

**Statement of Suzanne Scholte: International Human Rights Day
FOR PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE LAOS NINE
December 10, 2014**

Thank you for joining us this morning. First I wish to express my deep thanks to Congressman Ed Royce and Congressman Elliot Engel on behalf of the North Korea Freedom Coalition for their leadership on the North Korea human rights issues and their sponsorship of HR 1771 which passed the Congress unanimously. In fact, Rabbi Abraham Cooper and I started this year off with a press conference at the Museum of Tolerance in New York with Congressman Engel to call for an end to Dennis Rodman's basketball diplomacy, which was occurring during the time that the Commission of Inquiry was completing its findings that North Korea was guilty of crimes against humanity.

Our purpose for being here this morning is to call for specific action regarding the atrocious human rights violations being committed against the people of North Korea including the children of North Korea -- by the Kim Jong Un regime and by North Korea's neighbors. The incident we are highlighting this morning is the human face of this ongoing tragedy.

We are releasing a statement from MJ, the missionary who rescued these children and members of our North Korea Freedom Coalition will highlight each child by sharing some thoughts from MJ about them. We realize that the DPRK is now claiming that the children are doing wonderfully in the warm embrace of the dictator now that disturbing reports are emerging about their torture and the possible execution of the two oldest orphans.

We are releasing today letters we have sent to the governments of China, Laos, and Russia, as well as to Ban Ki Moon, calling for specific action to determine the wellbeing and status of these children. In fact, since this incident occurred in May of 2013 we have repeatedly called on China and Laos to account for the well-being of these children but also NEVER to repatriate North Korean refugees again and to work with the U NHCR to safely resettled refugees.

In addition, we have called for these member nations to support the Commission of Inquiry's referral of the DPRK to the International Criminal Court AND we are once again calling on the United States Senate specifically Senators Robert Menendez and Robert Corker, to take up the North Korea Sanctions Enforcement Act that Congressman Royce and Engel have successfully gotten passed unanimously through the House. We simply must stop the flow of money to Kim Jong Un and his regime that are enabling him to continue to commit crimes against humanity.

All of these requested actions are in the letters we have released today. We do not know how these nine young people are doing but one thing for certain we do know -- MJ and his

wife saved the lives of these children and others that were being sheltered – they gave up their own safety and well being to nurture these children back to life. Several made it to South Korea, several made it to America. However, the last nine orphans -- just at the point they thought they were going to South Korea from Laos -- were forced back to North Korea even though they made it clear they wanted to go to South Korea, even though South Korea had agreed to accept them, even though repatriation to North Korean means certain torture, certain imprisonment and sometimes even execution. The fact is the governments of Laos and the People's Republic of China decided to honor the request of the DPRK, not the government of South Korea or what was in the best interest of these innocent young people.

Now, I would like to read a few excerpts from MJ's statement and introduce you to the Laos Nine. We are making available today MJ's entire statement.

In the winter of 2009 in China, I met the kkotjebbi children for the first time. Most of the children were eating what they could find in trash cans and were sleeping in the sewers in freezing conditions...I have seen with my own eyes the Chinese border patrol guards beat kkotjebbi children with clubs and metal brushes. Our children were physically beaten so much that their heads were covered with bald spots because the hair would no longer grow back from the trauma. My wife and I lived with these children and know first-hand that North Korean defectors in China have no basic human rights or privileges and are only treated as objects for sale. Objects sold for cheap as laborers or sold for the harvesting of their organs. Women are forcefully prostituted and live as slaves for the profit of Chinese people. This is the reality for North Korean defectors.

To see these children and not do anything would be unconscionable. So starting in 2009 we started to bring the kkotjebbi children to our home to live as a family. My wife and I did our best to teach the children who had been living on the streets how to read, write, and socialize so that they could eventually live in society. In those circumstances there were many difficulties, but the children called us "mom" and "dad" and thought of us as family. This made it all worthwhile.

..... We were living in fear on a daily basis and as a result lived very quietly as if our house was vacant and if we felt something was suspicious, we moved as quickly as possible. We lived like this and moved repeatedly. When we felt the children were ready for life in South Korea, we sent them three at a time from China to the South Korean Embassy in Laos and also three were safely resettled in America.

In 2013 my wife's health was in such poor condition that she could not help care for the children in our home. We then decided to go to South Korea with all nine (9) children with us via Laos. We started our journey in April, 2013, making it to Laos.....

Now imagine as you see these pictures and hear about these young people how these nine were told on the morning of May 27 by the Lao authorities to pack their bags, they were going to South Korea...

It is my honor to introduce Vice Chairman of the North Korea Freedom Coalition and Associate Dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and my dear colleague, Rabbi Abraham Cooper ...