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Human Rights Infringements in North Korea

Throughout the past decade, the grave human rights violations of DPRK have gradually gained attention, while its possession and development of nuclear weapons have always been priority agenda of the international community. After the continuous work of NGOs that fought for the recognition of the North Korean refugees, the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights finally responded to the efforts of civil society and the cry of victims. In 2013, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 22/13, establishing the Commission of Inquiry and its mandates to gather evidences of human rights infringements in North Korea in 9 criterias and also on the crimes against humanity, ensuring full accountability.

Resolution 22/13 the accountability particularly for the crimes of humanity, which demand high legal threshold of the widespread and systemic inhumane acts in pursuant to the state policy. It also asked for COI's recommendations to address the situation of the human rights in the DPRK after the official actions of the United Nations that documented the accounts of victims and perpetrators and initiated the process of archiving the evidences for the future applications.

The Commission of Inquiry presented its reports to the Human Rights Council in 2014. COI collected the evidences of human rights infringements of DPRK mainly by finding patterns in the victim's testimonies while maintaining strict accountability standards. This was the best and only way for COI to investigate, as DPRK refused all of COI's requests to be invited to its country. COI also looked at the published documents of UN organizations or NGOs that examined the first-hand accounts human rights in DPRK. It also found out that the satellite images elucidated the four massive prison camps inside DPRK.

It elaborated the legal frameworks of COI, which includes the four human rights treaties that DPRK is bound to, and the customary international law which has developed the interpretations of the crimes against humanity. It also identified the victims of crimes against humanity: the victims in the political prison camps; ordinary prison camps; religious believers and those who supposedly introduced "subversive" influence; those who try to flee the country; starving population; and the victims of international abduction. Not only did COI illustrated the grave denials of human rights one by one, it also articulated the way the inhumane acts committed by the government of DPRK have been the products of its policy that only prioritized the developments of its military weapons and the maintenance of its regime and of the extravagant lifestyle of elites over appropriate food spending and well-being of its citizens.

The reports of COI represent the trailblazing step of the international community that has finally decided to stop dismissing the human rights situation in DPRK for the sake of its concerns for the nuclear weapons. As the words express itself, crimes against humanity necessitates the condemnation and actions of international community against the criminals as the scale of the human rights violations are so grave, systemic, and widespread that it ignores the dignity of whole human race and the government itself is the perpetrator of the crime.

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