

Media Advisory

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North Korea: Persecuting the starving

As North Korea seeks to normalize relations with the international community, Amnesty International reiterated its call for dialogue on human rights. The organization today released a report on the plight of thousands of North Koreans who have fled to China to escape critical food shortages since 1994.

North Korean law states that leaving the country without permission is a criminal act and punishment can be anything from seven years in a reform institution to execution.

It is estimated that hundreds, possibly thousands, of North Koreans have fled to China in search of food. But their situation in China is very precarious -- they face intimidation and imprisonment at the hands of Chinese security forces. Although China is a party to the Refugee Convention, many North Koreans are forcibly returned to North Korea where they risk serious human rights violations, including imprisonment in harsh conditions, torture and the death penalty.

The North Korean authorities should ensure that no one is persecuted if forcibly returned, and amend provisions in the criminal code in accordance with international human rights standards so that people are free to leave the country. The Chinese authorities must ensure that the refugee rights of North Koreans are protected.

Amnesty International is urging the international community to raise these concerns with both the Chinese and the North Korean authorities.

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