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37th session of the Human Rights Council

Oral Updates on DPRK



**United Nations Deputy High Commissioner
for Human Rights**

Geneva, 14 March 2018

Salle, Palais des Nations

Mr President, Excellencies,

This [morning] I have the responsibility for providing you with the oral updates you have requested on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Eritrea, pursuant respectively to your resolutions 34/24 and 35/35.

Oral update on the DPRK

Excellencies I will start by reporting on progress made towards **accountability** for human rights violations in the DPRK.

Your resolution decided to strengthen the human rights office's capacity to monitor and document human rights violations in the DPRK, particularly those that may amount to crimes against humanity.

You also called for the establishment of a central information and evidence repository, and for the recruitment of legal accountability experts to assess information and victims and witnesses' accounts, with a view to developing possible strategies for any future accountability process.

In the past year, OHCHR has worked to develop the best modality for fulfilment of the Council's decision, and is steadily moving ahead, within the limits of the resources provided to us eventually under approval of the General Assembly. On this basis we have developed "**the Accountability Project for the DPRK**" which foresees a team of five staff, to be based both in Geneva and Seoul, bringing the legal expertise and skills to establish the information repository as foreseen.

I am pleased to announce that the High Commissioner has appointed a high-level expert to lead the project and we are in the process of filling the other posts.

We have also begun work on the the electronic repository, which will be the **first independent and comprehensive information system on human rights violations committed in the DPRK**. It will bring together a wealth of information from a wide range of actors. It will be publicly available, allowing for comprehensive and annotated searching. And, this tool will facilitate the building of cases that eventually could be used for the purposes of criminal prosecution.

The information collected by our office in Seoul from a range of sources – notably including that held in its database of **interviews with victims** of human rights violations - will constitute a vital building block for the larger accountability project.

Setting up such an information management system is a major undertaking, with **considerable financial implications**. We will adopt a step by step approach so that the elaboration of this tool can be incremental, according to the resources made available to us.

As part of our accountability project on the DPRK, we are in the process of organizing **training to be provided** in Seoul, on international criminal law and international human rights law. This will be held in the first half of 2018 and will convene judges, prosecutors, governmental and non-governmental actors involved in documenting human rights violations perpetrated in the DPRK.

The **recent thaw** in relations between the DPRK and the Republic of Korea is welcome. The High Commissioner hopes that this easing of international tensions that was evident during the Winter Olympics exchanges presages deeper dialogue with the DPRK Government on a wide range of serious human rights concerns.

We also hope that the opportunity for many elderly people and separated families to visit their missing relatives will be seized. We further hope that the missing may be accounted for, and that the Special Rapporteur will be provided opportunity to speak with people inside the country.

The SDGs remind us, as do their foundation the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that peace, security and development are sustainable only in as far as they benefit all, with no one left behind, with no one excluded or forgotten.

The international community's aim must be to support **long-term, a principled protection and accountability approach** that improves the situation for the people of the DPRK. Measures that will hold those responsible for human rights violations to account are necessary steps in this, and will provide victims with their right to justice, to remedy, to restoration of their dignity.

The accountability project is a unique and, in many ways, **historical opportunity** for us all to support, promote and, we trust, deliver accountability for human rights violations perpetrated in the DPRK.

I call upon this Council to ensure the necessary support is provided for all of us to work towards this important aim.