

## **Human Rights Watch**

### **Mongolia: Protect Rights of North Korean Migrant Workers**

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Letter to Mongolian Ministers to Protect Labor Rights of North Koreans

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Elaine Pearson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch

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The Mongolian government should protect the human and labor rights of North Koreans coming to Mongolia to work, Human Rights Watch said today in a letter to Mongolia's minister of social welfare and labor.

On July 22, 2008, Daily Business News Mongolia reported that Ulan Bator and Pyongyang have approved a deal allowing North Koreans to work in Mongolia. According to the US Department of State, the agreement, reached in February 2008, permits up to 5,300 North Korean workers to come to Mongolia over the next five years.

"We are not advocating for Mongolia to reject North Korean workers, but to ensure that human and labor rights of North Koreans are protected while working in Mongolia," said Elaine Pearson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, in the letter.

An opportunity to work overseas is hugely attractive to many North Korean workers. But reports on North Korean workers deployed to work in foreign-owned factories and in some European countries indicate that they face severe restrictions on their freedom of expression, movement, and association. In some cases, they remained under virtually constant surveillance by North Korean "minders," and were routinely forced to deposit a large portion of their salaries in a bank account controlled by North Korean embassy officials.

In the letter to Minister Demberel, Human Rights Watch asked the Mongolian government to conduct thorough on-site investigations in facilities where North Koreans work, ensure that all North Korean workers are fully informed of their rights and how to exercise them, ensure that workers receive net wages compliant with minimum wage laws, and monitor freedom of movement of North Korean workers.

"This is a chance for the Mongolian government to set a positive precedent for North Koreans working overseas and allow them to be treated like other workers, instead of as virtual prisoners of North Korean minders. They must not waste it," said Pearson.

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