

DPRK: UN report finds 10 years of increased suffering, repression and fear

GENEVA (12 September 2025) – The overall human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has not improved over the past decade and, in many instances, has degraded, bringing even more suffering to the population, a [report](#) published by the UN Human Rights Office on Friday has found.

Covering the period following the 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry, the latest findings point to the introduction of more laws, policies and practices that are subjecting citizens to increased surveillance and control in all parts of life.

“No other population is under such restrictions in today’s world,” the report concludes, pointing to the remarks of one escapee who recounted, ‘to block the people’s eyes and ears, they strengthened the crackdowns. It was a form of control aimed at eliminating even the smallest signs of dissatisfaction or complaint’.

In 2025, the country remains more closed than at almost any other time in its history, it reads, adding: “The human rights landscape cannot be divorced from the broader isolation that the State is currently pursuing.”

A significant aspect of the report is the link between the degrading human rights situation in the DPRK, the country’s increasing self-imposed isolation and the peace and security situation on the Korean Peninsula.

“What we have witnessed is a lost decade,” UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk said. “And it pains me to say that if DPRK continues on its current trajectory, the population will be subjected to more of the suffering, brutal repression and fear that they have endured for so long.”

The report says political prison camps continue to operate. The fate of the hundreds of thousands of disappeared people, including abducted foreign nationals of the Republic of Korea, Japan and elsewhere, remains unknown. Citizens continue to be subjected to unrelenting propaganda by the State for their entire lives. The right to food continues to be violated, with some State policies exacerbating hunger.

Today, the death penalty is more widely allowed by law and implemented in practice. Enjoyment of freedom of expression and access to information have significantly regressed, with the implementation of severe new punishments, including the death penalty, for a range of acts including the sharing of foreign media such as TV dramas. The surveillance of the population has become even more pervasive, aided by advances in technology.

The report, which is based on hundreds of interviews by the Office along with supporting materials, points to the increased use of forced labour in many forms, particularly so-called “shock brigades”, usually deployed to take on physically demanding and hazardous sectors such as mining and construction. They often come from poorer families and in recent years, the Government has used thousands of orphans and street children in coal mines and at other hazardous sites and for extensive hours.

The UN Human Rights Office continues to document human rights violations, some of which may amount to international crimes, while the State has no independent institutions or processes to ensure accountability and provide victims with effective remedies.

The Office did receive reports of some limited improvements. Escapees reported nominal improvements in the treatment of people in detention facilities, including a slight decrease in violence by guards, with law enforcement officials reportedly showing more awareness of the standards for the treatment of persons deprived of liberty and their conditions of detention. Several laws have been enacted or amended, reportedly strengthening fair trial guarantees and protection against ill-treatment of persons deprived of liberty.

The country is engaging to a degree with the international human rights system, ratifying two more human rights treaties, complying with some treaty bodies’ reporting obligations. However,

the disconnect between the State's international obligations and ultimately the reality of the lives of its citizens remains stark, the report concludes.

It reminds Member States of the efforts they should play towards improving the human rights situation, and the need to pursue accountability for international crimes, including through a long-delayed referral by the Security Council of the situation to the International Criminal Court. Additionally, the report says States have an obligation to comply with the principle of non-refoulement in respect of DPRK nationals under their jurisdiction, and of the need to address the negative impact of sanctions on the enjoyment of human rights of the population.

The report lays out some immediate steps to foster credibility of the Government's commitment to human rights and provide momentum for a new path. These include: ending the system of political prison camps and guilt by association; ending the use of the death penalty; restarting family connections, including through meetings; ending torture and ill-treatment in places of detention; providing information on those abducted or forcibly disappeared by the State; distributing information about human rights to the population; inviting the High Commissioner and other human rights mechanisms to visit the country; and accepting UN Human Rights technical assistance on rights in detention.

"Taking these steps would give the people a measure of hope that a path towards a future of greater freedom in equality and rights is possible," said Türk. "The hundreds of interviews conducted during the course of this reporting shows a clear and strong desire for change, particularly among young people."

To read the full report, click here : <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc6058-situation-human-rights-democratic-peoples-republic-korea-report>

To watch the video interview with James Heenan, click here: <https://media.un.org/unifeed/en/asset/d344/d3446146>

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