



The International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea Submits Petition to United Nations to End *Kwan-Li-So* (Gulag System)

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Seoul, South Korea

The International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK), consisting over 40 prominent human rights organizations and activists, today submitted a petition to the special procedures of the United Nation Human Rights Council calling for the UN to help shut down North Korea's vast gulag system.

North Korea holds as many as 200,000 people in its gulag system, known as the *kwan-li-so*. In these prison-camps, both real and imagined dissenters are imprisoned alongside their relatives—including the elderly and children—under a guilt-by-association system that was instituted by Kim Il-sung and which is now overseen by Kim Jong-eun.

“The environment in the gulag is horrific, making the suffering of the prisoners one of the most serious human-rights and humanitarian disasters in the world today” said Jared Genser, Managing Director of Perseus Strategies and pro bono counsel to the ICNK. Prisoners, including children, must undergo backbreaking labor, such as mining, logging, and farming, seven days a week for twelve or more hours a day. The labor is usually dangerous and a large percentage of the prison population, approximately 20-25, dies each year due to the horrendous labor conditions. It is estimated that over the past few decades more than 400,000 of the camp prisoners have perished.

“The labor conditions are only part of the misery the prisoners face,” said Ha Tae-keung of Open North Korea. “They also endure starvation-level food rations.” One defector reported the daily ration as approximately twenty grains of corn per inmate, an amount so meager that prisoners have to dig through cow dung to search for undigested grain in order to stave off death. Even though illnesses such as pneumonia and tuberculosis run rampant in the camps, there is no medical treatment available for prisoners. They are forced to work while sick, and for those who are no longer physically able to work, they are sent to sanatoriums to await their death. Alongside the hard labor and starvation, prisoners must also face the routine occurrence of torture, rape, and extra-judicial killing.



“Kim Jong-eun now has a choice to make,” said Kanae Doi, Japan Director of Human Rights Watch. “He can do nothing and continue operating the gulag system, thus making him responsible for the ongoing crimes against humanity his government is committing. Or, he can shut down the gulag and put this terrible chapter in the history of his country to an end.”

The petition submitted today urges the UN to carry out an investigation and reporting on the gulag. ICNK hopes to maximize the use of the UN system for the benefit of the victims in North Korea.

The UN used a similar procedure to investigate the situation of U.S. detainees at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. In that case, the UN issued a single report that shined a bright light on the abuses at Guantánamo and put forth recommendations that have helped reduce the number of prisoners detained in the system.

The time is ripe for this approach because for too long North Korea has not only denied any wrongdoing, it has also continued to ignore and repeatedly reject recommendations by the international community to take action. David Knaute, Asia Director for the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), said, “The Koreans imprisoned in this system need the help of the UN. The international community owes them nothing less.”

In its petition, ICNK calls on the UN to:

- Initiate an investigation and demand access to the gulag;
- Outline the size and scope of the gulag system;
- Render a conclusion the gulag’s operations constitute crimes against humanity;
- Work with the North Korean government to initiate a process that holds perpetrators accountable and provides appropriate reparations to victims and their families; and
- Take additional action with the full range of UN organs to engage with North Korea about the gulag system.

In addition to this submission, Perseus Strategies has submitted an independent



petition on behalf of gulag survivors Kang Chol-hwan and Shin Dong-hyuk to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on behalf of their family members who remain in the gulag system. The petition urges the Working Group to find their respective detentions in violation of international law and demand their immediate release.

The petitions were completed on a pro bono basis by Perseus Strategies (www.perseus-strategies.com) and New Perimeter (www.newperimeter.com).

To obtain copies of the petitions, please see www.stopnkcrimes.org

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Members and supporters of the Coalition include:

- Advocates International Global Council
- Asia Justice and Rights
- Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances



- Asian Human Rights & Humanity Association of Japan
- Burma Partnership (Thailand)
- Christian Lawyers Association for Paraguay
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide
- Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (USA)
- Conectas (Brazil)
- Council for Human Rights in North Korea (Canada)
- Freedom House (USA)
- Free NK Gulag (ROK)
- Free North Korea Radio (ROK)
- Han Voice (Canada)
- HH Katakomb (ROK)
- Human Rights Watch
- Human Rights Without Frontiers (Belgium)
- Inter-American Federation of Christian Lawyers
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- COMJAN (Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea)(Japan)
- Japanese Lawyers Association for Abduction and Other Human Rights Issues in North Korea
- Jubilee Campaign (USA)
- Justice for North Korea (ROK)
- KontraS (Indonesia)
- Liberty in North Korea - LiNK (USA)
- Life Funds for North Korean Refugees (Japan)
- Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights (ROK)
- NK Intellectual Solidarity (ROK)
- No Fence (Japan)
- North Korea Freedom Coalition
- Odhikar (Bangladesh)
- Open North Korea (ROK)
- People In Need (Czech Republic)
- PSALT NK (Prayer Service Action Love Truth for North Korea)
- The Simon Wiesenthal Center (USA)
- The Society to Help Returnees to North Korea (Japan)
- Students Alliance for Human Rights in North Korea (ROK)
- World Without Genocide (USA)
- Young Defectors' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (ROK)
- Yuki Akimoto, Burmainfo (Japan)



- Tomoharu Ebihara
- David Hawk, Visiting Scholar, Columbia University, Institute for the Study of Human Rights, and author of *Hidden Gulag*
- Ken Kato, Director, Human Rights in Asia (Japan)
- Tomoyuki Kawazoe, Representative, Kanagawa Association for The Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea / Member, Reporters Without Borders
- Suzanne Scholte, Seoul Peace Prize Recipient & Defense Forum Foundation (USA)
- Dr. Norbert Vollertsen