SEOUL (6 February 2026) – End of Mission statement by the **UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)**, Elizabeth Salmón, on her third official visit to the Republic of Korea from 2-6 February 2026.

INTRODUCTION

I am very pleased to be back in the Republic of Korea (ROK). I thank the Government of the ROK for accepting my official visit and for the many meetings with Government officials. I am grateful to all the escapees, victims and their family members, civil society organizations, and diplomatic representatives who shared their opinions, provided information and engaged with me during this visit. I also thank the Human Rights Office in Seoul for the support to my visit.

Last August, I began the second half of my term as a UN Special Rapporteur. During the first three years of my mandate, I consistently promoted a victims-centered approach. My work focused on human rights of women and girls; the forcible repatriation of escapees and torture and other ill-treatment after repatriation; advancing accountability – both judicial and non-judicial; the links between human rights and peace; and human rights violations by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) beyond its borders. I conducted official visits to the United States, the European Union and Japan. In addition to yearly interactive dialogues with the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, I gave briefings to the Security Council and made an intervention at the General Assembly and Human Rights Council enhanced dialogues on human rights in the DPRK. Even amid the many

difficult political situations around the world at the moment, human rights in the DPRK continue to be on the international community's agenda.

MAIN ISSUES

Degraded human rights situation in the DPRK

The overall human rights situation of the last 10 years showed no improvement and, in many instances, degraded despite reports of a few improvements in some isolated issues, as the High Commissioner for Human Rights assessed last September. Surveillance has increased with newer CCTV cameras with facial recognition functions. Freedom of movement remains severely restricted and for the DPRK citizens leaving the country is nearly impossible.

I believe we need more concrete ways to monitor progress in human rights, in particular in the areas to which the DPRK has committed itself. To this end, I recommend all Member States encourage the DPRK to accept regular and independent monitoring by UN human rights mechanisms. Such monitoring will support the DPRK to translate its commitment into actions for making real changes on the ground.

In my upcoming report to the Human Rights Council, I will make a series of suggestions to better utilize recommendations made by Member States in the DPRK's recent universal periodic review (UPR) and supported by the DPRK as a means of tracking progress.

Place human rights front and center

I am encouraged by the decision by the ROK Government to co-sponsor the General Assembly resolution on human rights in the DPRK. I hope that the Government will take a consistent position in March at the Human Rights Council. The policy of the President of the Republic of Korea on peaceful coexistence includes "striving to promote the substantive advancement of human rights while upholding the principle of mutual respect." In my meetings with ROK Government officials, I stressed that in any possible negotiations with the DPRK, we must place human rights front and centre. Without human rights, there can be no sustainable or lasting peace.

The DPRK has committed itself to human rights in the international human rights fora. Its leadership also continues to emphasize its goals of improving the living standards of the people. Therefore, we do not have to hesitate to talk about human rights of the people of the DPRK. Human rights is not a problem but an opportunity for opening, for engagement. We should make the most of any possible space for dialogue with the DPRK to talk about human rights – for example, the return of missing people or remains, acceptance of regular independent monitoring bodies, improvement in the treatment of detainees, access to food and health by vulnerable populations, the return of the UN Country Team, and reporting on progress with respect to supported UPR recommendations.

Accountability

As I have consistently stressed, both engagement and accountability need to be pursued to ensure human rights. Victims of human rights violations have the right to

truth, justice and reparations wherever they may live. I was encouraged to hear from victims and families that some civil lawsuits and a criminal complaint – have been filed in the courts here in the ROK by victims of human rights violations in the DPRK. Such legal actions in national courts are particularly important for victims when the DPRK does not demonstrate any political will to hold people to account.

Role of CSOs

I met with various civil society organizations and victims' groups who play a significant role in promoting human rights in the DPRK, particularly when there is absolutely no independent civil society in the DPRK. The work of all civil society whether it is seeking accountability for human rights violations, or promoting humanitarian support to the DPRK people, are all equally valuable for human rights protection and promotion in the DPRK. Further, human rights, peace and security, and development are strongly interlinked. Therefore, the international community and the Government of the Republic of Korea should further strengthen their support to civil society organizations, many of which are currently facing a funding crisis, to enable them to operate independently and sustain their critical role in pursuing a common goal of improving the lives of people in the DPRK.

Social integration of escapees and their role in peace building

During the mission, I spoke with escapees from diverse backgrounds, each with very different expectations for their life here in the ROK. What I learned during these interactions was escapees need long-term and tailored support to fully integrate and

thrive in the new society. I am encouraged by the ROK Government's policy to further strengthen its support for social integration of escapees. For example, I was impressed by an alternative school providing vocational training and tailored support to escapees and escapees' children born in China. I encourage the ROK Government to strengthen assistance directly to escapees and to such schools and communities who are strongly supporting escapees. Escapees who arrive in the ROK are often victims of serious human rights violations and have profound trauma. Psychological support is a crucial element of any integration support programs. The Government should also create a space for escapees to meaningfully participate in discussions on peace building as well as on issues that concern escapees themselves, such as how they are described here in the ROK, and what kinds of support they will receive.

I look forward to regularly discussing with you all the way forward to improve the human rights of people in the DPRK. Thank you for your attention.

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