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NORTH KOREA | Defectors to Testify at UK Parliament Hearing

Three North Korean defectors will testify at a hearing on human rights in North Korea hosted by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for North Korea on Oct. 8. The hearing is one of a series of events for North Korea Freedom Week.

The hearing, which will be open to the public, will be chaired by Lord Alton of Liverpool, Chairman of the APPG for North Korea. The speakers will include:

- Kim Young-soon, a former dancer in the People's Army Ensemble who spent nine years in Yodok political prison camp. After graduating from Pyongyang University of Music and Dance, she joined the army's ensemble and rose to the rank of lieutenant, before being arrested because she had information about Kim Jong-il's personal life. Under the guilt-by-association system, her parents and her four children were also imprisoned. Her parents and her oldest son died in the camp due to malnutrition. She defected in 2001, and reached South Korea in 2003.
- Jo Jin-hye, who escaped from North Korea in 2006 at the age of 19. In 2008, she reached the United States and in 2012 she founded North Korea in the US (NKUS). In February 2013, she testified before the US Congress on China's policy of forced repatriation of North Korean refugees.
- Kim Joo-il is the Secretary-General of the UK North Korean Residents Society, Director of the Democratisation Broadcasting System, founder of Free NK, a newspaper covering North Korean issues, and Europe correspondent for Radio Free Asia's Korean service. He came to the UK as a refugee in 2007, having served in the North Korean army and risen to the rank of captain.

North Korea Freedom Week in Europe 2013 runs from Oct. 7-12 and aims to raise awareness of the situation in North Korea among Europeans. In addition to the parliamentary hearing on Oct. 8, UK events include a protest outside the North Korean embassy in London on Oct. 7, a film screening and photography exhibition at Amnesty International UK and the launch of North Korean Refugees Solidarity Worldwide.

Benedict Rogers, East Asia Team Leader at Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, “This first-ever Europe-wide North Korea Freedom Week is an exciting and valuable opportunity to raise public awareness about the appalling human rights crisis in North Korea. Earlier this year the UN Human Rights Council established a Commission of Inquiry to investigate North Korea’s human rights record, something CSW has advocated for more than five years, so finally the world’s spotlight is beginning to focus on one of the world’s most oppressed nations. North Korea Freedom Week is an initiative led by North Korean refugees themselves, and we are delighted to support them in their campaign to increase attention on North Korea. The visit to London by several prominent North Korean defectors provides a rare opportunity for us to learn more about the world’s most closed nation, and we hope many people will take part in these events, tell others, stand in solidarity and take action to promote human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, in North Korea.”