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COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
IN THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

-PRESS RELEASE-

**UN COMMISSION ON NORTH KOREA TO HOLD PUBLIC HEARINGS IN UK AND US**

GENEVA, 17 October 2013 – The United Nations-mandated commission investigating the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) announced today that next week it will begin a series of public hearings in the United Kingdom and the United States aimed at gathering information from witnesses addressing rights violations alleged to have occurred in the Asian nation.

The three-member Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the DPRK will hold public hearings in London on 23 October to be followed by two days of similar hearings in Washington D.C. on 30 and 31 October. Those testifying before the UN panel will include individuals with first-hand accounts of conditions in the DPRK.

The chairperson of the Commission, the Australian judge Michael Kirby, said the London and Washington D.C. hearings provide an important opportunity for witnesses to share information aimed at raising international awareness about the human rights situation in the DPRK, whose Government has so far declined to grant access into the Asian country to the Commissioners.

“Although we do not have direct access to the DPRK, we are still able to gather vital information from individuals who have bravely come forward to tell their stories”, said Kirby. “These hearings, which are transparent and conducted impartially, will hopefully sharpen the focus and spotlight on the situation in the country”.

The London hearings will be held on 23 October beginning at 1 p.m. In Washington D.C, the Commissioners will hold public hearings on 30 and 31 October on the campus of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. In the two locations, the members of the COI will hear from persons who fled from the DPRK and non-governmental organisations working on human rights in the DPRK. The Commission of Inquiry and their support team will also meet with government officials, independent experts and others with specific knowledge about the situation in the DPRK.

The Commission will also visit New York on 28-29 October where they will hold meetings with senior officials at UN headquarters and present an oral update to the General Assembly.

Previously, the Commission held similar public hearings in Seoul and Tokyo in late August. Presenting an oral update to the Human Rights Council on 17 September, chairperson Kirby reported that testimony heard on those occasions pointed to widespread and serious violations in every area it had been asked to investigate. “What we have seen and heard so far – the specificity, detail and shocking character of the personal testimony – appears without doubt to demand follow-up action by the world community, and accountability on the part of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,” he said.

The Commission of Inquiry was established by the UN Human Rights Council through a unanimous decision in March 2013. It was given a one-year mandate to investigate alleged systematic, widespread, and grave violations of human rights in the DPRK. The Commission is also tasked to conduct its



investigation with a view to ensure that those responsible for human rights violations will be held accountable for their crimes.

In May, the Human Rights Council President, Ambassador Remigiusz Henczel (Poland), appointed the three members of the Commission. The other two Commissioners are Sonja Biserko, a Serbian human rights campaigner, and Marzuki Darusman of Indonesia, who also serves as UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, a post he has held since 2010.

Possible violations being investigated by the group include those related to the right to food and those associated with prison camps, torture and inhuman treatment, arbitrary detention, discrimination, freedom of expression, the right to life, freedom of movement and enforced disappearances, including abductions of nationals of other states.

“The direct interaction with witnesses in these public hearings has been extremely powerful and helped expose a number of critical issues”, Kirby said. “The witnesses we have met with so far in Seoul and Tokyo told us they were sharing their testimony with the hopes that their children won't suffer the same way they have and be subjected to the ferocious treatment which they have been subjected to. We hope that this new round of hearings will cast further light on a truly terrible situation that has remained largely obscured for far too long.”

The members of the Commission will hold press conferences in each of the three locations at the conclusion of those city visits. Further details will be made available prior to each city visit.

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For more information about the Commission of Inquiry please visit their website:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/CoIDPRK/Pages/CommissionInquiryonHRinDPRK.aspx>