



General Assembly

Distr.: General
6 August 2025

Original: English

Eightieth session

Item 72 (c) of the provisional agenda*

Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives

Situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [79/181](#) on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It provides an update on the human rights situation from June 2024 to May 2025 and a summary of the engagement of the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with the United Nations on human rights.

* [A/80/150](#).

** The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 79/181 on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.¹ It provides an update on the human rights situation from 1 June 2024 to 31 May 2025.
2. On 22 July, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) sent a note verbale to the Permanent Mission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations in Geneva inviting the Government to provide any factual comments on the draft report. No response was received.
3. The number of people fleeing from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and arriving in the Republic of Korea remained lower than before the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Ministry of Unification of the Republic of Korea reported that, from the second quarter of 2024 to the first quarter of 2025, 231 escapees from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea entered the Republic of Korea.² OHCHR has observed that a majority of escapees were women who had been trafficked into neighbouring States.³ Arrivals also included men who had been sent to third States as labourers to generate income for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and who later escaped from their workplaces. A small number of escapees fled directly from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the Republic of Korea by sea or across the demilitarized zone.

II. Political context

4. On 12 June 2024, the Security Council held an open briefing on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, at which the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea gave briefings. The High Commissioner expressed concern about deepening repression of the right to freedom of movement, worsening repression of freedom of expression and harsh socioeconomic conditions, particularly the lack of access to food, and called on the State to end its self-imposed isolation. He noted the persistence of forced labour in the country, as well as arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment and a lack of fair trials as ongoing tactics of repression. He reiterated his concern relating to long-running cases of enforced disappearance inside the country and of citizens of other countries, notably the Republic of Korea and Japan. He highlighted the need for accountability, including non-judicial approaches, and called for respect of the principle of non-refoulement.⁴ The Special Rapporteur, in turn, highlighted that the State's prioritization of its military, nuclear and missile programmes placed a high "military burden" on its people, especially the most vulnerable, leading to an overlooking of fundamental freedoms and human rights.⁵ She called on the international community to strengthen engagement with the country through the United Nations human rights mechanisms. A representative of the escapee community shared his experience with the Council.

¹ Hereafter, "the Government" refers to the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and "the State" refers to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

² Republic of Korea Ministry of Unification, Settlement Support Archive, available at https://hanaportal.unikorea.go.kr/hanaportal/Institution/Archive/;jsessionid=5-N8Q9vFcDovwtX9yvVF6vrK.hanaportal22?boardId=bbs_0000000000000008&mode=list&category=&pageIdx=.A/78/212, para. 18.

³ A/78/212, para. 18.

⁴ See www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/06/turk-addresses-un-security-council-open-debate-situation-democratic.

⁵ See <https://seoul.ohchr.org/en/node/569>.

5. No progress was made during the reporting period on inter-Korean relations. Following the January 2024 announcement by the President of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kim Jong Un, that references to reunification, unity and similar topics should be deleted from the State's socialist Constitution,⁶ State media reported in October that the Constitution had been amended by the Supreme People's Assembly.⁷ The precise changes relating to inter-Korean relations and unification were not announced. However, on 17 October, State media reported the demolition of roads connecting the two countries "in keeping with the requirement of the [Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,] which clearly defines the [Republic of Korea] as a hostile state".⁸

6. In July 2024, northern regions of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea experienced severe flooding due to Tropical Storm Gaemi. The President declared an emergency, and stranded people were airlifted from several locations. An emergency meeting of the Politburo of the Workers' Party of Korea was held to address emergency response and recovery.⁹ The international community, including the Korean Red Cross and the Government of the Republic of Korea,¹⁰ offered humanitarian assistance. However, the State rejected international aid, emphasizing self-reliance and reiterating enmity with the Republic of Korea.¹¹

7. During the reporting period, the State reiterated its commitment to developing its nuclear weapons capability.¹² It also continued to develop and display its military capabilities, including by testing various missiles.

8. The Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreed to in June 2024 by the Russian Federation and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea came into force on 4 December 2024.¹³ Under article 4 of the bilateral defence treaty, if either Party comes under attack and enters a state of war, the other "shall provide military and other assistance with all means in its possession without delay, in accordance with article 51 of the [Charter of the United Nations] and the laws of the [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] and the Russian Federation".¹⁴

9. During the reporting period, the Security Council held five open meetings on its item entitled "Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea".¹⁵ In a briefing given on 18 December 2024, the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs stated that, although the United Nations was not in a position to verify the claims, the reported increased military cooperation between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation was cause for concern. She noted that, in line with all relevant Council resolutions, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea should cease the export of all arms and related materiel, and all Member States should prohibit the procurement by their nationals of such arms and related materiel from the State.¹⁶ At the meetings held on 4 November 2024 and

⁶ See <http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/f4bf631617198851f067bd66d7f48d18.kcmsf>.

