

Sufferings in North Korea Must Be Brought to Light

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Kjell Magne Bondevik is president of the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, and former Norwegian prime minister. This week the human rights situation in North Korea will be reviewed in the U.N. Human Rights Council. For too long the world has ignored the human rights situation in North-Korea, fearing it could obstruct constructive discussions on nuclear weapons. It is vital that the grave human rights violations and humanitarian challenges are brought to the top of our agenda. (...)

The human rights and humanitarian situation in North Korea is among the most appalling in the world today. Threats of war and nuclear weapons allow Kim Jong-il to keep his brutal iron grip on his people.

Human rights and nuclear politics are linked, and human rights concerns should therefore be addressed in all political discussions with the regime. The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights has submitted a report on the human rights situation in North Korea to the U.N. Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review, recommending action.

Through two reports, in 2006 and 2008, the Oslo Center has participated in documenting the serious humanitarian and human rights situation in North Korea. The reports concluded that the North Korean government has failed in its

responsibility to protect

its own population against some of the world's most serious violations of human rights and international law. Against this backdrop the Oslo Center has two central recommendations to the U.N.:

Firstly, the U.N. Security Council should adopt a non-punitive resolution. The intention is to exert pressure on the North Korean government with a view to opening the country for humanitarian relief, to release the political prisoners and give access to the country for the U.N. special rapporteur, as well as further engagement by the U.N. Secondly, the U.N. General Assembly should strengthen the annual resolution on North Korea by referring to the U.N. doctrine of ``

responsibility to protect

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The U.N. should also conduct an analysis of whether the human rights situation in North Korea is indeed a violation of this doctrine. (...)

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