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NORTH KOREA | UN Human Rights Council Panel Addresses Violations

An unprecedented panel discussion at the UN Human Rights Council on Sept. 21 focused on international abductions and enforced disappearances taking place in North Korea.

According to the UN Commission of Inquiry on North Korea, “well over 200,000 persons, including children, who were brought from other countries to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea may have become victims of enforced disappearance,” from countries such as Japan, Romania, Netherlands, France and China.

The panel discussion was another indication of an increased international focus on human rights violations in North Korea following the publication of the report by the UN Commission of Inquiry on North Korea in February 2014. It concluded that the regime is committing crimes against humanity and widespread human rights violations including murder, sexual violence, forced abortions, slave labor, torture and executions. The dire conditions in the country’s network of prison camps, as well as enforced disappearances and abductions in North Korea have been increasingly highlighted on international platforms.

In December 2014, the human rights situation of the country was added as a permanent item to the UN Security Council’s agenda. In June 2015, the Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights established a field office in Seoul to strengthen monitoring and documenting of human rights violations in North Korea. Furthermore, in September 2015 the BBC announced plans to start broadcasting a daily news program into North Korea which will provide vital access to information to the people of one of the most closed and repressive countries in the world.

During the panel discussion, Marzuki Darusman, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea (DPRK) called for the urgent establishment of an accountability structure to address human rights violations. “Justice delayed is justice denied. It is therefore of the greatest and immediate urgency that at this darkest hour the international community jointly acts,” he said. In regard to the enforced disappearances and abductions, he argued that the most important task now is for the field office in Seoul to re-establish the exact figures on Japanese and other abductees. He also drew attention to the family reunification negotiations between DPRK and Republic of Korea (ROK) which will take place between in late October. Approximately 66,000 families living in DPRK and ROK need to be reunited.

Kwon Eun-kyoung from the International Coalition to Stop Crimes Against Humanity in North Korea, said, “Putting aside the approximately 80 executions of high-ranking DPRK officials

carried out since late 2011, I would like to shed light on the executions and immoderate punishments inflicted on normal residents in the DPRK. According to a 2015 white paper by the Korean Institute for National Unification, the number of public execution victims from 2000 to 2014 is 1,382 with 345 of those instances occurring from 2010-2014. Moreover, according a separate report released by the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights, from 2000 up until now 1,409 people were killed through executions, with 231 of these cases occurring since 2010. Of the 231 victims, 64 were killed through closed executions. These White Papers reveal that for the last few years, executions for watching ROK videos and circulating them to other people have drastically increased.”

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “Enforced disappearances and abductions violate the most basic human rights and count among the many crimes against humanity committed by North Korea. We urge the North Korean government to release the abductees immediately and provide international humanitarian actors such as the International Committee of the Red Cross access the political prison camps. We also urge all UN member states to find effective ways to end impunity and address human rights violations in the country. Education of, and engagement with North Korean refugees living outside the country, remains an important part of the solution.”