

Families of Victims of Enforced Disappearance by North Korea

Urge the Lee Jae-myung Government

On the eve of the UN-designated *International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances* (August 30), we gather to deliver our urgent appeal to the Government of the Republic of Korea and the international community.

For decades, North Korea has systematically carried out enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention of South Korean POWs, abductees during and after the Korean War, South Korean citizens, and North Korean escapees. The 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the DPRK (COI) concluded that these state-organized abductions and non-repatriations constitute crimes against humanity, estimating more than 200,000 victims.

In December 2024, the Republic of Korea became a State Party to the *International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED)*, which affirms that enforced disappearance can never be justified under any circumstances, and guarantees victims and their families the right to truth, justice, and reparation. As a State Party, Korea bears both legal and political obligations to actively address cases of enforced disappearance committed by North Korea.

Yet successive governments have sidelined this issue in inter-Korean dialogue. Families of POWs, abductees, and detained citizens have suffered for decades without even confirmation of life or death, while the plight of forcibly repatriated North Koreans remains unresolved.

We therefore strongly call upon the Lee Jae-myung administration to act without delay and fulfill its constitutional and treaty-based responsibilities:

1. **North Korea** must disclose the fate and safety of all victims—including POWs, Korean War abductees, detained citizens such as Kim Jung-wook, Kim Guk-gi, and Choi Chung-gil, and forcibly repatriated escapees. It must return the remains of the deceased, release all arbitrarily detained persons, and promptly repatriate survivors.
2. **The Government of the Republic of Korea** must hear directly from victims' families and establish a presidential- or prime minister-level task force dedicated to the repatriation of POWs, abductees, and detained citizens. The government should prioritize enforced disappearance as a national agenda and institutionalize regular *inter-Korean human rights dialogue* as a central pillar of North Korea policy.
3. **As a State Party to the ICPPED**, the Korean government must fulfill its treaty obligations: guarantee families' right to truth, formally refer the issue to the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, and pursue international avenues for resolution.
4. **The Government** must adopt comprehensive measures to support the psychological and social needs of victims' families and immediately begin legislative efforts for a special law on truth, accountability, and reparations.

This is not a mere appeal but a reminder of the Korean government's legal and moral obligations under international law and the Constitution. Enforced disappearance is not a past issue but an ongoing crime. Continued neglect would mean the abdication of the state's duty to protect its citizens and would leave Korea accountable before the international community.

We urge the Lee Jae-myung government once again: make North Korea's enforced disappearances a central agenda, not a peripheral issue, and take concrete action to respond to the suffering of victims' families.

August 20, 2025

Families of Victims of Enforced Disappearance by North Korea & North Korean Human Rights Organizations

- Families of South Korean Detainees in North Korea
- Korean War POW Family Association
- Kyereol Unification Solidarity
- Improving North Korean Human Rights Center
- Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights
- Transitional Justice Working Group
- Justice for North Korea
- Committee for the Democratization of North Korea
- North Korean Human Rights Corporation
- Council for North Korean Human Rights