⁷ See <http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/4032980408ea38bbd5d9a2adb1e716ae.kcmsf>.

⁸ See <http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/64e900f5bd0353837ca02d7babce3ad8b04704642132a6cb3c6fd8ca38550e6a71110c246820e75b27f0800d3bfeaf6.kcmsf>.

⁹ See kcn.co.jp/item/2024/202407/news31/20240731-01ee.html; www.pyongyangtimes.com.kp/blog?page=politics&subpage=p_others&blogid=66a9c73793298005ab8022b1.

¹⁰ See https://unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/news/releases/?boardId=bbs_0000000000000034&mode=view&cntId=54306&category=&pageIdx=.

¹¹ See <http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/44e07e940bbb13792fd7d29f394a769a.kcmsf>.

¹² See <http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/7f7ecaf7174ecaf1e8c145bcb264ac04df374e0b09e507d9aa9f4e6589c144a7.kcmsf>; and <http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/cb8bae4be289a132e31b45035c49ad86.kcmsf>.

¹³ See <http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/5f5c3e7a1ee89a4183e757ffe51f1e3e.kcmsf>.

¹⁴ See <http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/6a4ae9a744af8ecd6a6678c5f1eda29c.kcmsf>.

¹⁵ See S/PV.9676, S/PV.9775, S/PV.9820, S/PV.9833 and S/PV.9912.

¹⁶ See S/PV.9820.

8 January 2025, some Member States noted a link between the country's nuclear programme and violations of human rights.¹⁷ In his briefing to the Council on 7 May 2025, the Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations recalled that, in addition to non-proliferation issues, the Council must also remain attentive to the humanitarian situation in the State.¹⁸ He reiterated the call on the State to facilitate the return of the United Nations country team, which had not been allowed back in the country since the COVID-19 pandemic.

10. In January 2025, the Government of Ukraine reported the capture of two soldiers from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea during combat in the Kursk region of the Russian Federation.¹⁹ In late April 2025, the Russian Federation²⁰ and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,²¹ in separate announcements, confirmed the presence of soldiers from the latter in the Kursk region, deployed under article 4 of the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. OHCHR has previously reported on the use of forced labour in the armed forces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which may be exacerbated by the current situation.²²

11. On 20 May 2025, pursuant to paragraph 27 of General Assembly resolution 79/181, the Assembly held a high-level plenary meeting to address the human rights abuses and violations being committed in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Two escapees spoke about human rights violations they suffered, and two representatives of civil society made statements. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights made a statement in which she highlighted the worsening human rights concerns, the need for accountability and the work of OHCHR in that regard.²³ The Special Rapporteur also gave a briefing on the country's isolation and its expanding militarization, discussing the interrelation between peace, security and human rights.²⁴ The Permanent Representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea strongly criticized the event, calling it a "dangerous precedent" that contradicted "the [Charter of the United Nations] and general principles of international human rights law with the respect for sovereignty and non-interference as its core".²⁵

12. Despite its self-imposed isolation, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea re-engaged with a small number of other Member States during the reporting period. Compared with the previous reporting period, more embassies were allowed to reopen in Pyongyang. At the time of drafting the present report, 24 States had embassies in Pyongyang, including at least 4 that reopened their embassies during the reporting period. However, no international staff of the United Nations or of international humanitarian actors were allowed to return to the country.

¹⁷ See S/PV.9775 and S/PV.9833.

¹⁸ See S/PV.9912.

¹⁹ See www.president.gov.ua/en/news/prezident-vidznachiv-nagorodami-voyiniv-dshv-ta-sso-zokrema-95513; and <https://x.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1878046090018042169>.

²⁰ See <https://t.me/MariaVladimirovnaZakharova/10291>; https://t.me/news_kremlin/5550; <http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/64e900f5bd0353837ca02d7babce3ade051fe4da8591636124416bd83e17fb286e3f678356c6bea6037dff29b9da0c.kcmsf>; and www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/76805.

²¹ See <http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/7f7ecaf7174ecaf1e8c145bcb264ac04fb08cc532ea5a0178e83c7a7fde163fd.kcmsf>.

²² See www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/forced-labour-democratic-peoples-republic-korea, paras. 68–75.

²³ See www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/05/high-level-plenary-meeting-address-human-rights-abuses-and.

²⁴ See <https://seoul.ohchr.org/en/node/626>.

²⁵ The full statement is available at <https://journal.un.org/en/new-york/meeting/officials/8ebbd846-c5c4-444c-ae3d-f696721bf057/2025-05-20>.

