

## **UN expert hopes States can persuade North Korea to change direction during Geneva ‘peer review’**

GENEVA/SEOUL (8 May 2019) – The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea has expressed hope that the UN’s ‘peer review’ process will persuade authorities in North Korea to change direction and to prioritise improving the lives of ordinary citizens.

“This is a rare opportunity for States to directly engage with the DPRK Government on human rights issues,’ said Tomás Ojea Quintana, referring to the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the DPRK on 9 May in Geneva.

Under the UPR, the human rights situation of all UN Member States is reviewed every five years by the 47 members of the Human Rights Council. This is the third such review of North Korea.

“The UN human rights mechanisms are an integrated system, and will follow up on implementation of the recommendations made through the Universal Periodic Review. To this end, access to a country that continues to be closed to any scrutiny remains crucial, and I trust that members of the Council make this point clear enough.

“I also encourage States to raise the issue of political prison camps,” said Ojea Quintana. “North Korean citizens live in fear of being sent to political prison camps, only for exercising their fundamental rights. Such a way of living is contrary to the fundamental right to live in dignity, and should never be tolerated.”

Although the Government of the DPRK denies the existence of the political prisons, information gathered indicates that citizens of North Korea fear being sent to these prisons for any act perceived critical of the authorities.

“I hope that the Government of the DPRK and reviewing States put the ordinary North Korean’s lives at the heart and openly discuss how to improve their daily life,” the UN expert said.

**ENDS**

*Mr. Tomás OJEA QUINTANA (Argentina) was designated as the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK by the UN Human Rights Council in 2016. Mr. Ojea Quintana, a lawyer with more than 20 years of experience in human rights, worked for the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, and represented the Argentinian NGO “Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo” in cases concerning child abduction during the military regime. He also led cases of criminal corporate responsibility. He is a former Head of OHCHR human rights programme in Bolivia, and served as the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar from 2008 to 2014.*

*The Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights*

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