

Joint statement calling for discussion of the issues of prisoners of war (POWs), abductees and detainees and China's forcible repatriation of North Korean refugees as well as respect for the free will of North Korean POWs in the keynote speech, interactive dialogues and general debates and the side event during the 58th UN Human Rights Council (Feb 26-Apr 4, 2025)

February 25, 2025

We call upon the South Korean government to raise the issues of prisoners of war (POWs), abductees and detainees and China's forcible repatriation of North Korean refugees as well as respect for the free will of North Korean POWs captured by Ukraine 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 58th UN Human Rights Council which is to be held from February 24 to April 4, 2025.

1. The keynote speech during the high-level segment by 2nd Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Insun

On February 25, 2025, 2nd Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Insun will attend the 58th UN Human Rights Council and deliver the keynote speech during the high-level segment (HLS).¹ 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 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.

Lastly, we ask that Vice Minister Kang Insun call for respect for the free will of North Korean POWs captured by Ukraine, especially given that there are substantial grounds for believing that they would be in danger of being subjected to torture and other grave human rights violations if returned to North Korea.

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

During the 58th 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).² We ask that the South Korean government participate, not only in the interactive dialogue with Special Rapporteur Elizabeth Salmón on March 19, but also in the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on torture, Ms. Alice Edwards, on March 4 to discuss 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 and respect for the free will of North Korean POWs; the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms. Nazila Ghanea, on March 4-5 and the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, Ms. Mary Lawlor, on March 6, and the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy, Dr. Ana Brian Nougères, to discuss the detention of missionaries, Mr. KIM Jung-wook, Mr. KIM Kook-kie and Mr. CHOI Chun-gil, in North Korea; and the enhanced interactive dialogue on OHCHR report on transitional justice to discuss the issues of abductees and prisoners of war.

We also request that South Korea, in the general debates for each agenda item, including the general debate following the presentation of the OHCHR's DPRK accountability report on March 20, 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 observance of the

¹ <https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/RegularSessions/58/Pages/High-level%20segment.aspx>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session58/pow-hrc58-en.doc>

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 58th 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 25, 2025)

Kim Kyu Li and Kim Hyuk (elder sister and cousin 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)