13. In February 2025, the Rason special economic zone was reopened for tourism by foreign visitors, but was closed again in March 2025. The thirty-first Pyongyang International Marathon was held on 6 April 2025, with participation by invitation only.²⁶ The twenty-third Pyongyang Spring International Trade Fair was held in May 2025, making it the first such fair since the pandemic-related border closures in 2020.²⁷ However, approximately one week before the fair was to be held, the visas of foreign attendees were reportedly cancelled without explanation.²⁸ The State also participated in some international sporting events in 2024, such as tournaments organized by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association. This included Women's World Cup tournaments for female players under the age of 17 ("U-17"), held in October and November 2024 in the Dominican Republic, and for female players under the age of 20 ("U-20"), held in August and September 2024 in Colombia.

14. In its resolution 55/21, the Human Rights Council requested the High Commissioner to submit a comprehensive report containing an update on the situation of human rights in the State since 2014, when the report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was published, and taking stock of the implementation of the commission's recommendations, to the Council at its sixtieth session, to be followed by an enhanced interactive dialogue.

III. Overview of the situation of human rights

A. Forced labour

15. In July 2024, OHCHR published a report on forced labour by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.²⁹ The report contained an examination of six discrete types of forced labour, as described to OHCHR by escapees in 183 interviews and supported by publicly available material. They are: labour in detention; compulsory State-assigned jobs; non-military labour by the armed forces; the use of "shock brigades"; mobilizations by neighbourhood organizations and other entities; and work performed by people sent abroad by the Government to earn currency for the State.

16. In its oral statement during the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review,³⁰ the State's delegation pointed to "volunteer" work by its nationals, especially young people and service personnel, as evidence of their "firm confidence in the State". The State's delegation rejected the categorization of such labour as "forced", calling such accounts "conspiratorial propaganda, calculated to tarnish the image of our republic, and an affront to our people and youth". The delegation also noted that it was "preposterous" to allege that overseas workers were subjected to forced labour. OHCHR, however, continued to gather recent first-hand information about forced labour in the penal system and forced labour mobilizations by neighbourhood organizations and other groups. With respect to child labour, the delegation noted that this was "strictly forbidden" by the State's Constitution and that work activities

²⁶ See <http://rodong.rep.kp/en/index.php?MTJAMjAyNS0wNC0wOC0wMDhAMTVAMUBAMEA1QA==>.

²⁷ See <http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/7f7ecaf7174ecaf1e8c145bcb264ac046aaa3f3f518b01ee4326139e299fbf83.kcmsf>.

²⁸ See www.nknews.org/2025/05/north-korea-cancels-foreigners-visas-a-week-before-international-trade-fair/.

²⁹ See www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/forced-labour-democratic-peoples-republic-korea.

³⁰ See A/HRC/58/11.

carried out by students on farms “[were] not forced labour, but educational activities”. OHCHR has not been able to verify the delegation’s claims.

B. Repatriations and arbitrary detention

17. During the reporting period, OHCHR remained unable to verify the fate and whereabouts of persons reportedly repatriated to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea from China, in particular shortly after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic,³¹ namely in October 2023³² and April 2024.³³

18. On 6 November 2024, a group of special procedure mandate holders of the Human Rights Council sent a joint allegation letter³⁴ to the State, in which they requested information regarding the reported public trial on 31 August 2024 of 11 women who had reportedly been forcibly repatriated from China in October 2023. In the letter, it was noted that 2 of the 11 women had been sentenced to death following their convictions “on charges of human trafficking of escapees from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea who [were residing] in China to the Republic of Korea, operating adult entertainment establishments, prostitution and ‘insulting the dignity of people’”. Both women were reportedly executed on the same day. The other nine women were sentenced to life imprisonment “for allegedly being involved in trafficking in China”. Their whereabouts remain unknown.³⁵ At the time of writing, the Government had not responded to the joint allegation letter.

19. OHCHR is also concerned about reports of the arrest in August 2024, by Chinese authorities, of 15 nationals of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (13 women and 2 children) as they were attempting to cross the southern border of China into the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.³⁶ At the time of writing, the fate and whereabouts of the women and children arrested were not known.

20. In its oral statement at the fourth cycle of its universal periodic review, the delegation of the State reiterated its denial of the existence of political prison camps, insisting that terms like “political prisoner” or “political prison camps” did not exist in its laws. Rather, it noted that there were only “criminals who committed anti-State offences” and “reform institutions”. The State said that those criminals were “spies and terrorists who [were] sent by hostile forces and those who committed subversive acts”. It added that such criminals were few in number and were “kept in reform institutions, but separately from ordinary prisoners”. This language appears to confirm the continued existence of the concept of political crimes and the separate detention of people detained for political crimes.

