

Treasury Sanctions North Korean Officials and Entities in Response to the Regime's Serious Human Rights Abuses and Censorship

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WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) today designated three individuals in response to the North Korean regime's ongoing and serious human rights abuses and censorship. Treasury is taking this action in conjunction with the State Department's "[Report on Serious Human Rights Abuses and Censorship in North Korea](#)," which is being submitted in accordance with the North Korea Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act of 2016 (NKSPEA).

"Treasury is sanctioning senior North Korean officials who direct departments that perpetrate the regime's brutal state-sponsored censorship activities, human rights violations and abuses, and other abuses in order to suppress and control the population. These sanctions demonstrate the United States' ongoing support for freedom of expression, and opposition to endemic censorship and human rights abuses," said Treasury Secretary Steven T. Mnuchin. "The United States has consistently condemned the North Korean regime for its flagrant and egregious abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and this Administration will continue to take action against human rights abusers around the globe."

Today's actions shine a spotlight on North Korea's reprehensible treatment of those in North Korea, and serve as a reminder of North Korea's brutal treatment of U.S. citizen Otto Warmbier, who passed away 18 months ago. Otto would have turned 24 years old on December 12, and his parents Fred and Cindy Warmbier and the rest of his family continue to mourn for him. President Trump pledged in his 2018 State of the Union address that the United States will "honor Otto's memory with American resolve." Today's actions are part of this Administration's continued efforts to highlight North Korea's abysmal human rights record, and to speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Today's designations were issued pursuant to Executive Order 13687, which targets, among others, officials of the Government of North Korea and the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), and are consistent with the provisions of NKSPEA. Individuals designated today are senior officials

of previously sanctioned government bodies, including the Ministry of State Security (MSS), the Ministry of Public Security, WPK Organization and Guidance Department (OGD), and the WPK Propaganda and Agitation Department (PAD).

OFAC designated **Jong Kyong Thae**, the Minister of State Security, pursuant to E.O. 13687 for being an official of the Government of North Korea and of the WPK. According to the Department of State report, Jong Kyong Thae plays a role in directing the censorship activities and abuses perpetrated by the MSS. The MSS was designated previously pursuant to E.O. 13722 for having engaged in, facilitated, or been responsible for an abuse or violation of human rights by the Government of North Korea or the WPK.

OFAC designated **Choe Ryong Hae**, the Director of the OGD, pursuant to E.O. 13687 for being an official of the WPK. Choe Ryong Hae is reportedly seen as the “Number Two” official with control over the party, government, and military. The OGD is a powerful body of the North Korean regime, is instrumental in implementing censorship policies, and purports to control the political affairs of all North Koreans. The OGD also assumes oversight responsibilities over organizations undergoing party audits to inspect for ideological discipline. When a party official deviates from the official message in public remarks, the OGD reportedly will dispatch an official to monitor a self-criticism session. Choe Ryong Hae is also a member of several powerful WPK committees, including Vice Chairman of the Executive Policy Bureau of the WPK Central Committee.

OFAC also designated **Pak Kwang Ho**, the Director of the PAD, pursuant to E.O. 13687 for being an official of the WPK. According to the Department of State report, in his capacity as the Director of the PAD, Pak Kwang Ho is responsible for maintaining ideological purity and managing the general censorship functions of the PAD, furthering the suppression of freedom of speech, expression, and censorship. The PAD is said to maintain oppressive information control and is responsible for indoctrinating the people.

Today's Department of State report highlights the role of three groups responsible for implementing strict censorship and restricting access to foreign media. These groups are composed of personnel from the Government of North Korea and the WPK, whose property and interests in property were blocked in 2016. These groups — which go by various numbered identifications such as Group 109, Group 118, and Group 114 — reportedly conduct warrantless searches for unapproved foreign media or content, inspect and confiscate computer content, including external storage devices, and even kidnap defectors or foreign citizens who support human rights in North Korea.

Human rights abuses undermine the values that form an essential foundation of stable, secure, and functioning societies; have devastating impacts on individuals; weaken democratic institutions; degrade the rule of law; perpetuate violent conflicts; facilitate the activities of dangerous persons; and undermine economic markets. The United States seeks to impose tangible and significant consequences on those who commit serious human rights abuse, as well as to protect the financial system of the United States from abuse by these same persons.

In total, since January of 2017, Treasury has taken action against over 500 individuals and entities engaged in activities related to, or directly involving, human rights abuse, including actions like today under the North Korea program and other programs such as Global Magnitsky, Syria, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Venezuela, Russia, Iran, and other sanctions programs. Treasury has also published [advisories to U.S. financial institutions on human rights abuses enabled by corrupt senior foreign political figures and their financial facilitators that can be found here](#) , as well as [advisories related to some of the programs listed above, which can be found here](#).

As a result of today's actions, any property or interests in property within (or transiting) U.S. jurisdiction of those designated by OFAC are frozen. Additionally, transactions by U.S. persons involving the designated persons are generally prohibited. [For identifying information on the individuals designated today, click here](#).

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