, calling on North Korea's regime to end the widespread violation of human rights.

Benedict Rogers, CSW's East Asia Team Leader and a co-founder of the ICNK, said, "No one is better placed to speak from direct, personal and extremely painful first-hand experience about the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the North Korean regime than Shin Dong Hyuk, a young man who spent the first 23 years of his

life enduring daily torture and deprivation. It is a privilege for us to host Shin and a vital opportunity for him to share his shocking story with people in this country who are in a position to make a difference. We believe the time has come for the crimes which Shin and hundreds of thousands of other North Koreans have endured for too long to be investigated. We appreciate the strong moral support offered by senior British politicians and other people of influence, and we urge the United Kingdom to work for the establishment of a United Nations Commission of Inquiry into crimes against humanity in North Korea.”

Notes to Editors:

1. Shin Dong Hyuk is not available for interview.