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Statement by Elizabeth Salmón

**United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the
Democratic People's Republic of Korea**

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Mr. Chair,

Excellencies and

Distinguished Delegates,

Overview of the Current Human Rights Situation

I am honored to present my fourth report to the Human Rights Council.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) continues to emphasize that it is improving the living standards of its people. During the 9th Party Congress held at the end of February 2026, the General Secretary Kim Jung Un stated, looking back the past five years, “bringing about a substantial improvement in the people's living standards were pushed forward vigorously by the Party and the state”.

However, as the High Commissioner for Human Rights assessed last September, 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. Surveillance has increased with newer CCTV cameras with facial recognition functions. New laws include a number of crimes punishable by the death penalty. The Government centralized the distribution of grains, and staples sold at the State-run shops are not affordable for many people particularly when they have lost cash income due to stricter control of markets. Freedom of movement remains severely restricted. The United Nations and other organizations have not been able to return to the

country. At the same time, the DPRK's extreme militarization policies continue to raise concerns as they are sustained through extensive reliance on forced labour and quota systems.

Monitoring of UPR recommendations

Excellencies,

Last November, the DPRK participated in the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review (UPR) and supported 143 recommendations which constitutes almost 48 percent of received recommendations.

There are, however, challenges in monitoring the implementation of UPR recommendations supported by the Government. First, when the State lacks the political will to monitor and implement these recommendations or to seek international cooperation, it is equally challenging for the international community to assess progress. This results in making repeated similar recommendations in multiple review cycles. Second, some supported recommendations are too generic, making it difficult to objectively monitor their implementation. Third, examining selected recommendations has shown contradictions in the position of the DPRK concerning specific rights. For instance, while the DPRK supported a recommendation to “ensure freedom of movement for all individuals”, it did not support similar recommendation to

“amend the Criminal Code and other legislation to remove the requirement for permission to travel abroad and within the country”.

Monitoring through Human Rights Indicators

Mr. Chair,

On efforts to improve human rights and implement UPR recommendations, I recommend that the DPRK use the human rights indicators suggested in the present report to track its progress and to report on the development until the fifth cycle of the UPR. This approach can also serve as a guide not just for DPRK itself but for other States and international organizations to track progress in the implementation of the supported UPR recommendations.

For example, the DPRK supported recommendations to ensure that conditions in detention facilities are in compliance with its obligations. Building on some nominal improvements reported in the treatment of detainees, I encourage the DPRK, among others, to report on the adoption of regulation or official policies regarding the use of non-invasive screening methods in places of detention.

The second example. The DPRK supported a recommendation to reduce the preventable infant and maternal mortality ratios to less than half of the present level within the next four years. This is a concrete and measurable commitment. This is also one of the SDGs targets. Both infant and maternal mortality rates have slightly increased between 2019 and 2023.

I urge the DPRK to monitor and report on improvement by providing data on the proportion of children under five years of age and pregnant and lactating women who regularly receive nutrition supplement programmes, such as school meals and fortified blended foods. I would like to remind that the DPRK has the obligation to utilize its maximum available resources, including through international assistance and cooperation to fulfill the right to adequate food.

Excellencies,

I recommend that other States take any opportunity to follow up on the UPR recommendations in their engagement with the DPRK. My report provides a roadmap for monitoring and documenting progress in the implementation of UPR recommendations that were supported by the DPRK. Human rights is not a barrier but an opening for engagement and should be placed in the center of any possible future dialogue with the DPRK.

At the same time, I strongly encourage the DPRK to demonstrate its own good will for engagement by extending an invitation to experts from United Nations human rights bodies on a regular basis. Independent monitoring is a crucial element in improving human rights. Unfortunately, neither independent state bodies nor independent civil society organizations exist in the DPRK. Hence the role of international bodies including the UN is even more important.

The ongoing lack of information coming out of the DPRK cannot be a justification for us not to address the human rights of people in the country.



People continue to suffer from the lack of respect to fundamental rights and from strict control of their lives. Thank you for your attention.