

Statement on the findings of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Jennifer Welsh 14 March 2014 The Special Adviser to the United Nations

Secretary General on the Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Welsh, expresses her deep concern over the findings of the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which were made public in Geneva on 17 February 2014 and will be presented to the Human Rights Council.

Drawing on documentary evidence, presentations from expert witnesses, and testimony from victims and their relatives, the Commission found that crimes against humanity – including extermination, enslavement, torture, forced abortions and other sexual violence, and the inhumane act of knowingly causing prolonged starvation - have been committed in the DPRK, in line with policies “established at the highest level of the state.” Moreover, the CoI has determined that such crimes are ongoing, given both the continuation of discriminatory policies and institutions, and the long-standing culture of impunity.

“The persistence of such crimes, and the prolonged period of suffering endured by the population of the DPRK,” stated the Special Adviser, “are an affront to our humanity and demand serious consideration by the Human Rights Council and other United Nations bodies. While the world's attention is fixed upon crises in Syria and the Central African Republic, the sobering testimony of witnesses before the Commission makes clear that the population of the DPRK also deserve timely and decisive action.” Much of the testimony took place in public hearings accessible to a wide range of observers.

“I am particularly concerned by the Commission's findings concerning persons detained in political prison camps, those who try to flee the country, those who adhere to the Christian religion, and all those alleged to constitute a threat to the political system of the DPRK,” said Ms. Welsh. “The Commission concludes that widespread attacks against these individuals are embedded in a broader pattern of politically-motivated human rights violations that affects the general population of the country.”

As Members States of the United Nations declared at the 2005 World Summit, all states have the primary responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The Special Adviser therefore called upon the leadership of the DPRK to cease immediately the systematic commission of serious violations of human rights and crimes against humanity, and engage in dialogue with the Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. She also urged the international community to assume its responsibility to protect the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea from such crimes, given the Commission's findings that the “Government of the DPRK has manifestly failed to do so.”

“In exercising its collective responsibility,” Ms. Welsh stated, “the international community should act upon the Commission’s call for accountability for all those who have committed crimes against the population of DPRK, or actively assisted in such crimes,” including through a possible referral of the situation of the DPRK to the International Criminal Court. In addition, she supported the Commission’s call for the Human Rights Council to adopt its report, and for all relevant bodies of the United Nations to take appropriate action.

“International actors have a range of diplomatic, political, and humanitarian tools at their disposal to act upon their responsibilities to protect the people of the DPRK from these continued crimes”, said the Special Adviser. As recommended by the Commission, such action could include targeted sanctions against particular individuals most responsible for the commission of crimes against humanity, as well as longer-term efforts to promote human rights dialogue, increased contacts with the population of the DPRK, and an inter-Korean agenda for reconciliation.

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