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NORTH KOREA | CSW Welcomes UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' Support for International Inquiry

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay, on Jan. 14, called for an international inquiry into serious human rights violations in North Korea, stressing that concerns about the country's nuclear program must not be allowed to overshadow the "deplorable" human rights situation of its people.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) welcomes Pillay's remarks, which represent a response to years of campaigning. CSW first recommended an international inquiry in 2007 in its report *North Korea: A Case to Answer, A Call to Act*.

In 2011, CSW helped establish the International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK), drawing together over 40 human rights organizations around the world to campaign for an investigation into North Korea's human rights record. On Jan. 14, CSW delivered a letter to the Foreign Secretary William Hague on behalf of the ICNK, calling on Britain to support a UN Commission of Inquiry to investigate crimes against humanity in North Korea. A similar request was also made in a letter to the Foreign Secretary in October 2012, signed by 179 former North Korean political prisoners and defectors.

In the letter, the ICNK argues that "an international, independent inquiry, mandated by the UN and supported by the UN Special Rapporteur and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, is needed to investigate and further establish facts, and evaluate both new and existing evidence and allegations to ascertain if there are, prima facie, sufficient grounds to view those violations as crimes under international law, and make recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly."

North Korea is one of the world's worst human rights violators. There is no freedom of speech, assembly, movement, press, conscience or religion. No dissent is tolerated at all, and the regime controls the people through an extensive system of surveillance and propaganda. An estimated 200,000 people are detained in an extensive system of prison camps. Hundreds of thousands of prisoners have died due to starvation, inhumane living conditions or execution. Many more prisoners endure torture and regular beatings. Whole families are jailed for the perceived political crimes of a relative, under a policy of 'guilt by association' that inflicts punishment on up to three generations.

In his most recent annual report, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in North Korea described the government's human rights abuses as "egregious" and recommended the establishment of "a more detailed mechanism of inquiry." The US government was also asked to support an international inquiry in December 2012, in a letter written by Edward Royce, Chairman of the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee.

On Jan. 21, the House of Lords will discuss the human rights and humanitarian situation in North Korea in a debate tabled by Lord Alton of Liverpool.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "We very much welcome the UN High Commissioner's statement, and believe, as she does, that an international inquiry is long overdue. We urge the United Kingdom, other members of the European Union, Japan, the United States and South Korea to work with others within the United Nations to establish a Commission of Inquiry at the Human Rights Council in March."