21. The State’s delegation also reported in its oral statement that it had enacted the Law on the Treatment of Reform Institution Inmates in May 2022 and that the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) had been referred to in the drafting of the Law. The delegation reported that the law set standards for receiving and registering convicts; conditions of work;

³¹ A/79/277, paras. 30–33.

³² See www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/news/briefings/?boardId=bbs_0000000000000035&mode=view&cntId=54563&category=&pageIdx=6.

³³ See www.nknews.org/2024/05/china-repatriated-at-least-260-more-north-koreans-last-month-rights-groups-say/.

³⁴ See communication No. PRK 3/2024, available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=29428>.

³⁵ A/HRC/58/65, para. 2.

³⁶ See <https://koreaJoongAngDaily.joins.com/news/2024-08-27/national/northKorea/Unification-Ministry-confirming-report-that-North-Korean-defectors-arrested-in-China-while-trying-to-escape-to-South/2121638>.

access to information; hygiene, exercise, nutrition and medical care; and visits and communications with family. The law reportedly made prosecutors responsible for monitoring compliance by visiting facilities and talking with detainees; it also stipulated that misconduct by guards was punishable. The delegation dismissed allegations of violence in detention facilities as “utterly groundless”. It further opined that such allegations were based on a misunderstanding of the legitimate system of punishing detainees for violating the rules, as set out in the aforementioned Law. The law, as described by the delegation, would appear to present an opportunity to address human rights violations in places of detention, which have been extensively documented by OHCHR. OHCHR requested a copy of the law for review, but had not received it at the time of writing.

C. Separated families

22. No progress has been made on the reunion of families separated by the Korean War, by escape from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea or due to abductions and enforced disappearances by the State. In February 2025, the State reportedly destroyed the Inter-Korean Family Reunions Center in the Mount Kumgang resort area, which had been constructed with funds from the Republic of Korea and had previously been used to host meetings between separated families.³⁷ The last such meeting was held in August 2018.

23. Members of separated families residing outside the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea continued to report to OHCHR that they faced considerable obstacles in establishing or re-establishing contact with family members who remained in the country. Even for individuals who had left the country voluntarily, the prolonged separation from their families had become involuntary, as sustained by State-imposed restrictions on freedom of movement and access to information.

24. In its statement during the 2024 universal periodic review process, the State’s delegation pointed to its Mobile Communications Act and related regulations and infrastructure development. The Mobile Communications Act prohibits the use of unauthorized mobile telephones or software. In addition, the Law on Rejecting Reactionary Thought and Culture strictly prohibits the possession or use of foreign mobile telephones, with violations punishable by imprisonment or fines. Although mobile telephone ownership has increased dramatically in recent years, and the State has recently begun commercializing fourth-generation (4G) networks, such advancements have not enhanced people-to-people communication across borders. On the contrary, telecommunications appear to be tightly controlled and under heavy State surveillance, restricting rather than expanding individual freedoms. Reports received by OHCHR indicate that individuals found to have communicated with people in the Republic of Korea may be treated as political criminals.

25. Amid severe restrictions on postal and banking services and the absence of an Internet network connected to the outside world, members of separated families often resorted to high-risk informal channels to communicate with their families or transfer financial support, depending on intermediaries (“brokers”) based in neighbouring countries. Escapees interviewed by OHCHR reported that family members inside the State were subject to heavy surveillance by authorities. Unable to safely contact or send money to struggling family members, many interviewees expressed growing concern for the well-being of their relatives inside the country, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

³⁷ A/74/268, para. 36; and www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/news/releases/?boardId=bbs_0000000000000034&mode=view&cntId=54312&category=&pageIdx=.

26. Escapees living in the Republic of Korea also encountered difficulties when attempting to send money to their families living in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. During the reporting period, two individuals were convicted of violating the Foreign Exchange Transactions Act of the former, in connection with sending remittances to the latter.³⁸ Previously, such violations of the Act had been tacitly tolerated on humanitarian grounds. There is increasing recognition in the Republic of Korea of the need to consult with escapees and to establish a legal framework for remittances in which humanitarian needs are acknowledged alongside legitimate security concerns.³⁹

27. Highlighting the urgency of the issue of separated families, the Ministry of Unification of the Republic of Korea reported in May 2025 that, as at the end of December 2024, there were 134,291 people listed in its registry of separated families.⁴⁰ Of these, 97,350 had died, leaving only 36,941 still alive. Of the surviving separated family members, 30.7 per cent were over the age of 90 years, and 34.8 per cent were between the ages of 80 to 89 years.

