The South Korean parliament should pass legislation on human rights in North Korea that promotes human rights protections and accountability for the most serious international human rights crimes, Human Rights Watch said.

“South Korea arguably has the greatest interest of any country in improving human rights in North Korea, yet unlike some of its allies, it has made no legislative commitment to that task,” said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director. “Passing this bill would ensure that human rights issues in the North are not pushed aside for political convenience on the Korean peninsula, now or in the future.”

The bill is intended to “protect and improve human rights of the North Korean people.” Lawmakers first proposed the bill in 2005, and it has been the subject of serious ideological disagreements between the conservative and progressive parliamentarians ever since. However, recent progress in negotiations on the bill between the ruling Saenuri Party and the opposition Minjoo Party offer greater hope that a compromise bill may be passed.

The bill includes provisions to create a North Korean Human Rights Foundation that could fund non-governmental groups to conduct research and seek to improve the human rights situation in North Korea, educate South Koreans about rights conditions in North Korea, and provide humanitarian aid in line with international monitoring standards. The law would also establish a system to document and archive information about rights abuses by the North Korean government and its leaders that could be used for future efforts to pursue accountability for rights crimes, in line with similar international efforts.

In 2006, Japan passed the North Korean Human Rights Act, to enhance public awareness of the human rights situation in North Korea and resolve the issue of abductions of Japanese nationals to North Korea. The United Nations General Assembly has adopted an annual resolution on Pyongyang's systematic and pervasive human rights violations every year since 2005.

A UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) reported in 2014 that the North Korean government had committed systematic human rights abuses on a scale and gravity without parallel in the contemporary world – including extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions, and other sexual violence. The UN Human Rights Council and the General Assembly adopted the commission-inspired resolutions by overwhelming majorities, and the UN Security Council decided to place the issue of human rights in North Korea on its permanent agenda. On December 10, 2015, the Security Council formally debated the human rights situation in North Korea for the second year in a row.
As part of the international community’s commitment to hold North Korea accountable for rights abuses, the UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights on June 23, established a special office in Seoul to gather evidence and information about ongoing abuses and crimes against humanity in North Korea.

“Human rights should be respected everywhere in the Korean peninsula and any effort that contributes to that goal deserves strong support,” Robertson said. “By passing this act, South Korea would show that it firmly believes there can be no backsliding on the need for rights accountability in North Korea.”

Read the full article [here](#).