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NORTH KOREA | CSW Calls Attention to “Appalling Human Rights Violations”

On the 60th anniversary of the end of the Korean War, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling for increased efforts by the international community to address the grave human rights crisis in North Korea.

The Korean War ended on July 27, 1953, having claimed the lives of three million Koreans including many civilians. The war ended in an armistice, not a permanent peace, and the Korean peninsula is technically still at war between North and South. Furthermore, North Korean people continue to suffer under a brutal regime with one of the worst human rights records in the world.

An estimated 200,000 people are believed to be detained in five political prison camps across the country. The system of guilt by association means that citizens can be imprisoned for political “crimes” committed by their family members for three generations. Conditions in the camps are dire: inmates endure freezing temperatures in winter, hard labor, and meager food rations. Defectors estimate that 70 percent of prisoners are severely malnourished. Torture, rape and public executions are common.

Outside the camps, the government's strict control over resources, combined with bad harvests, storms and flooding have resulted in widespread starvation and malnutrition. Every year thousands of North Koreans try to escape over the border into China. Many female border crossers are victims of human trafficking. China does not recognize North Koreans as refugees and regularly repatriates men, women and children to North Korea where they face imprisonment, torture and death. In May 2013, nine North Koreans, including at least one child, were deported from Laos to China and were repatriated from there to North Korea. As a party to the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, China is bound by the principle of non-refoulement. By forcibly repatriating North Koreans, China is in violation of its international commitments.

CSW has been calling for an international inquiry into the human rights situation in North Korea since 2007. In 2011, CSW helped establish the International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK), drawing together over 40 human rights organizations to campaign for an investigation, culminating in a resolution adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in March 2013 establishing a Commission of Inquiry “to investigate the systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights” in North Korea.

CSW also calls for the BBC World Service to establish radio broadcasts for North Korea. Earlier this year, 20 Members of Parliament signed an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons, encouraging the BBC to consider this proposal. The motion followed a specific recommendation made during a debate in the House of Lords on North Korea in January 2013, introduced by Lord Alton of Liverpool, Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea. The BBC has indicated an interest in the idea, and it is now a question of resources.

CSW’s Team Leader for East Asia, Benedict Rogers, said, "On this the 60th anniversary of the end of the Korean War, CSW calls attention to the appalling human rights violations committed every day by the North Korean regime against its own people, including Christians who are particularly targeted for their faith. We urge the North Korean government to immediately release all political prisoners and to close the network of prison camps. We urge the North Korean government in particular to end violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief. We call on North Korea to co-operate with the UN Commission of Inquiry, and invite international human rights monitors into the country, with unhindered access, to conduct their investigation. We urge the UN to ensure that the Commission of Inquiry is given the resources it needs to conduct its work. In addition, we call on China, Laos and other transit countries to recognize North Korean defectors as refugees and to give them access to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Finally, we support the recommendation that the BBC World Service start a Korean language service to be broadcast across the Korean Peninsula, in order to break through the information blockade. Sixty years on from the end of the Korean war, it is time to act to end the North Korean regime’s war against its own people.”