

Question for written answer E-005235/2014
to the Commission (Vice-President / High Representative)
Rule 117
Charles Tannock (ECR)

Subject: VP/HR - Blood minerals in North Korea

Although the appalling state of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) is notorious throughout the world, the recent UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) report highlighted one particularly egregious phenomenon: the existence of slave labour in prison camps, which are thought to house up to 200 000 inmates, among them thousands of children. The report states that in the prison camps 'all inmates are subjected to forced labour' for over 12 hours a day, regardless of their physical or emotional well-being, and that 'deadly work accidents frequently occur as a result of the combination of the prisoners' dire physical condition and the lack of safety measures'. The report further states that the actions of the state in the political prison camps, which include extermination, enslavement, torture, rape and religious and gender-based persecution, constitute crimes against humanity.

A less well-known aspect of the camps is that many of them host mines which produce coal, magnetite and other minerals. Given the overwhelming evidence that such mines are operated using slave labour, and that the inmates are subject to appalling conditions frequently resulting in severe injury or death, it comes as a surprise to many that importing such minerals from North Korea is technically not forbidden under the sanctions regime. It can be argued that EU policy is therefore tacitly supporting the trade of 'blood minerals', which should be treated in the same way as 'blood diamonds' in West Africa. Banning their trade would also cut off a valuable source of revenue for the government and its nuclear weapons programme.

1. Is the VP/HR aware of the allegations surrounding so-called 'blood minerals' in North Korea's slave labour camps?
2. Will she add her call for the import of such minerals to be explicitly banned by the EU, for example by amending Council Regulation (EC) No 329/2007?
3. What other measures has she taken, and can she take, to draw attention to the appalling situation of human rights in North Korea, and help to alleviate the conditions in the prison camps?