

UN rights expert welcomes return of detainees from DPRK, urges release of others

The release of three United States nationals by North Korea is “another important building block” towards peace, said a United Nations human rights expert on Thursday, while urging the release of six South Korean nationals who are still being held.

In a statement reacting to the release of the US citizens, Tomás Ojea Quintana, the UN expert on human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) said that he had “consistently advocated for the release of these foreign detainees, who were reportedly under arbitrary detention and prevented from enjoying their basic freedoms.”

“I welcome this important decision of the DPRK Government,” the Special Rapporteur continued, “which I hope will offer an opportunity to further address human rights and humanitarian concerns,” he added.

Kim Sang-duk, known as “Tony Kim”, Kim Hak Song and Kim Dong-chul were among several foreign nationals arrested in recent years in the country.

Mr. Ojea Quintana urged the north to also release six South Koreans who remain in detention, including three pastors.

“I remain concerned by reports that the foreign detainees have not received due legal process and may be held in inhumane conditions without consular access,” he said.

“Moreover,” continued the Special Rapporteur, “as peace talks progress, a comprehensive assessment of the overall penitentiary system in North Korea will become unavoidable.”

During the first week of July, Mr. Ojea Quintana will visit the south, and in October present his next report to the UN General Assembly.□

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