

February 26, 2024

President Yoon Suk-yeol

CC. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo  
Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul  
Unification Minister Kim Yung-ho  
Justice Minister Park Sung-jae  
National Defense Minister Shin Won-sik

**Re: South Korea's responsibility as a global pivotal state to raise the issues of prisoners of war (POWs), abductees and detainees as well as China's forcible repatriation of North Korean refugees in the keynote speech, interactive dialogues and general debates and the side event during the 55<sup>th</sup> UN Human Rights Council (Feb 26-Apr 5, 2024)**

Dear President Yoon Suk-yeol,

We urge your government, as a global pivotal state, to raise the issues of prisoners of war (POWs), abductees and detainees as well as China's forcible repatriation of North Korean refugees in the keynote speech of the high-level segment, interactive dialogues with UN human rights experts and general debates and the side event organized by South Korea during the 55<sup>th</sup> UN Human Rights Council which is to be held from February 26 to April 5, 2024.

### **1. The keynote speech during the high-level segment by 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Insun**

On February 26, 2024, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Insun will attend the 55<sup>th</sup> UN Human Rights Council and deliver the keynote speech during the high-level segment (HLS).<sup>1</sup> We request that Vice Minister Kang Insun urge the immediate resolution of the issues of POWs, abductees and detainees, in particular the immediate return of the six known South Koreans detained in North Korea by specifically naming the missionaries, Mr. KIM Jung-wook, Mr. KIM Kook-kie and Mr. CHOI Chun-gil, in her keynote speech.

Moreover, we ask that Vice Minister Kang Insun expresses concern about China's recent resumption of the forcible repatriation of North Korean refugees, namely the deportation of hundreds of North Korean escapees that included Ms. Kim Cheol-ok who had lived in China for 25 years and a family of POW, and urge China and other countries to observe the principle of non-refoulement under the Refugee Convention and Protocol as well as the Convention against Torture and guarantee safe passage to a third country like South Korea for North Korean refugees.

### **2. Interactive dialogues with UN human rights experts and general debates**

During the 55<sup>th</sup> UN Human Rights Council, UN human rights experts including the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK will hold interactive dialogues (IDs).<sup>2</sup> We ask that your government participate, not only in the interactive dialogue with Special Rapporteur Elizabeth Salmón on March 18, but also in the interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms. Nazila Ghanea, on March 5-6 and with the Special Rapporteur on torture, Ms. Alice Edwards, on March 7-8 to raise respectively the detention of missionaries, Mr. KIM Jung-wook, Mr. KIM Kook-kie and Mr. CHOI Chun-gil, in North Korea and the forcible repatriation of North Korean refugees including Ms. Cheol-ok and a family of POW in violation of article 3 of the Convention against Torture.

We also request that South Korea, in the general debates for each agenda item, including the general debate following the oral update by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the DPRK on March 19, raise concern about North Korea's crimes against humanity and other grave human rights violations and urge the immediate resolution of the issues of POWs, abductees and detainees, including the immediate return of the six known South Koreans detained in North Korea by specifically naming the missionaries, Mr. KIM Jung-wook, Mr. KIM Kook-kie and Mr. CHOI Chun-gil, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Kim Hyo-jeong, "2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Insun to attend the UN Human Rights Council next week; to call for interest in North Korean human rights", Yonhap News, 2024. 2. 22., <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20240222142500504>

<sup>2</sup> HRC55 Sched meeting calendar, <https://hrc55.sched.com>

observance of the principle of non-refoulement under international law guarantee of safe passage to a third country like South Korea for North Korean escapees.

### **3. The side event on North Korean human rights organized by the South Korean government**

During the 55<sup>th</sup> UN Human Rights Council, we ask that families of POWs, abductees and detainees or North Korean escapees are invited as speakers to the side event on North Korean human rights organized by the South Korean government to let the international community hear the voice of the victims to add strength to calls for the resolution of the issues of POWs, abductees and detainees as well as China's forcible repatriation of North Korean refugees.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Signature organizations and individuals (as of February 26, 2024)

Kim Kyu Li (elder sister of Kim Cheol-ok who was repatriated by China to North Korea on October 9, 2023)

Kim Jeong-sam (elder brother of missionary Kim Jeong-wook who has been held in detention in North Korea since 2013)

Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (NKHR)

Justice For North Korea

Korean War POW Family Association

Mulmangcho

No Chain

Stepping Stones

THINK

Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG)