

Statement of Julie Turner
Nominee to be Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights Issues, with the
Rank of Ambassador
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
May 17, 2023

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as the Special Envoy on North Korean Human Rights Issues, with the rank of Ambassador. I am grateful for the confidence shown by the President and Secretary Blinken in nominating me.

As a Korean American adoptee, it was my childhood dream to serve the country that welcomed me, and I have been privileged to do so as a career civil service employee for 20 years. I entered the State Department in 2003 as an eager Presidential Management Fellow, finding a home in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), and having the opportunity to work at the National Security Council as well. I have spent the last two decades promoting human rights, not just as U.S. values, but as critical interests directly tied to our national security.

One of my first assignments in DRL was to staff the first Special Envoy on North Korean Human Rights during President George W. Bush's administration. With great humility and appreciation, I sit here today seeking your support for that same position. If confirmed, I will work closely with you and all Members to advance our nation's interests through the promotion of human rights for North Koreans.

The human rights situation in the DPRK is one of the most protracted human rights crises in the world, and the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed Kim Jong Un to tighten his control over all aspects of life in the isolated country even more.

As the DPRK's human rights record has deteriorated, the connection between its widespread violations and abuses and the threat it poses to international security are clear. The regime's human rights violations and abuses are inextricably linked to its weapons programs, which are funded through the exploitation and abuse of the North Korean people. Thousands of North Koreans are exported abroad and

subjected to conditions that amount to forced labor. School children are subject to mass mobilizations, and food distribution policies favor the military, leaving millions of North Koreans food insecure. The people of North Korea have suffered far too long under these abusive policies.

If confirmed, I will focus on five key areas:

First, I will work with partners and allies, including the ROK, to reenergize international efforts to promote human rights and increase access to uncensored information in the DPRK. I will also empower and elevate the efforts of North Korean escapees, whose firsthand experiences, networks, and analysis are invaluable.

Second, I will seek to reinvigorate accountability efforts at the UN. I will prioritize efforts to resume the open briefing at the UN Security Council on the human rights situation in the DPRK and coordinate with likeminded governments to advance accountability for those responsible for human rights violations and abuses in the DPRK.

Third, I will undertake efforts to urge the DPRK to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide for the needs of its people. I will call for the repeal of repressive laws, such as the Reactionary Thought and Culture Denunciation Law, and for assurances that international aid organizations will have access to provide assistance in an independent and nondiscriminatory manner, including to the most vulnerable populations.

Fourth, I will focus on the protection of North Korean refugees, including by pressing governments to uphold their respective non-refoulement obligations, to allow UNHCR access, and to ensure access to U.S. resettlement programs. I have had the honor of welcoming many North Korean escapees to the United States over the years and am proud to call many of them friends. These individuals overcame unimaginable odds in search of freedom and are now business owners, soldiers, civil service employees, and great Americans.

Fifth, I will engage with the Korean American community to identify divided families in the United States who have family members in the DPRK and advocate for the urgent reunification of these families with their immediate relatives. To

that end, I will partner closely with the Republic of Korea to advance family reunions, including for Korean abductees and their loved ones. I will also work with Japan and other partners to press for the immediate resolution of the Japanese abductees issue.

In closing, I want to thank my parents, Fred and Joan, and my siblings, Brad and Lindsey, for teaching me to have faith, to work hard, and to serve others. I also want to thank my talented and compassionate children -- Olivia, Eli, Alise, and Emma -- who drive me to be a better human, along with my best friend and partner, George. I love you all. Thank you for your unwavering support and gracious understanding when humanitarian crises have kept me at work late. Lastly, thank you to my colleagues in DRL and the State Department, who have mentored, encouraged, and inspired me.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to your questions.