

Q1) It's been 7 years since the release of the COI report. How do you look back?

“A number of recommendations of the COI have been implemented, such as the recommendation of a special branch office or field office should be created in the region. And it has been created in Seoul. A lot of the recommendations had not been implemented, in large part because North Korea has been not cooperative, and has not permitted the United Nations to enter its territory. And they have been taking up the continuance of problems and wrongdoing the COI reported in its report. So, it can only be given a mixed mark, because of the difficulty of getting implementation of the recommendations, which were contained in the report.”

Q2) What is the most difficult part in implementing the recommendations of the COI report?

“The most difficult parts were getting North Korea to cooperate as the United Nations member should. No member has to, no country has to join the United Nations. But, if they do, they must be expected to comply with the fundamental principles in the charter. Those fundamental principles include security and

peace. But they also include fundamental human rights and respecting fundamental human rights. Unfortunately, North Korea has a very bad record in that respect.”

Q3) What are the achievements that the COI report has contributed to?

“First of all, it has helped the international community understand what a problem it has on its hands with North Korea. The COI conducted its investigation in the open, transparently, and with public hearings, and the record is on the internet. So, this puts a permanent record before the international community, which can be used to measure any improvement or deterioration. The good things that have come out of the report include the establishment of a branch office of the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights in Seoul. The field office permits the gathering of ongoing information about the refugees who escaped from North Korea, and the state of human rights in North Korea. North Korea

has improved somewhat its compliance with the regular reporting of human rights record, and in some little areas, has reportedly improved the way, in which it has dealt with certain minorities, such as people with disabilities. But overall, anything to do with politics and so called enemies of people, enemies of the regime, there has been no progress whatsoever. And most of the human rights abuses remain today as they were when they were reported by the COI in 2014.”

Q4) The COI report had led to the establishment of the Seoul office. How do you assess what the Seoul office has done so far?

“I think the Seoul office has performed as well as possible with its very meager resources. One of the recommendations are meant to be made in the upcoming meeting of the Human Rights Council is that the resources of the Seoul office could be raised, so that it can continue to interview people who have escaped North Korea and who have stories to tell.

The history of the Korean people should be recorded, and the documentary and other records, including interviews with people who have escaped, should be kept. One day, the terrible conditions in North Korea will be improved. When that happens, the people of Korea will have an entitlement to have the record of what has happened in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea unveiled, so that it can be seen for future generations as a warning of what happens when a small group and a family gain a virtual uncontrolled power over a whole people.”

Q5) What is the most urgent thing that needs to be done with regard to the North Korean human rights issues?

“The most important things are to maintain the sanctions that are in place against North Korea, whilst always allowing for humanitarian exemptions. The only language that North Korea appears to understand are the sanctions imposed by the Security Council. They have been increased since the report

of the COI. China and the Russian Federation, which are permanent members of the Security Council, have been in favor of the increase. Each of those countries as neighbours of North Korea have a good reason to be concerned about the human rights situation and the security situation in North Korea. You can't have one without the other. You can't get improvement in security, you can't get an end to a nuclear weapon, whilst North Korea is controlled by an autocratic and totalitarian regime. So, all of these are interconnected. Similarly with South Korea, it's important that South Korea should rejoin the international consensus on calling out the conduct of North Korea that amounts to a breach of fundamental human rights, amounts to crimes against humanity. At the end of the Second World War, that is what the world community agreed to do, and it's important that the Republic of Korea, South Korea as a democratic state, should rejoin the international consensus and speak up for the human rights of fellow Koreans in North Korea."

Q6) Any advice for the US Biden Administration, in terms of how they should approach North Korea?

“I think the Biden Administration knows what has to be done. President Trump initiating a dialogue with Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un was taking a step that was probably beneficial of trying to cut away the difficulties and get to discussions. But when it's analyzed, President Trump never mentioned the issue of human rights in North Korea, and the consequence of that was no pressure was applied in respect of human rights in North Korea. And I expect a much more balanced and nuanced approach will be taken by the Biden administration.”

Q7) The UN Security Council doesn't appear to be working towards referring North Korea to the International Criminal Court. Should the international community seek an alternative way to hold the North Korean regime accountable?

“When you actually go and sit in the beautiful

chamber of the Security Council, and you see the places for the 15 representatives of nation states, you realize what a small number of people in our world have enormous responsibilities. And I don't give up on the possibility that the Security Council will decide to refer North Korea to a prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. I hope that will be done. The UN charter should work in a case like this. If it isn't done, the COI report listed a number of alternative procedures could be adopted, including the creation by the General Assembly, which does not permit a veto by any country, to establish a special tribunal.”

Q8) And your final words?

“I hope the progress will be made in the reunion -- families from North Korea to make contact with families from South Korea. Nowadays with new technology, and with the way in which we can communicate so easily, it is really disgraceful that North Korea has not made access by families,

separated by the Korean War. Such a decision to be decided by a ballot, like a lottery, this is uncivilized conduct. It ought to be corrected as quickly as possible. People involved are all getting old, very old. And the denial of access to your family in this way, when technology this immediately available, this is a very uncivilized conduct on the part of North Korea.”