28. On 15 May 2025, the Security Council held a discussion on missing persons in armed conflict, including the implementation of its resolution 2474 (2019).⁴¹ A representative of civil society from the Republic of Korea recounted to the Council her family's suffering after her father was abducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea during the Korean War. She called for accountability, including a referral to the International Criminal Court, as well as the repatriation of forcibly disappeared persons or the identification of the remains of those who had died. The Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations told the Council that, on the Korean Peninsula, all parties were encouraged to build on previous efforts and to continue the repatriation of remains from the Korean War to their respective countries. He further noted that the issue of missing persons could become "an obstacle to sustainable peace". He therefore called for the full implementation of resolution 2474 (2019), "with urgency".

29. In its 2024 universal periodic review oral statement, the State did not address the issue of families separated by war or by escape from the country, speaking only to the issue of enforced disappearances and abductions. The State claimed that "the abduction issue [had been] resolved conclusively and completely by our sincere efforts a long time ago".

D. Accountability

30. OHCHR continued its work to strengthen monitoring and documentation efforts, promote strategies for accountability and consult with victims and other stakeholders, with a view to ensuring a victim-centred approach to accountability. OHCHR has significantly increased the amount of relevant information on human rights violations and possible international crimes preserved in its central evidence and information repository.

³⁸ Yonhap News Agency, article regarding arrests, 16 March 2025, available at www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20250316003351504?input=copy.

³⁹ See Republic of Korea, National Assembly Research Service, "Legal challenges and improvement measures for remittances to families in North Korea by North Korean defectors", Issues and Perspectives, 14 April 2025, available at www.nars.go.kr/eng/report/view.do?cmsCode=CM0137&brdSeq=47758.

⁴⁰ See www.korea.kr/common/download.do?tblKey=EDN&fileId=198186733, p. 63.

⁴¹ See S/PV.9917.

31. In the absence to date of relevant criminal proceedings, victims' groups and civil society organizations have brought civil claims in third-State jurisdictions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or its officials, seeking damages for human rights violations. For example, in the Republic of Korea, the Seoul Central District Court ruled in September 2024 in favour of five plaintiffs (three women and two men) who had escaped from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the Republic of Korea. The plaintiffs, ethnic Koreans formerly resident in Japan, had been relocated to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as part of the "Paradise on Earth" campaign.⁴² The Court ordered the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to pay each plaintiff 100 million won for human rights violations they had suffered as a result.⁴³ OHCHR continues to monitor the progress of such cases and engage with victims' groups and organizations bringing such claims, including by organizing capacity-building workshops.

32. There has also been steady growth in initiatives focused on non-judicial forms of accountability, especially truth-seeking, memorialization and education. For example, 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 Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1977 and 1978. In June 2024, an exhibition space was established at the War Memorial of Korea in Seoul, to raise awareness of prisoners of war from the Republic of Korea who have not been repatriated. In August 2024, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the Republic of Korea⁴⁴ determined that 17 ethnic Koreans who had previously lived in Japan had been deceived by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the organization Chongryon,⁴⁵ causing them to move to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in connection with the "Paradise on Earth" campaign. The Commission called upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to issue a formal apology and to ensure the safety and freedom of movement of the victims.⁴⁶

33. In its 2024 universal periodic review national report,⁴⁷ the State's delegation reiterated the independence of its courts and discussed the duties of the prosecutor, the reorganization of its bar association and amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law in 2022 to simplify trials and promote the speedy resolution of cases. It stated that it was an important principle in all stages of criminal proceedings to "allow no privileges [or] exceptions to any person whatever position he/she [might] hold".⁴⁸ In addition, in its oral statement during the universal periodic review process, the delegation noted that it had prioritized "putting in place the legal and systematic framework enabling citizens to fully exercise their vested rights and fundamental freedoms" and, in its legislative measures, had "paid due attention to incorporating the requirements of international human rights instruments" to which the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was a State Party.

⁴² "Paradise on Earth" refers to the campaign run by the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea from 1959 to 1984, whereby more than 93,000 people (mostly ethnic Koreans living in Japan and some of their spouses who were Japanese nationals) moved to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea based on stated promises of a better life.

⁴³ A/HRC/58/61, para. 19.

⁴⁴ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the Republic of Korea is an independent and impartial national institution that is not affiliated with the legislative, judicial or executive branches of government. It was established to investigate past human rights violations and state violence and to promote social reconciliation through truth-finding.

⁴⁵ The General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, also known as Chosen Soren.

⁴⁶ See https://jinsil.go.kr/upload/TRCK%20NewsLetter.%20Vol.%2015_1731055161986.pdf, pp. 18 and 19.

⁴⁷ See A/HRC/WG.6/47/PRK/1.

⁴⁸ Ibid., para. 26.

