

# TOWARDS A NEW DAWN FOR THE NORTH KOREAN PEOPLE

Opportunities for Advancing Human Rights in North Korea

Side Event at the 55<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council

## Event Summary

Date: Friday 15 March 2024, 11:00 Central European Time

Location: Palais des Nations, Room XXV

The event is co-organized by a global coalition of nearly twenty members, including civil society representing over 500 organizations in over 100 countries, including the Center for Justice and Accountability, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Global Rights Compliance, HanVoice, Human Rights Watch, International Coalition to Stop Crimes Against Humanity in North Korea, International Federation for Human Rights, Korean War POW Family Association, Liberty in North Korea, Mulmangcho, Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights, People for Successful Corean Reunification, Stepping Stones, Sunny Pictures, THINK, Transitional Justice Working Group, and Unification Academy.

The event is co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Albania, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Romania, the Republic of Korea, and the United States and the Delegation of the European Union.

## Event Background

In 2014, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry (“COI”) on Human Rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (“North Korea”) published a landmark [report](#) detailing “unspeakable” atrocities, including crimes against humanity, inflicted by the North Korean government upon its people and others. The COI stated that the “gravity, scale and nature of these violations reveal a state that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world.” In the decade since the report’s publication, reports by various UN experts and civil society organizations have highlighted that the situation has worsened, particularly concerning freedom of movement and expression and access to food and basic necessities.

The event will discuss new developments that have impacted the human rights situation in North Korea since the publication of the COI report in 2014, with a particular focus on the period of Kim Jong Un’s leadership, the nexus between human rights and weapons development, and the unexplored impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. On January 23, 2020,

North Korea became the first country in the world to shut its borders in response to COVID-19. The government implemented overbroad, excessive, and unnecessary new restrictions, including a standing “shoot on sight” order at the northern border, installed new fences and guard posts, and applied strict enforcement of rules, which sealed the country. During this period, the government also carried out harsh punishment for consuming and distributing foreign media and communicating with the outside world.

This event comes at a time of heightened tensions, with North Korea continuing to expand its weapons programs, which benefit from the widespread use of forced labour and systematic repression and contribute to the diversion of resources from its people which could be used for the fulfilment of economic and social rights.

The event will include testimony from two North Korean escapees on the ongoing human rights situation in North Korea and a discussion of civil society priorities and proposals to strengthen action at the Human Rights Council to address the grave abuses in the country. This event will also identify and explore various strategies to strengthen existing accountability mechanisms and new avenues for justice for human rights abuses and international crimes in North Korea.

## Event Program

1. Welcoming Remarks by Mr. Sean Chung, HanVoice
2. Opening Remarks by Ambassador Leslie E. Norton, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in Geneva
3. Testimony from Ms. Kim Kyu-li, North Korean Escapee Representative
4. Testimony from Mr. Kim, North Korean Escapee Representative
5. Statement delivered by Mr. Ilhyeok Kim, a North Korean escapee representative speaking on behalf of a global coalition of twenty members, including civil society groups representing over 500 organizations in over 100 countries
6. Q&A and Interventions from the Floor
7. Closing Remarks by Ambassador Michèle Taylor, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations in Geneva