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CHINA | North Korean Defectors Face Forcible Repatriation

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling on the Chinese government to halt moves to forcibly repatriate 10 North Korean defectors, including a four-year-old child, who have been arrested by police in Shenyang.

The defectors were arrested Nov.4 following an investigation by the police and the raid of a house where some of them were sheltering in Shenyang in northeast China. The group, whose ages range from a child of four to adults in their late 40s, was detained at a police station in Shenyang as of Monday afternoon and is facing the threat of imminent repatriation. Their current whereabouts are unclear.

The defectors, their families in South Korea and the South Korean embassy have appealed for the Chinese government to consider their case on humanitarian grounds. The Chinese government has a policy of forcibly repatriating North Korean defectors within its borders, despite the fact that this puts the returnees at risk of death or imprisonment in the country's network of brutal prison camps.

CSW has written to the Chinese government annually on Save North Korean Refugees Day requesting that North Korean refugees in its borders be allowed safe passage to a third country: "Unlike any refugee crisis in the world today, the North Korean refugees have a place to go for immediate resettlement as they are citizens of South Korea, under Articles 2 and 3 of the Republic of Korea Constitution. Furthermore, the United States, as well as other countries, has shown a willingness to accept these refugees for resettlement. There is no reason for them to remain a burden and concern for China and face the threat of repatriation to North Korea where they will most certainly be tortured and imprisoned, and in some cases, executed for fleeing their country."

In 2014, The UN Commission of Inquiry on human rights in North Korea found that “the gravity, scale and nature” of human rights violations in North Korea “reveal a State that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Forcibly repatriating North Koreans to their country violates the international humanitarian principle of 'non-refoulement' and risks sending people to their deaths. Even if not actually executed, the conditions of torture and abuse in North Korean detention centers and prison camps are so severe that imprisonment amounts to a death sentence. We appeal to China to show humanity and exercise responsibility by allowing these and all other North Korean Refugees safe passage to South Korea or a third country. As it becomes an increasingly influential world power, China must respect international humanitarian norms. Failure to do so renders China directly complicit with North Korea's crimes against humanity."