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Peace and prosperity for the two Koreas depends on human rights

"The Korean people's human rights must be on the agenda of the forthcoming inter-Korean summit," said Amnesty International.

One of the objectives of the historic meeting between President Kim Dae-jung and Chairman Kim Jong Il to be held in Pyongyang from 12-14 June, is to establish a permanent peace on the Korean peninsula. The promotion and protection of human rights is crucial to this aim.

President Kim Dae Jung, a former prisoner of conscience himself, has pledged to carry out political and judicial reforms. These include a review of the National Security Law (NSL), the formation of a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the enactment of a Human Rights Law. However progress in these areas continues to be stalled.

Amnesty International urges the President to put his words into action by undertaking legal and institutional reforms to prevent abuses and safeguard human rights.

North Korea's recent openness to engagement with the international community must include an acknowledgement of international human rights standards. In particular, the North Korean government should end the secrecy surrounding human rights and allow access for international human rights monitors.

North Koreans who cross the border into China in search of food are apprehended by (North Korean and Chinese) security forces and if forcibly returned, some may face the death penalty. Public executions, harsh and inhumane conditions in prisons and detention centres, and torture continue to be of concern to Amnesty International.

While the human rights situations are different in each country, moves toward re-unification, peace and stability must include human rights.

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