

What is the UN, HRC, and OHCHR?

What is the UN?

The United Nations (UN) is an international organization founded in 1945 near the end of World War II. It currently has 193 Member States. Both the DPRK and the ROK were admitted as members in 1991. The UN is guided by the purposes and principles in its founding document, the Charter. Some of the aims of the UN are to maintain international peace and security, to promote human rights and international law, to promote social progress and better standards of living, to limit the use of force, to promote international cooperation in solving international problems, and many others. The main bodies of the UN are the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the UN Secretariat. All were established in 1945 when the UN was founded. All UN Member States are members of the General Assembly. By joining the UN, Member States agree to be bound by the decisions of the 15-member Security Council.

What is the Human Rights Council?

The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the UN system made up of 47 Member States responsible for the promotion and protection of all human rights around the globe. The Member States of the Council are elected by the General Assembly on a regional basis. Member States can also be removed from the Council by a vote of the General Assembly. Of the 193 Member States of the UN, 117 have been members of the Council at least once. The Council has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. It can also appoint independent experts to examine specific issues or places of concern, for example the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK.

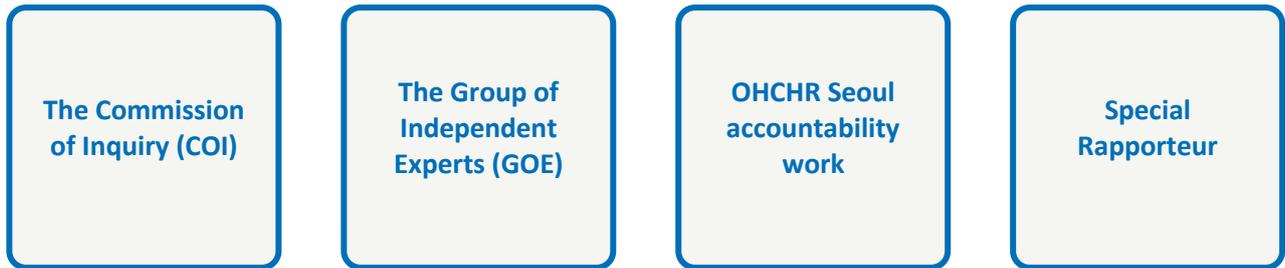
What is OHCHR (Seoul)?

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is the leading UN office that works directly on human rights. It represents the world's commitment to the promotion and protection of the full range of human rights and freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. OHCHR is led by a High Commissioner, currently Michelle Bachelet. Both the High Commissioner and the Office have a unique role to promote and protect all human rights, help empower people, assist governments, and to ensure that peace and security, development, and human rights - the three pillars of the UN - are mutually reinforced.

In 2015, the Human Rights Council asked OHCHR to open an office in Seoul. Since then, OHCHR Seoul has been working on these mandates with respect to the DPRK:

- Strengthen the monitoring and documentation of the human rights situation in the DPRK as steps towards establishing accountability in the country
- Enhance engagement and capacity-building with the Governments of all States concerned, civil society and other stakeholders
- Maintain visibility of the situation of human rights in the DPRK including through sustained communications, advocacy and outreach initiatives

What is the UN doing about human rights in the DPRK?



[The Commission of Inquiry \(COI\)](#)

The Human Rights Council has been concerned about the human rights situation in the DPRK for many years. In 2013, the Council established a Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the situation of human rights in the DPRK. Following a one-year investigation the COI presented its report in 2014, which detailed severe and long-running human rights violations in the country. The COI made recommendations to the international community, including the referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court by the UN Security Council. The COI also recommended that the Human Rights Council establish the OHCHR Seoul Office.

[The Group of Independent Experts \(GOE\)](#)

In 2016, the Human Rights Council requested the High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish a Group of Independent Experts (GOE) to explore appropriate approaches to seek accountability for human rights violations in the DPRK, in particular where such violations amounted to crimes against humanity, and to recommend practical mechanisms of accountability to secure truth and justice for victims. In its 2017 report, the GOE recommended the adoption of a multi-pronged and comprehensive approach to accountability, including measures towards the realization of victims' rights to truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence. Its recommendations included referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court, creation of an ad hoc tribunal for the DPRK, and prosecution of crimes by Member States through the principle of universal jurisdiction.

[OHCHR Seoul accountability work](#)

The GOE also recommended that the international community enhance its efforts to lay the groundwork for future criminal trials of human rights violations in the DPRK. The Human Rights Council has responded by deciding to strengthen the capacity of OHCHR, including OHCHR Seoul, to implement the recommendations of the GOE pertaining to criminal accountability. Specifically, the Human Rights Council requested OHCHR to strengthen its monitoring and documentation efforts; establish a central information and evidence repository; and have experts in legal accountability assess all information and testimonies with a view to developing possible strategies to be used in any future accountability process. Whereas the work of the COI and GOE are complete, the work of OHCHR in implementing their recommendations is ongoing. Unlike some other UN accountability mechanisms, such as the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria, OHCHR does not have a mandate to prepare case files or propose individual prosecutions.

Special Rapporteur

In addition to the work of OHCHR, the Human Rights Council in 2004 also established the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK. The Special Rapporteur is currently Ms. Elizabeth Salmon Garate from Peru. The Special Rapporteur is an independent expert, is not paid by the UN, and is not a UN staff member. The Special Rapporteur investigates and reports on the situation of human rights in the DPRK and on the DPRK government's compliance with its obligations under international human rights law. The Special Rapporteur submits reports to the Human Rights Council and General Assembly annually. In addition to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, any other special rapporteurs working on thematic human rights issues may examine the situation in the DPRK as it pertains to their mandates. For example, in 2017 the Special Rapporteur on the rights of people with disabilities carried out a state visit to the DPRK at the invitation of the Government. Her visit was the first and only visit to the DPRK by a Special Rapporteur to date.