

ICNK Launches Fresh Fight against Prison Camps

Daily NK

By Hwang Chang Hyun

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▲ ICNK held a press conference today pressing the UN to step up work on North Korea's political prison camp system (DailyNK)

The International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK), a group founded by Amnesty International, NKnet and more than 40 other domestic and international human rights organizations, today revealed that it has submitted a new petition to the UN.

The petition calls for the UN Human Rights Council to employ its special procedures mechanism to help shut down the North Korean political prison camp system.

Jared Genser, an international lawyer with a long history of providing legal counsel to international figures including Desmond Tutu, asserted at the event, “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.”

Those things called for by ICNK under the petition include; ▲ access to political prison camps for the UN; ▲ investigation of the size and scope of the political prison camp system; ▲ conclusion that the prison camps constitute a crime against humanity; ▲ North Korea to cooperate to provide compensation to victims and families of the dead; ▲ all UN agencies to take what additional action they can to engage North Korea on the issue.

The press conference was also attended by Benedict Rogers, the East Asia region head for Christian Solidarity Worldwide, while Human Rights Watch and officials from the International League for Human Rights are among those who have signed the petition.

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Rights Coalition Seeks U.N. Probe Into N. Korea Gulags

Agence France Presse

April 03, 2012 10:58 AM

SEOUL: A human rights coalition called Tuesday for a United Nations investigation into North Korea's prison camps, saying more than 400,000 inmates have died in the past few decades from starvation or overwork.

"It is estimated that over the past few decades more than 400,000 of the camp prisoners have perished," said the group called the International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea.

In a petition submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Council, it urged the body to carry out an investigation and demand access to the gulag system.

The petition also urged the council to help shut down the North's network of camps, where it said as many as 200,000 prisoners are held.

"Prisoners, including children, must undergo backbreaking and usually dangerous labor, such as mining, logging, and farming, seven days a week for twelve or more hours a day," the coalition said in a statement.

Up to 25 percent of inmates die each year due to "horrendous" labour conditions, it said.

The coalition is made up of more than 40 human rights groups and activists including Perseus Strategies, a legal firm specializing in human rights.

One defector reported the daily ration as about twenty grains of corn per inmate, prompting prisoners to dig through cow dung to search for undigested grain, the coalition said.

"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," it said.

Along with hard labor and starvation, prisoners must also face "the routine occurrence of torture, rape, and extra-judicial killing", it said.

The North rejects widespread international criticism of its rights record. Last November it described a U.N. resolution expressing "very serious concern" as a smear campaign led by the United States.

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Ending The Gulag System In North Korea: International Coalition Submits Petition to United Nations

Radio Free Asia

Posted on [April 3, 2012](#) by [Bjorklundk](#)



North Korean prison camp survivor Kim Young Soon wipes away a tear at a U.S. Congressional hearing, Sept. 20, 2011. AFP Photo.

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-un.

“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.



SEOUL, South Korea, Shin Dong Hyuk, a North Korean defector who escaped to South Korea, speaks at a press conference on Oct. 29, 2007. He says that he was tortured in the gulag and that he saw his mother hanged and his brother shot to death. AFP Photo.

“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 extrajudicial killing.

“Kim Jong-un 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.

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U.N. urged to investigate prison camps in N. Korea

2012-04-04 20:42

Korea Herald

An international organization of more than 40 human rights groups around the world on Tuesday urged the U.N. Human Rights Council to address the issue of North Korean prison camps.

The International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea, or ICNK, submitted a petition to call on the U.N. to carry out an investigation and report on the gulags.

“ The U.N. used a similar procedure to investigate the situation of U.S. detainees at Guantanamo Bay, ” human rights lawyer Jared Genser, former attorney for Myanmar ’ s Aung San Suu Kyi, said during a press conference.

He said the North holds as many as 200,000 people in prison camps where prisoners, including children, undergo intensive labor including logging, mining and farming. More than 400,000 of the camp prisoners have died over the past few decades, he said.

“ 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, ” he said.

The petition calls on the U.N. to outline the size and scope of prison camps in North Korea, work with the North Korean government to hold perpetrators accountable and to take additional actions with other U.N. organs to address the issue together.

Separately, Genser has submitted an independent petition on behalf of prison camp survivors Kang Chol-hwan and Shin Dong-hyuk to the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to help them find their family members who remain in prison camps in North Korea.

By Kim Yoon-mi (yoonmi@heraldm.com)

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April 03, 2012

Activist Groups Petition UN to Investigate North Korea Prison Camps

Jason Strother | Seoul

Voice of America



Photo: Reuters

Participants holding pictures of a Northern prison camp and N. Korean children in hunger shout slogans after they got their heads shaved during an anti-North Korea rally demanding a legislation of N. Korean human rights laws at a plaza in front of the Seoul railway station, April 26, 2011.

Human-rights groups are petitioning the United Nations to investigate suspected prison camps in North Korea. Activists say thousands of North Koreans have died from starvation and forced labor in the gulag-like facilities.

A group calling itself the International Coalition to Stop Crimes Against Humanity in North Korea says 400,000 North Koreans have died in labor or prison camps during the past 60 years. And according to activists, as many as 200,000 prisoners remain locked up today. Human rights in North Korea are often overshadowed by security concerns, especially Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions.

Jared Genser of the international law firm Perseus Strategies says petitioning the United Nations will force member states to stop ignoring the violations taking place in the North.

"While North Korea's nuclear and missile programs are an obvious priority, the international community has an unfulfilled obligation to ameliorate the suffering inside North Korea," said Genser. "It is time for the U.N. to take the lead in helping to put an end to the gulag."

Interest in North Korean human rights violations has surged of late. That is due in part to the

publication of *Escape From Camp 14*, a book detailing the life of North Korean refugee Shin Dong-hyuk, a man born into one of these labor camps.

In this memoir, written by former *Washington Post* correspondent Blain Harden, Shin describes the torture he and his family endured and how he watched the public execution of his mother and brother.

This and similar first-hand accounts from defectors form the backbone of the coalition's case against North Korea.

Amnesty International's Jack Rendler says there is enough evidence to justify a U.N. investigation.

"What we want to have happen is that the U.N., the U.N. Human Rights Council, will establish a commission of inquiry to look into the violations that have occurred by virtue of there being a prison camp and labor camp system in North Korea and the abuses that occur within that system," said Rendler.

Rendler acknowledges that getting the United Nations to take action against North Korea will not be easy, but he says activists need to keep pushing.

He says that on April 14 Amnesty International will deliver petitions with 170,000 names to the North Korean Mission to the United Nations in Switzerland.