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## Smith: Photos of fishermen handed over to North Korean communists 'painful to view'

Decries controversial repatriation by previous South Korean Government 'without due process'



WASHINGTON—Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), Co-Chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, today issued the following statement after South Korea's Ministry of Unification publicly released photos showing the controversial repatriation of two fishermen to communist North Korea in 2019:

“Photos of fishermen who were seeking asylum being physically forced to return to communist North Korea against their will and without due process of law are painful to view. These pictures clearly show the two fishermen being forced to cross the Military Demarcation Line at the truce village of Panmunjom and their resistance to being handed over to a brutal regime.

As I said at [the hearing I chaired on June 24th](#), I was shocked and dismayed by what happened, and I believe a thorough investigation is still needed to determine who issued the order and why.

The justification the previous Moon Jae-in government gave at the time—that the fishermen were murderers—sounded very pretextual, and insufficient time was given to

investigate the allegations. Regardless of wrongdoing, these escapees should not have been refouled to North Korea against their will, and the government should have respected due process.

This tragic episode also underscores the barbarity of North Korea's communist regime, and the callous complicity of the previous Moon Administration. North Korea should disclose what happened to these two fishermen, and whether they are still alive. I fear the worst, however."

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