

58th session of the Human Rights Council



**Presentation of the Report of the UN High Commissioner for
Human Rights**

**“Promoting accountability in the Democratic People’s Republic of
Korea”**

Nada Al-Nashif
Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Mr. President,

Excellencies,

I am pleased to present our report on promoting accountability for human rights violations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The report covers the two-year period between 1 November 2022 and 31 October 2024. While it focuses on accountability, it also highlights our continued serious concerns over violations in the DPRK, particularly in relation to the right to food, where State policies appear to have exacerbated severe hunger, and severe restrictions on freedom of expression.

It includes the work of our Office in the past year on the issue of enforced disappearances and abductions, as well as the use of forced labour both in the DPRK and other countries.

We will present a comprehensive report in September on human rights in the DPRK over the past decade.

Mr. President,

Regrettably, there has been no significant movement over the last two years towards criminal accountability for human rights violations committed in the DPRK.

However, there has been some progress internationally in related areas.

First, our Office is continuing to build a central repository of evidence of human rights violations in the DPRK, as mandated by this Council. The repository doubled in size during the reporting period and now includes hundreds of witness testimonies covering more than 1,000 victims of human rights violations.

The repository enables deeper analysis of patterns of violations for many years, including imprisonment, torture, enslavement, enforced disappearance and abductions, overseas forced labour, and trafficking.

Our analysis provides reasonable grounds to believe that international crimes may have been committed in the DPRK over a period of several decades, and indeed, continue to be committed. However, further investigations are needed to build out the evidence base and, in particular, to link the evidence more clearly to the specific individuals responsible.

During the reporting period, our Office conducted 175 interviews with escapees from the DPRK, victims of human rights violations, and families and relatives of victims. Our staff also interviewed former senior officials who provided critical information about State policies, structures, and decision-making processes.

Our Office stands ready to cooperate with Member States on judicial investigations or other approaches providing forms of redress to victims, including by sharing information from the repository, in accordance with the UN Secretariat's cooperation framework.

Mr. President,

Second, while criminal accountability is completely absent, a number of civil cases have drawn attention to human rights violations by the DPRK.

Victims' groups and civil society organizations have filed civil claims seeking damages in several different countries. For example, ethnic Koreans living in Japan have filed civil claims relating to being lured from Japan to the DPRK under false pretenses and subjected to human rights violations there.

Third, our Office is exploring potential paths towards accountability through competent judicial authorities, UN investigative bodies and human rights mechanisms, and civil society.

This engagement has opened space for the exchange of best practices from around the world, to develop the capacities of our civil society partners, and to promote the needs of victims.

To this end, in February 2024, our Office hosted a conference in Seoul to mark the ten-year anniversary of the landmark report of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the DPRK.

The conference brought together expertise on judicial and non-judicial forms of accountability from around the world, including the leading UN mechanisms, providing space for victims, civil society organizations and Governments better understand pathways to accountability from other contexts.

Fourth, non-judicial initiatives for accountability, including forms of memorialization and education, increased during the reporting period.

For example, in May of last year, the Government of the Republic of Korea unveiled memorials on Seonyu Island and Hong Island in remembrance of five high-school students reportedly abducted by the DPRK in 1977 and 1978.

Such initiatives are an important part of truth-telling; of establishing a common narrative; and of acknowledging people's pain and suffering.

Recalling violations and remembering victims is an essential part of strengthening respect for human rights now and in the future.

Such approaches are therefore an important complement to criminal accountability.

Fifth, as requested by the Council, our Office held consultations with a broad cross-section of people affected by human rights violations in the DPRK, about their views on appropriate forms of accountability.

Almost all those consulted emphasized the importance of prosecuting those responsible for crimes as soon as possible. Given the passage of time, they noted the challenges in pursuing prosecutions, and emphasized their interest in non-judicial forms of accountability.

Mr. President,

Our Office is gravely concerned about the continuing widespread impunity – including a total absence of criminal accountability - for human rights violations that may amount to international crimes in the DPRK.

We urge the DPRK to take immediate action to prevent and address those violations, ensure accountability for those responsible, and fulfil the rights of victims to truth, justice and reparations.

The DPRK has primary responsibility for respecting and protecting the human rights of its citizens. It is currently engaging with the Universal Periodic Review process and pursuing other engagement with the UN system, including our Office. I urge the authorities to deepen this engagement.

I also call on this Council and Member States to consider the recommendations in the report. I urge States to bring up human rights in all interactions with the DPRK; to conduct domestic investigations and prosecutions in line with international standards; and to support non-judicial approaches to accountability for victims on their territory.

Given the gravity, scale and seriousness of the violations, and the inability or unwillingness of the State to pursue accountability, international accountability options must be considered, including referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court.

At the same time, we will continue every effort to engage with the DPRK, to encourage meaningful steps to implement the recommendations of the human rights mechanisms, and to advance the promotion and protection of human rights.

Thank you.