34. In that connection, the delegation also discussed in its oral statement the issue of the “alleged impunity of law enforcement officials”. It claimed that, as there was no “loophole in the law for law enforcement officials to commit violations of human rights and go unpunished”, such alleged impunity was “inconceivable”. The delegation mentioned specific articles of the State’s criminal law prohibiting arbitrary detention, illegal search and seizure, unfair judgments and other misconduct by law enforcement or judicial officials. It also noted articles establishing punishment for such misconduct. In addition, the law penalized “ignoring or irresponsibly handling complaints or petitions of citizens”. According to the State, those and other laws, along with a Code of Conduct for law enforcement officers, ensured accountability for violations of the law. It further noted that law enforcement organs had in-house discipline committees to receive and act on complaints from citizens.

35. As mandated by the Human Rights Council,⁴⁹ OHCHR continued to consult with victims, affected communities and other stakeholders to ensure that their perspectives and views were integrated into accountability initiatives. A total of 229 persons (127 women and 102 men) and 39 organizations had been consulted at the time of writing, representing a diverse sample of opinions. During the reporting period, OHCHR provided an update to the Council on its findings from the consultations.⁵⁰ Those consulted advocated a broad range of accountability measures, driven by the wide array of human rights violations they had suffered, as well as by other challenges, such as stigma and discrimination where they now resided. Many expressed a desire for prosecutions, but expressed concerns about the practical viability of that approach. Groups pursuing civil litigation expressed the need for legal aid and for concerted international efforts to facilitate the enforcement of judicial awards for monetary compensation. Stakeholders also mentioned specific considerations, such as the need for gender-sensitive approaches and psychosocial care, as well as interest in various non-judicial approaches to accountability.

IV. Cooperation between the Government of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the United Nations on the human rights situation and on humanitarian assistance

36. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea maintained its rejection of cooperation sought pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution [25/25](#), including with the OHCHR field-based structure in Seoul and with the Special Rapporteur. No visits by thematic special procedure mandate holders were conducted during the reporting period, and the Government did not accept any requests for visits. No standing invitation has been issued to special procedure mandate holders.

37. In November 2024, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was reviewed for the fourth time under the universal periodic review process of the Human Rights Council. Member States submitted 294 recommendations.⁵¹ The State later reported that it had “rejected” 88 recommendations “on the spot”, as they “severely distorted the human rights situation” based on “false information fabricated by the hostile forces”.⁵² Of the remaining 206 recommendations, the State reported that it had “accepted” 143, noting that many had already been implemented or were being

⁴⁹ Human Rights Council resolution [52/28](#), para. 19.

⁵⁰ [A/HRC/58/61](#), paras. 44–52.

⁵¹ See [A/HRC/58/11](#).

⁵² See [A/HRC/58/11/Add.1](#).

implemented.⁵³ The “accepted” recommendations related primarily to Sustainable Development Goal 16, on peace, justice and strong institutions. Similarly, the largest number of “accepted” recommendations were related to the legal and general framework of implementation of the State’s human rights obligations.⁵⁴ The State “rejected” a further 56 recommendations that it considered to be “related to national sovereignty” and “based on prejudiced views from political motivation”. Lastly, the State “decided to partially accept” seven recommendations relating to the ratification of additional human rights treaties, including the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, engaging with OHCHR and human rights mechanisms and addressing malnutrition among vulnerable groups.

38. The Human Rights Council has repeatedly emphasized the importance of implementing recommendations by human rights mechanisms, including the universal periodic review, to address human rights violations in the country. As there are no independent civil society organizations allowed in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, no stakeholder reports were submitted for the universal periodic review from within the country. OHCHR continues to engage regularly with the State’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva to explore possible areas for cooperation.

39. In July 2024, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) visited the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, marking the first time a senior United Nations official had been invited to the country since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019. During the reporting period, FAO organized three training programmes for State officials and experts on double-cropping best practices, on fish farming and on improved feed crop production.

40. In February 2025, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reported that the availability of data on women and children, food and nutrition, and water, sanitation and hygiene in the country remained constrained. Despite the ongoing absence of international staff based in the country, UNICEF continued to provide life-saving interventions to women and children. These included a “catch-up” vaccination campaign in September 2024 for children and pregnant women who had not been able to receive key vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, programmes in maternal and newborn care and child healthcare, treatment and prevention of wasting (a life-threatening form of acute malnutrition) and interventions in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector.⁵⁵

41. In November 2024, with the support of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, OHCHR organized three days of information sessions in Geneva for government officials engaged in the universal periodic review process. During the sessions, the Office provided an overview of the United Nations human rights system, covering the role of OHCHR; human rights mechanisms; the upcoming review of the State by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the right to development; economic, social and cultural rights; the universal periodic review process; national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up; women’s rights; and the rule of law. The event concluded with a discussion to identify issues for

⁵³ “Accepting” and “rejecting” are the terms used by the State in its reporting. In the official terminology of the universal periodic review process, “supporting” a recommendation is generally deemed as accepting it, whereas “noting” a recommendation is generally deemed as rejecting it. Applying the universal periodic review terminology, “supporting” parts of recommendations but “noting” other parts means that the State effectively rejected the elements that were only “noted”.

