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NORTH KOREA | Statement Made for Korean Workers' Party 70th Anniversary

The international community should demand that the North Korean government immediately end its pervasive abuses of human rights instead of lauding its ruling Korean Workers' Party on the 70th anniversary of its founding, said the International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK), which comprises 40 human rights groups worldwide.

"Given the decades of horrific rights abuses committed in the name of Korean Workers' Party, this 70th anniversary should be mourned, not celebrated," said Eunkyong Kwon, Secretary General at the ICNK's secretariat. "Pyongyang is not fooling anyone with its staged parades and its appeals to its people to work harder."

North Korea continues to systematically and pervasively violate human rights through public executions, torture, forced labor, sexual violence, food deprivation, incarceration in political prisoner camps (*kwan-li-so*), and the denial the freedom of expression, thought and religious belief.

A UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Human Rights in North Korea issued a report in February 2014 that "found a disturbing array of crimes against humanity," that "arise from policies established at the highest level of the State," and the "gravity, scale, duration and nature of the unspeakable atrocities committed in the country...does not have any parallel in the contemporary world."

North Korea should end its use of violent and abusive political prison camp systems and other forced labor camps. Based upon first hand testimonies collected by ICNK member organizations, hundreds of thousands of prisoners have died over the past decades because of inhuman conditions or summary executions. These compelling testimonies demonstrate the need for the North Korean government to end acts of torture in the country, and commit to a just arrest, judicial and detention process that is free from coercion, violence and torture. The North Korean government and its party members should recognize the rights of every North Korean individual to life, liberty, freedom of thought and expression, equality and fair trial.

The ICNK supports the creation of the new UN human rights office in Seoul to follow up the findings of the COI by conducting additional research on rights abuses in North Korea. The UN Security Council should also take action before the end of the year to formally discuss North Korea's human rights situation, and demanding Pyongyang take action to comply with the recommendations of the COI.

“The international community should mark this 70th anniversary of the ruling party of North Korea with renewed calls for international accountability for those who have committed human rights crimes there,” said Benedict Rogers, East Asia Team Leader at Christian Solidarity Worldwide. “The UN Security Council needs to put North Korea human rights on its urgent agenda this year and demand with one voice that North Korea comply with its international rights obligations.”

ICNK also strongly urged the leadership of the Korean Workers’ Party to take action to ensure an end to the government’s practice of compelling forced labor from both prisoners and ordinary citizens. Although article 31 of North Korea’s constitution stipulates that child labor is prohibited, the practice continues unabated in the country. The ICNK calls on North Korea to join the International Labor Organization (ILO), and comply with the ILO’s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work which commits all members of the ILO to end forced and child labor.

“The grim reality is the North Korea state, its agencies and its state enterprises employ an economic strategy based on systematically grabbing the benefits of forcing people to work for prolonged periods without remuneration, often in arduous or highly dangerous conditions,” said Phil Robertson, Deputy Asia Director at Human Rights Watch. “There needs to be an end to the North Korean government’s used of forced labor wherever it occurs in the country.”