**BRIEF:**
**Why the U.S. Should End the Travel Ban to North Korea**

For over thirty years, thousands of Americans traveled safely to North Korea for family reunions, educational and cultural activities, and humanitarian projects. However, in response to the 2017 tragic death of American student Otto Warmbier, the Trump administration imposed a ban on U.S. citizens traveling to North Korea that essentially ended these meaningful people-to-people exchanges.

Here are four reasons why the U.S. should end the North Korea travel ban:

1. **Allowing Korean Americans to reunite with their family members in North Korea will fulfill decades of U.S. promises to resolve one of the longest humanitarian crises in the world.**
   - An estimated 10 million Koreans became separated from their families as a result of the Korean War. In 2001 U.S. officials estimated that approximately 100,000 Korean Americans still had loved ones in North Korea, but that number has likely decreased as many have died since then.
   - The U.S. government has made promises to arrange reunions with divided Korean Americans and their North Korean families since 2001. More recently, President Biden made a pledge to pursue these reunions just before the 2020 election. The U.S. has a moral obligation to facilitate these reunions as quickly as possible, as time is running out for many of these elderly Korean Americans.
   - The travel ban, however, has prevented Korean American families who had previously traveled to North Korea to see their family members from further access and communication. It also prevented elderly Korean Americans who had been searching for their loved ones since the 1950-53 Korean War one last chance at a reunion.

2. **Allowing civil society efforts and people-to-people exchanges would help break down barriers and build trust between the people of nations still technically at war.**
   - People-to-people exchanges are vital to transforming 70 years of enmity into peaceful coexistence. For example, in 2015 representatives of Women Cross DMZ, a U.S.-based women’s peacebuilding organization, traveled to North Korea for a women’s peace symposium and peace walk. The historic meeting of American and North Korean women would not have been possible had a travel ban been in effect.
   - Ending the travel ban would allow American civil society organizations to resume their important trust-building activities, helping to fulfill U.S. commitments made under the 2018 Singapore Agreement to “establish new relations” and “build a peace regime on the Korean peninsula” — a commitment that the Biden administration has also pledged to fulfill.
3. Allowing the repatriation of U.S. servicemen remains, which serves the interests of both the U.S. and the D.P.R.K., offers a rare and needed opportunity for collaboration.

- In late 2016, the Richardson Center and the Coalition of Families of Korean & Cold War POW/MIAs sent a mission to the D.P.R.K. to discuss the return of 55 boxes of remains of U.S. soldiers who fought in the Korean War. This mission was in line with point #4 of the Singapore Summit: The United States and the DPRK commit to recovering POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified.
- However, the 2017 travel ban barred any follow-up missions that could return these remains to their families; overrode Congress's intention to enable and encourage such humanitarian activities; and closed a crucial non-governmental channel that could help advance future U.S.-D.P.R.K. negotiations.

4. Allowing U.S. humanitarian organizations to resume their work would allow the delivery of life-saving aid to the most vulnerable populations in North Korea.

- Reputable aid organizations with long-standing programs in North Korea are some of the strongest, most well-informed, and trusted channels of communication between the U.S. and North Korea.
- The travel ban, however, has greatly restricted or shut down entirely U.S.-based humanitarian and development projects in North Korea. While the State Department's travel ban has exemptions for humanitarian workers, journalists and those acting in the “national interest,” many aid organizations have reported that the process of applying for these Special Validation passports has been cumbersome and unpredictable, greatly hindering their operations.