⁵⁴ See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/upr/sessions/session47/prk/upr47-democratic-people-s-republic-korea.pdf; and www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/upr/sessions/session47/prk/upr47-democratic-people-s-republic-korea-t.docx.

⁵⁵ UNICEF, “UNICEF DP Republic of Korea: annual report 2024”, February 2025.

possible follow-up. OHCHR and the Department had previously organized a similar workshop for State officials in May 2019.

42. The secretariat of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities conducted technical briefings for State officials in November 2024 and May 2025, in preparation for the Committee's review of the State's initial report during its thirty-first session in August 2025. The State submitted its replies to the list of issues in December 2023.⁵⁶ The State's reports to several human rights treaty bodies remain outstanding.

43. On 21 February 2025, the Government communicated its agreement for extending the strategic framework for cooperation with United Nations for the period 2017–2021 until 31 December 2026. There remains no indication when international United Nations staff will be able to return to the country. The United Nations country team continued to liaise with the Government on this issue.

V. Conclusions

44. During the reporting period, the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic continued to worsen, with a difficult socioeconomic situation exacerbated by isolation and the prioritization of military spending. The Government continued to severely repress fundamental freedoms, including the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of movement. Although the Government engaged with the United Nations human rights system through the universal periodic review, no concrete progress was seen on accountability or systemic reforms.

45. The reliance of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on forced labour allows the State to control, monitor and indoctrinate its people rather than provide for their welfare. Forced labour is prohibited under international human rights law and may violate the right to health, workers' rights and the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, while also increasing the risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

46. The repatriation of nationals of the State from neighbouring countries raises grave concerns for the safety of repatriated persons. According to information on individual cases collected by OHCHR over many years, repatriated people may be subject to the risk of torture, arbitrary detention, execution and other gross human rights violations. The Secretary-General calls once again on all Member States to fully respect the principle of non-refoulement and upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to respect the right to freedom of movement within and outside the country and to immediately cease treating those who leave the country as criminals.

47. The Secretary-General regrets the absence of progress made in resolving the question of separated families and the related issues of enforced disappearance and abductions. Restrictions on communications and remittances between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and other States may infringe upon the rights of all involved, such as the right to family life, the right to non-interference in family and privacy, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to freedom of movement and the right to freedom of thought. Families separated by war, escape from the country, abductions or enforced disappearances are unable to maintain contact with and offer essential support to each other, causing significant emotional and psychological harm across borders. Good-faith efforts to engage on these issues among all relevant States are necessary to end decades of anguish for hundreds of thousands of victims in multiple countries. The United Nations stands ready to assist in such endeavours, including through the good offices of the Secretary-General.

⁵⁶ [CRPD/C/PRK/RQ/1](#).

48. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as the primary duty bearer, is responsible for ensuring accountability for human rights violations, including those that may amount to possible international crimes on its territory or by its agents. Although there has been no visible progress made towards accountability by the State, victims have sought justice wherever possible. The Secretary-General once again calls on Member States to promote victim-centred justice at the international and national levels and to uphold the rights of victims of human rights violations and possible international crimes wherever they may live. Although criminal accountability is and must remain a top priority, non-judicial approaches to accountability must be pursued in parallel, to provide victims with a measure of justice in their lifetimes. For any approach to accountability to succeed, it must be designed with due regard for victims' actual needs and priorities, such as those conveyed to OHCHR in the consultations undertaken in the context of the present report. OHCHR stands ready to cooperate with competent judicial authorities of Member States in providing relevant support, as appropriate, including, where applicable, by sharing information from its central evidence and information repository upon request and in line with the rules, regulations and policies of the United Nations.

49. The engagement of the State during the reporting period, namely, in the universal periodic review, in information sessions with OHCHR and in technical briefings with the secretariat of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, are positive developments. The laws and policies described by the State in the context of its universal periodic review appear to reflect acknowledgement of the need for accountability and redress for victims of human rights violations and possible international crimes. In its oral statement during the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review, the State described policies to address impunity, to promote the exercise of rights, to incorporate international standards into legislation, to provide for complaints mechanisms for victims and to subject law enforcement officials who violate the law to "dismissal, demotion or other administrative sanctions and in serious cases, to criminal punishment". All of these are necessary elements of accountability. If the public is made aware of these policies and they are properly implemented, they could form useful steps in the fight against impunity for human rights violations and possible international crimes. However, it is imperative that the international community actively pursue judicial and non-judicial forms of accountability if the State remains unable or unwilling to do so.

