

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk

**Statement to the Human Rights Council on the human rights situation in the
Democratic People's Republic of Korea**

Geneva, 16 March 2026

Mr. President, Distinguished delegates,

Since my last update, people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have been subjected to further repression and isolation.

Fundamental rights are severely curtailed, including freedom of expression, the right to information, freedom of movement, as well as access to food and healthcare.

Families of the disappeared in the Republic of Korea, Japan and other countries continue to seek answers from the DPRK without success. Separated families cannot contact each other.

People who are forcibly repatriated to the DPRK are subjected to serious human rights violations and prolonged detention. I again urge all governments to stop forcibly repatriating DPRK nationals.

The ninth Congress of the Workers Party of Korea held last month prioritized economic development, but with an increased focus on military capabilities.

Security built solely around military strength is fragile and risks escalating conflict. It also leads to violations of human rights, as we see in the DPRK: from repression and forced labour, to the diversion of resources that are desperately needed for social services and sustainable development.

Real security comes through meaningful engagement, dialogue and cooperation, grounded in respect for human rights and international law.

As I highlighted last September, there are pathways for the DPRK to engage with the human rights ecosystem to build trust and confidence towards lasting peace.

We therefore encourage the DPRK's participation in international human rights mechanisms, most recently with the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in August 2025.

Mr. President,

I regret to say that accountability for the grave violations in DPRK, which in some cases may amount to crimes against humanity, is extremely limited. There has been no progress on referring the situation in the DPRK to the International Criminal Court. Nor were any criminal investigations opened over the past year in other jurisdictions.

However, there has been progress on forms of accountability led by victims. My Office is central to this work.

Our team in Seoul collects, analyses and preserves evidence for use in current and future accountability processes. Our work has been used by plaintiffs and Courts over the years, most recently two months ago in January, when Tokyo District Court awarded damages from the DPRK Government to four victims of human rights violations.

As some of these crimes recede into the past, it is even more urgent to document their physical, psychological and socioeconomic consequences for victims and their families.

Over the past year, we have worked to realise victims' rights in several different ways.

We interviewed 120 escapees, and analysed the testimony of over 300 more who escaped over the past decade. We held hundreds of consultations with individuals and with victims' groups.

We provided technical assistance to victims' associations on non-judicial forms of accountability, including reparations and truth telling initiatives. We also supported these groups in submitting information to the Special Procedures bodies of this Council.

And we raised the profile of the human rights situation in the DPRK, and increased public understanding, by holding several public sessions where victims testified in the presence of diplomats and the international media.

I fully acknowledge that these steps are insufficient compared with the scale of the violations. But for individual victims, they can mean everything. Never underestimate the value of enabling people to tell their stories, creating a permanent record of their suffering, and publicly acknowledging them as victims.

Mr. President,

We have produced 24 reports on the situation in the DPRK since the Commission of Inquiry reported to this Council in 2014. They are a litany of repression that goes back decades.

It is imperative that the situation in the DPRK remains firmly on the agenda of the international community, including this Council. I urge States to seek a referral to the ICC and to exercise extraterritorial and universal jurisdiction. Our Repository of evidence is at the disposal of judicial authorities.

States can also support initiatives for engagement towards the goals of improving the human rights situation, ending isolation, and advancing the cause of peace on the Korean peninsula.

I encourage your financial and political support for the human rights and accountability efforts of my Office and our team in Seoul.

Thank you.