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Ranking Member Eliot Engel Opening Statement at Hearing, “North Korea’s Criminal Activities: Financing the Regime”

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Eliot L. Engel, the top Democratic on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, delivered the below remarks as prepared for delivery at today’s committee hearing, “North Korea’s Criminal Activities: Financing the Regime.”

The statement follows:

“I’d like to thank Chairman Royce for calling this timely hearing and for his leadership in addressing the North Korean threat. I would also like to say that it was a privilege to travel to the region with you (Chairman Royce) earlier this year to discuss North Korea with top leaders in Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing.

“The recent nuclear test conducted by the North was a dangerous provocation that raised tensions in northeast Asia. It reinforces the fact that Pyongyang poses a serious threat to the national security of the United States and our allies in the region. Following the test, the House overwhelmingly passed a strong, bipartisan resolution -- authored by Chairman Royce and myself -- condemning the North’s irresponsible action. Among other things, that resolution called for the United States government to use available legal authorities and resources to defend our country’s interests against North Korean illicit activities, the topic of today’s hearing.

“North Korea’s nuclear tests, ballistic missile launches, and attacks against South Korea have been obvious to the entire world. What has drawn less attention, however, is the fact that North Korea engages in a wide array of illicit activities to support its military program and leadership.

“The North Korean regime’s criminal conduct – including drug smuggling, weapons trafficking, the sale of nuclear and ballistic missile technology to rogue regimes in Iran and Syria, and the counterfeiting of US currency, cigarettes and pharmaceuticals – serves as a lifeline to keep itself in power. Proceeds from these criminal activities are distributed to members of the North Korean elite—including senior members of the military—and are used to finance the top leadership’s lifestyle. They are also invested in North Korea’s military programs.

“I have visited the capital of North Korea, Pyongyang, on two occasions, and I can tell you that the North Korean regime would do better to help its own people, give them the things that they need, rather than spend its time and money on nuclear weapons and missile technology in defiance of the international community.

“The North Korean regime practices what experts have called “criminal sovereignty.” In essence, Pyongyang uses state sovereignty to protect itself from outside interference, while dedicating a part of its government to carrying out activities in violation of international law and the domestic laws of many other countries. For North Korea, these criminal activities are viewed as necessary to maintain the power of the regime, with no regard for the fact that they are corrosive to international law and order.

“So, the question is, what steps can we take to combat North Korea’s illicit activities? And can our efforts to prevent these activities be used to pressure North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs?

“I look forward to the testimony of the witnesses, and once again thank the Chairman for holding this important hearing.”