50. During the period under review, despite noticeable efforts for re-engagement with a selected number of States, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remained largely cut off from the international community, including through its rejection of humanitarian aid. United Nations entities and humanitarian actors should be allowed back into the country as soon as possible, to enable them to carry out their important, and in some cases life-saving, work. Ending this self-imposed isolation would open up possibilities for progress on many fronts, including with regard to human rights.

51. Tensions remain high on the Korean Peninsula and in the region. The Secretary-General reiterates his call for diplomacy to de-escalate the situation and underscores that sustainable peace and the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula must be anchored in dialogue. Respect for the human rights of everyone on the Korean Peninsula and in the region, including accountability for past violations, is both a means and an end to the decades-long quest for a sustainable peace.

VI. Recommendations

52. The Secretary-General recommends that the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea:

(a) Investigate, prosecute and bring to justice perpetrators of human rights violations, including those that may amount to international crimes, and ensure that victims and their families know the truth about the violations and crimes that have been committed;

(b) Declare an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty, followed, at the earliest opportunity, by its abolition, and ensure that, pending its abolition, the death penalty is imposed only for the most serious crimes and consistent with the other requirements of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

(c) Disband all political prison camps (*kwanliso*) and immediately cease the arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of persons on the grounds of their real or perceived political or other opinions or their social background, and release them forthwith;

(d) Immediately cease the use of all forms of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, including in places of detention;

(e) Publicize the text of the 2022 Law on the Treatment of Reform Institution Inmates and other reforms mentioned in the State's oral statement during the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review, to ensure that people are aware of their rights under the law, and fully implement the safeguards contained therein;

(f) End all forms of forced labour, which is contrary to international law, and introduce structural reforms to the system of labour, to place workers and their rights at its centre;

(g) Provide the families of all persons who have been abducted or forcibly disappeared with full information on their fate and whereabouts, allow those who remain alive, and their descendants, to return immediately to their countries of origin and, in close cooperation with their families and nations of origin, identify and repatriate the physical remains of those who have died;

(h) Immediately enable separated family members to communicate with each other through all available media, including by telephone, videoconference technology and the exchange of letters;

(i) Ensure that all surveillance systems in place fully comply with the international human rights law and standards of legality, necessity, proportionality and legitimacy of objectives pursued, avoid their use as instruments of political oppression and ensure that they are subject to effective judicial review;

(j) Join all core human rights treaties to which it is not already Party, as well as the optional protocols thereto, accept the complaints and inquiry procedures provided for in those treaties and submit the remaining reports due to the human rights treaty bodies;

(k) Increase engagement with OHCHR to develop a capacity-development programme and technical assistance activities, so as to help to implement the present recommendations and recommendations made by all human rights

mechanisms, in particular the recent universal periodic review, and to keep Member States informed of its implementation efforts;

(l) Facilitate the return of the United Nations country team and international humanitarian staff, with free and unimpeded access to all populations in need, including for the purposes of effectively monitoring the distribution of aid;

(m) Engage constructively with international interlocutors, with a view to promoting concrete improvements in the human rights situation on the ground, including through human rights dialogues, through official visits to the country that include adequate access to fully assess human rights conditions, through cooperation initiatives and through more people-to-people contact as a matter of priority.

53. The Secretary-General recommends that the international community:

(a) Pursue principled, consistent and sustained engagement with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on the situation of human rights;

(b) Integrate human rights considerations fully into their efforts to advance peace and security on the Korean Peninsula;

(c) Facilitate more people-to-people contact with persons from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea residing outside the country, so that their views and aspirations can inform diplomatic engagement on human rights issues;

(d) Take further steps to facilitate accountability for those responsible for gross human rights violations and possible international crimes in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, including, where applicable, by considering action under accepted principles of extraterritorial and/or universal jurisdiction, consistent with international law, and by engaging and providing information to the OHCHR repository;

(e) Support initiatives to implement measures of non-judicial accountability, such as further forms of reparations, truth-seeking and memorialization, as well as guarantees of non-recurrence, to provide tangible redress for victims;

(f) Extend protection to citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea who have crossed international borders irregularly and people who have escaped from overseas labour deployments and ensure that they are not forcibly repatriated, in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement under international human rights law;

(g) Take steps to minimize unintended adverse humanitarian consequences of sanctions imposed on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, by enabling development and humanitarian actors to engage in programmes that improve resilience and reduce humanitarian need in relation to food crises and disasters and that facilitate the provision of food, medicine and healthcare at the national level.