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North Korea Urged to Respond on Fate of Japanese Abductees

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The United Nations special rapporteur on North Korean human rights is calling for the communist state to resolve issues concerning Japanese citizens kidnapped by its agents. The U.N. official also says Pyongyang does not recognize his mandate and has failed to cooperate with requests for information.

U.N. Special Rapporteur Vitit Muntarbhorn, has spent the week in Japan focusing on the issue of Japanese abducted by North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s.

On Thursday, Mr. Muntarbhorn issued what he termed a "humanitarian call" to Pyongyang to quickly and effectively respond to Japan's claims.

Japanese officials believe that some of the 10 suspected kidnap victims are alive in North Korea. Pyongyang says that eight are dead and the two others never were in North Korea.

Mr. Muntarbhorn says he hopes the other parties involved in talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons - China, South Korea, the United States, Japan and Russia - also can prod North Korea on its unresolved issues with Tokyo.

"I would hope that those involved in other talks can also lend their support for the satisfactory resolution of the issue between the two countries, particularly on the abductions issue," he said.

Mr. Muntarbhorn, a law professor from Thailand, was appointed eight months ago to investigate North Korean human rights violations. He was also supposed to begin a dialogue with the Pyongyang government. But Mr. Muntarbhorn acknowledges he has had no success with that part of his mandate.

"Any information from them, any constructive response from them would be most welcome," he said. "To date they have not responded in terms of providing any information. I think it is generally known that they do not accept the mandate and that they rebut the post of the special rapporteur."

Mr. Muntarhorn brushed aside questions about whether economic sanctions might be effective in pressuring North Korea to improve its human rights situation. He said his approach is to "broach constructive influence first" within the U.N. system.

North Korea has previously warned that it would consider sanctions tantamount to a declaration of war.

The special rapporteur's report on North Korea will be submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Commission at the end of this month. The report will make note of continued allegations of torture, public executions, capital punishment for political crimes and infanticide in prison and labor camps, among other human rights violations.

The commission could decide to issue a resolution and declare the situation needs further monitoring.
