

H.E. Mrs YueHou
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NORWAY

Your excellency,

I am writing to express my concern regarding forced repatriation of North Korean refugees in China.

China's commendable attempt to accelerate realisation of the SDG's and Agenda 2030 through the Global Development Initiative stands in stark contrast to realities on the ground. North Koreans forcibly repatriated face harsh punishment in their origin country; some are executed, others face torture, and/or become subject to forced labour in concentration camps. There has also been worrying reports surfacing of refugees suffering inhuman and degrading treatment in China.

The lack of recognition of refugee status for North Korean escapees constitutes a clear breach of international law. The 1951 Refugee Convention reiterates the core principle of non-refoulement of refugees, and China ratified the convention in September 1982. Labelling the North Korean refugees as "illegal economic migrants" is a clear breach of the Convention. This is exemplified by Chinese authorities not allowing the UNHRC Beijing office to interview North Korean escapees in an effort to determine pleas for refugee status.

The practice of forcibly repatriating refugees to North Korea knowing that they are likely to experience torture, is a clear breach of international obligations. Furthermore, while in China, North Korean are commonly subject to human trafficking and exploited. The lack of basic protection of the refugees' rights is a serious violation of international law. A basic right protection includes upholding refugees' right to freedom of religion or belief, which is not possible if forcibly repatriating individuals to a country which it is well known does not uphold this right, such as North Korea. Chinese authorities re-starting the forced repatriation process of North Korean refugees once the border lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic is suspended is a serious concern.

In light of the current circumstances and China's praxis for handling North-Korean refugees, I kindly ask for your intervention in ensuring that:

- China ceases labelling North Korean escapees as "illegal economic migrants", respects refugees' right to freedom of religion or belief, and abides by the 1951 Convention's definition of refugees;
- The UNHRC office in Beijing is given access to interview North Korean escapees to determine pleas for refugee status;
- Chinese authorities enable North Korean escapees to travel to a third country.

Sincerely,