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June 11, 2021

Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
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United Kingdom
Via email

Dear Leaders of the Group of Seven (G7),

As the heads of state of the world's leading democracies, you have shown a commitment to championing democratic values and promoting a freer, fairer, and more prosperous world. This commitment has been most exemplified in the past when you have addressed topics such as [forced labor](#) and the [horrific conditions](#) that the Uyghur people in China are subjected to.

Given the principled stand that you have taken on these issues, we respectfully request that you similarly address the grave human rights violations that have been taking place in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While many countries around the world have implemented travel restrictions and border measures due to the pandemic, none of them reach the level of brutality of those enacted by North Korea's totalitarian regime. North Korea has officially closed its borders and refuses to let its own citizens return, leaving [tens of thousands](#) overseas workers in limbo, most of whom are in China. North Korea's Ministry of State Security (MSS) has ordered border guards to [shoot at anyone attempting to cross the border](#) to and from [China](#). In January 2021, for example, a North Korean citizen trying to escape to China [was shot and killed](#). Last September, a North Korean citizen crossing the border from China was [killed on the spot](#) by border guards, and the MSS rewarded the guard who killed the citizen as well as his squad commander with a holiday.

This is not the first time that the North Korean regime has committed human rights abuses against its own people. In June 2019, three men attempting to defect to China were [shot dead](#) by border guards. In addition, the MSS lured a defector living in China to return home in exchange for an official passport, but instead [arrested the man and his family upon his return](#) — they have not been seen or heard from since then. Other human rights violations listed in the [2014 UN Commission of Inquiry report](#) persist, including violations of freedom of movement and residence; extrajudicial executions; arbitrary detention and torture, and forced labor camps; as well as abductions and enforced disappearances of Japanese citizens and North Koreans living in neighboring countries — all amounting to crimes against humanity.

In [May 2021](#), the foreign and development ministers of the G7 addressed forced labor camps and abductions in North Korea. While these horrific abuses warrant significant attention and the North Korean regime must be held

accountable for them, the devastating impact that COVID-19 has had on an already vulnerable population, in combination with the regime capitalizing on the pandemic as an excuse to commit rampant human rights abuses, must be addressed separately and immediately.

We urge you to speak on behalf of those living under the most brutal totalitarian regime in the world and to address the human rights violations that have been taking place during the pandemic in North Korea.

Sincerely,



Roberto González
Chief Legal Officer
Human Rights Foundation