

October 28, 2025

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Re: 2025 North Korean human rights resolution to be adopted at the 80th United Nations General Assembly

Dear President Lee Jae-myung,

We urge your government to engage fully with the international community and act in response to the dire and ongoing human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) by co-sponsoring the annual draft resolution on North Korean human rights at the 80th United Nations General Assembly.

The gravity of the human rights situation in North Korea is well recognized. In 2014, the UN [Commission of Inquiry on human rights in the DPRK \(COI DPRK\)](#) found that the DPRK government has committed crimes against humanity pursuant to the state policies, including "extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions and other sexual violence, persecution on political, religious, racial and gender grounds, the forcible transfer of populations, the enforced disappearance of persons and the inhumane act of knowingly causing prolonged starvation."

Following these findings, the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly have regularly adopted resolutions strongly condemning North Korea's human rights violations and calling for strengthening accountability efforts and mechanisms.

South Korea has historically played an integral role in these efforts. Every year from 2008 to 2018, the South Korean government co-sponsored North Korean human rights resolutions in the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council, reaffirming its commitment to the promotion of the North Korean people's fundamental rights.

However, we remain deeply concerned that your administration's current approach toward North Korea appears to be retreating from South Korea's previous commitments to human rights. In recent months, your government has blocked initiatives to provide the North Korean people with uncensored and vital information by restricting the activities of civic groups sending balloons with information across the northern border and halting public broadcasting into North Korea. The Ministry of Unification suspended the publication of its annual North Korea Human Rights Report in August,

dismantled a division dedicated to supporting North Korean escapee's employment and entrepreneurship in September, and decided to disband its North Korean human rights and humanitarian office and abductees response team earlier this month. These actions collectively signal a troubling shift away from support for the victims of North Korea's repression.

Between 2019 and 2022, South Korea declined to co-sponsor North Korean human rights resolutions claiming to promote human rights in North Korea through "[peace and prosperity in the Korean peninsula](#)." However, this approach did not reflect a holistic or principled policy toward inter-Korean relations. The South Korean government sidelined human rights considerations both explicitly and implicitly and pursued engagement at the expense of accountability and protection for victims. Most troublingly, in November 2019, South Korea [forcibly repatriated](#) two North Korean fishermen who had escaped to South Korea, sending them back to almost certain torture, enslavement, and enforced disappearances or execution. This action violated South Korea's domestic legal obligations and its international treaty commitments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, both of which prohibit refoulement to places where individuals face a substantial risk of torture or persecution. Such actions revealed the deep moral and policy shortcomings of an unprincipled engagement approach.

In late 2022, South Korea returned to co-sponsoring North Korean human rights resolutions.

It would send a deeply troubling signal, both domestically and internationally, if your administration were now to abandon its co-sponsorship for this year's resolution. Such a decision would not only undermine the universality of human rights but also diminish South Korea's standing as a democracy that upholds the rule of law and human dignity. South Korea should demonstrate leadership on human rights in North Korea. Ending co-sponsorship of this important resolution would be the opposite of leadership.

We stress that sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula cannot be achieved by excluding human rights. Durable peace in the Korean peninsula requires confronting the structures of repression that fuel instability and suffering in North Korea. Dialogue and engagement need to go hand in hand with accountability and truth, because genuine reconciliation cannot be built on silence or denial of North Korea's horrific rights violations. Ignoring human rights may make it appear that tensions have eased for a while, but the problems that fuel instability remain and real peace becomes harder to achieve.

We note that the UN General Assembly resolutions [78/218](#) of December 19, 2023 and [79/181](#) of December 17, 2024 condemned North Korea's systematic abduction, denial of repatriation and subsequent enforced disappearance of persons, including those from other Member States, on a large scale and as a matter of state policy, as well as denial of repatriation of prisoners of war and urged North Korea to realize the immediate return of all abductees, detainees and unrepatriated prisoners of war. These are issues which should be of paramount concern to South Korea.

We ask you to take a principled stance on North Korea's grave human rights violations with the co-sponsorship of the annual North Korean human rights resolution in the first United Nations General Assembly of your presidency.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Signatories (as of July 9, 2025)

Groups

Centro para la Apertura y el Desarrollo de América Latina (CADAL)

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)

Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (NKHR)

Free Korea Association (FKA)

Global Rights Compliance (GRC)

HanVoice

Human Asia

Human Rights Foundation (HRF)

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)

International Child Rights Center (InCRC)

International Coalition to Stop Crimes Against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK)

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Mental Health and Human Rights Info (MHHRI)

No Fence

Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights (NKnet)

North Korea Human Rights Network (NKHRN)

People for Successful Corean Reunification (PSCORE)

Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG)

Unification Academy

Individuals

Lord Alton of Liverpool / Independent Crossbench Member of the House of Lords & Co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea

Roberta Cohen / Former Co-Chair of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea