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**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 [80/220](#) on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It provides an update on the human rights situation from 1 June 2025 to 31 May 2026 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/81/150](#).

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [80/220](#) on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It provides an update on the human rights situation from 1 June 2025 to 31 May 2026.

2. On 30 July 2026, 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. Since 2020, the number of people fleeing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and arriving in the Republic of Korea annually has remained lower at around 20 per cent of the level before the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.¹ The Ministry of Unification of the Republic of Korea reported that, from 1 July 2025 to 31 March 2026, 170 escapees (151 female and 19 male) entered the Republic of Korea.² OHCHR assessed that the majority of the arrivals were women, particularly those who had been trafficked primarily into China and forcibly married and/or those who had initially left for economic opportunities and had remained in China for several years before arriving in the Republic of Korea. Additionally, increased border surveillance, restrictions on internal movement within the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the risk of forced repatriation if arrested in transit countries have significantly lowered the number of people leaving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea since 2020.

II. Political context

4. The security situation on the Korean Peninsula continued to remain volatile, with no progress on inter-Korean dialogue or denuclearization talks. As part of the measures to reduce tensions and create conditions for inter-Korean dialogue, in June 2025, the Republic of Korea suspended cross-border loudspeakers,³ and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea reciprocated by stopping loudspeakers towards the South the same day.⁴ The Republic of Korea stated that it had taken additional confidence-building measures, such as halting the dissemination by civilians of cross-border leaflets in June 2025 and suspending the "*Voice of Freedom*" radio broadcasts in September 2025. In May 2026, the Naegohyang Women's Football Club travelled to the Republic of Korea for a match of the Asian Football Confederation Women's Champions League, marking a rare instance over the past eight years of direct inter-Korean sports engagement.

5. Joint military exercises between the Republic of Korea and the United States of America continued during the reporting period, which the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has consistently characterized as provocative.⁵ The Ninth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea, held in February 2026, explicitly referred to the Republic of Korea as a "hostile state" and its "eternal enemy", portraying engagement efforts by the Republic of Korea as attempts at cultural influence aimed at regime

¹ Immediately prior to the outbreak of COVID/19, around 1,100 escapees arrived in the Republic of Korea; since 2020, it has been around 200.

² See https://unikorea.go.kr/web/eng_unikorea/contents/statistics_defectors.

³ Submission from the Republic of Korea.

⁴ See <https://www.nknews.org/2025/06/north-korea-turns-off-border-loudspeakers-day-after-south-halted-own-broadcasts/>.

⁵ See, for example, <https://kcnawatch.de/newstream/1773199235-53288690/press-statement-of-kim-yo-jong-department-director-of-c-c-wpk/>.

change.⁶ This stance reflects a strategic shift following constitutional changes in 2024 that acknowledged the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as two separate States and the subsequent dismantling of the institutions and structures related to reunification.⁷ The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has, however, signalled a possibility of engagement with the United States "if the [United States] respects the present position of our state specified in the Constitution of the [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] and withdraws its hostile policy toward [it]".⁸

6. The Ninth Party Congress reaffirmed that the country's nuclear programme was irreversible and permanent, and characterized it as indispensable for deterrence and national security.⁹ The State maintained its position that it is not bound by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and rejected any attempts to impose obligations under the Treaty upon it.¹⁰ The State's five-year military development plan (2026–2030), adopted at the Ninth Party Congress, underscored the continued prioritization of defence and nuclear programmes. During the reporting period, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea conducted multiple missile launches, including short-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and anti-ship systems, and continued to enrich its nuclear materials.¹¹

7. The Security Council did not convene any meetings specifically focused on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea during the reporting period. The General Assembly, by its resolution [80/220](#) of 18 December 2025, stressed, inter alia, that the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is intrinsically linked to international peace and security.

8. During the reporting period, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1718 \(2006\)](#) provided periodic closed briefings to the Council on sanctions implementation. The monitoring capacity of the Committee was reduced following the expiry on 30 April 2024 of the mandate of the Panel of Experts on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. While some Council members have advocated for stronger enforcement and accountability in response to the ongoing violation of the sanctions regime by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, others have expressed the view that the revision of existing sanctions might help to promote dialogue, benefitting international peace and security.¹² In February 2026, the Committee granted humanitarian exemptions for 17 humanitarian assistance projects, primarily focused on healthcare, food security, nutrition, and water and sanitation support for vulnerable populations, to be implemented by United Nations entities, other international organizations and non-governmental organizations. Approval of these projects had been pending since early 2025.¹³

⁶ See <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1772075300-472506881/let-us-make-great-victory-and-glory-gained-through-indomitable-pioneering-struggle-lead-onto-steady-prosperity-and-leaps-forward-in-new-struggle-report-on-ninth-congress-of-workers-party-of-korea/>.

⁷ See [A/80/312](#), para. 5; and <https://kcnawatch.de/newstream/1705399837-434912951/respected-comrade-kim-jong-un-makes-policy-speech-at-10th-session-of-14th-spa/>.

⁸ See <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1772075300-472506881/let-us-make-great-victory-and-glory-gained-through-indomitable-pioneering-struggle-lead-onto-steady-prosperity-and-leaps-forward-in-new-struggle-report-on-ninth-congress-of-workers-party-of-korea/>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See <https://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/dprk/2026/dprk-260507-kcna01.htm>.

¹¹ See <https://dppa.un.org/en/news/remarks-by-ms-rosemary-dicarulo-under-secretary-general-departments-of-political-and>.

¹² See [S/PV.10147](#).

¹³ See <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/1718/exemptions-measures/humanitarian-exemption-requests>.

9. During the reporting period, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continued to witness a gradual reopening in some respects, including the return of foreign diplomatic staff to Pyongyang following a period of closure since 2020. In addition to several high-level visits from China and the Russian Federation, the country also exchanged high-level visits with Belarus, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Singapore and Viet Nam. In July 2025, the Government opened the Wonsan-Kalma Coastal Tourist Area, allowing access to Russian tourists. In 2025, 9,985 Russian nationals visited the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, compared with 6,469 in the previous year.¹⁴ While these developments suggest a cautious expansion of external engagement and may offer opportunities for renewed dialogue and cooperation, such engagement remains limited, selective and tightly managed.

10. During his visit to the Republic of Korea in May 2026, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted the importance of integrating human rights and confidence-building measures in advancing peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. The High Commissioner emphasized that engagement with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea should prioritize practical steps, such as facilitating exchanges, restoring communication channels, addressing cases of disappearances and supporting family contacts and reunions.¹⁵

11. Two soldiers of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea who were captured by Ukrainian Forces in January 2025 during combat in the Kursk region of the Russian Federation remain detained in Ukraine as at the end of the reporting period.

III. Overview of the situation of human rights

A. Ten-year assessment of the human rights situation

12. In September 2025, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 55/21, the High Commissioner presented to the Council at its sixtieth session a comprehensive assessment of the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea since 2014, including a stocktaking of the implementation of the recommendations of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.¹⁶

13. In his report, the High Commissioner assessed that, despite some very limited improvements, the overall human rights situation in the country in many aspects had deteriorated over the past decade. State control over the population had intensified, supported by an expansion of a legal and institutional framework that criminalized the legitimate exercise of certain human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, access to information and freedom of movement. The report noted that the adoption of restrictive laws and the increased use of surveillance technologies had reinforced an environment of pervasive repression, while the country had become increasingly isolated from the international community, including through tightened border controls and limitations on external engagement since the COVID-19 pandemic.

14. Serious violations across civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights continued to be documented. These included arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, enforced disappearance, forced labour, the operation of political prison

¹⁴ See <https://www.nknews.org/2026/02/record-number-of-russians-visited-north-korea-in-2025-official-data-shows/>.

¹⁵ End of the mission statement available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2026/05/statement-un-human-rights-chief-volker-turk-south-korea>.

¹⁶ A/HRC/60/58.

camps and the expansion of the application of the death penalty. At the same time, economic and social conditions remained dire, with persistent food insecurity, limited access to health services and growing restrictions on informal market activity undermining livelihoods. Discrimination, including through the *songbun*, a system of classification of people based on State-assigned social class and birth, and entrenched gender inequality, continued to determine access to opportunities and services, while women, children and other groups at risk faced heightened exposure to exploitation and human rights violations and abuses.

15. In his report, the High Commissioner noted that accountability for human rights violations was minimal. Without a change in direction, the High Commissioner foresaw more suffering for the population in the years ahead. He underscored that the extreme isolation of the country's population from the outside world was a barrier to improving the situation. He proposed a number of urgent and concrete measures to build credibility and momentum. These include ending political prison camps and the practice of guilt by association, abolishing the death penalty, ending torture and ill-treatment, providing information on persons subjected to enforced disappearance or abduction and facilitating family reunifications. He further called for greater engagement with international human rights mechanisms, including through access to the country and technical cooperation, as well as for strengthened accountability efforts, including for violations that may amount to international crimes. The international community was encouraged to pursue accountability, uphold the principle of non-refoulement and promote a comprehensive approach linking human rights, peace and engagement in efforts to improve the situation.

B. Accountability

16. Accountability efforts for gross human rights violations and possible crimes under international law remained limited during the reporting period. Alongside a lack of accountability measures in the country itself, there has been no known development elsewhere of criminal investigations under the applicable principles of universal jurisdiction or extraterritorial jurisdiction during the reporting period. Similarly, there has been no development with respect to the encouragement, by the General Assembly, for the Security Council to take appropriate action to ensure accountability, including through consideration of referral of the situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the International Criminal Court.¹⁷

17. 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, domestic courts in Japan and the Republic of Korea, in two different civil cases in January and May 2026, ordered the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to pay compensation to victims.¹⁸ 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 on victims' rights.

18. As part of its mandate, OHCHR continued to strengthen its monitoring and documentation efforts, including through collecting, analysing and preserving information and evidence of human rights violations and possible international crimes in its central repository, for future use in appropriate accountability processes. OHCHR undertook capacity-building with civil society organizations, victims, government officials and legal practitioners on avenues to accountability, including

¹⁷ See General Assembly resolution [80/220](#) and previous, since resolution [69/188](#).

¹⁸ Kawasaki et al. (Case number: 2023 (Wa) No. 30330), Tokyo District Court (26 January 2026); and Seoul Central District Court, case No. 2026 Ga-Dan 40111 (14 May 2026).

sessions on international criminal law, access to United Nations human rights mechanisms and reparations for victims. It also continued to consult with victims, affected communities and other stakeholders to ensure that their perspectives and views were integrated into accountability initiatives.

C. Enforced disappearances, abductions, separated families and arbitrary detention

19. In the absence of inter-Korean engagement, there was no progress during the reporting period regarding families separated by the Korean War. By the end of May 2026, 101,274 of the 134,546 registered separated family members had died.¹⁹ The majority of those still alive were over 80 years old, with a significant proportion aged over 90. During the reporting period, 2,720 registered individuals died.²⁰ Since 2018, no official family reunions had taken place. There had been no opportunities for contact through exchange of letters or telephone calls.

20. There is also a continued lack of progress in resolving cases of enforced disappearance by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Since July 2025, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has transmitted 34 standard cases to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. As of May 2026, 511 cases that the Working Group had transmitted to the Government remained outstanding.

21. OHCHR maintained regular engagement with victims and their families, including families of both recognized and unrecognized abductees in Japan, as well as organizations representing families of the forcibly disappeared in the Republic of Korea. The High Commissioner, during his visit to both countries in May 2026, met with families of Korean War abductees, escapees, families and associations of the disappeared and those affected by prolonged separation, placing victims at the centre of these engagements. He heard about their experiences of loss and continued uncertainty, which underscored the urgency of clarifying the whereabouts and fate of the forcibly disappeared and abductees, and advancing people-centred initiatives that promote accountability and sustain peace. The High Commissioner also met with families of Korean War abductees during his visit to Japan in May 2026.²¹

22. United Nations human rights mechanisms and OHCHR have continued to raise concerns that nationals of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea who are forcibly repatriated face the risk of torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and other serious human rights violations upon their return to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. OHCHR continued to engage with the Government of China regarding the protection of nationals of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea who are arrested and detained on its territory and who would be at real risk of serious harm if returned. On 22 July 2025, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention reported²² on its opinions adopted in August and November 2024 respectively, concerning the detention of Ms. Kim Cheol-ok following her repatriation from China,²³ and the cases of Mr. Choi Chun-gil, Mr. Kim Kook-kie and Mr. Kim Jung-wook, nationals of the Republic of Korea.²⁴ It noted that no action had been taken by

¹⁹ See <https://reunion.unikorea.go.kr/reuni/home/pds/reqststat/view.do?id=456&mid=SM00000129&limit=10&eqDataDiv=REQUEST&eqIndex=0&page=1> (available in Korean only).

²⁰ <https://reunion.unikorea.go.kr/reuni/home/pds/reqststat/view.do?id=446&mid=SM00000129&limit=10&eqDataDiv=REQUEST&eqIndex=0&page=1> (available in Korean only).

²¹ See https://x.com/volker_turk/status/2055560080213287187.

²² A/HRC/60/26.

²³ A/HRC/WGAD/2024/37.

²⁴ A/HRC/WGAD/2024/59.

the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to implement these opinions and that all individuals remained in detention.²⁵ On 22 March 2026, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea sent a communication to China regarding a possible forcible repatriation.²⁶

23. On 28 September 2025, State media reported that the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly had decided to grant an amnesty, proclaimed from 1 October 2025, to persons convicted of "crimes against the country and the people", pursuant to a decree issued on 26 September 2025, to mark the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the Workers Party of Korea.²⁷ On 6 November 2025, several special procedure mandate holders transmitted a communication to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea requesting further information on the implementation of this amnesty,²⁸ including requests for information on the number and gender of those who had been granted amnesty, the crimes they had been charged with, the number of years they had been imprisoned for, the criteria that had been used for selection, whether individuals identified by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in its two previous opinions²⁹ had been included, whether forcibly repatriated individuals had been among those granted an amnesty and the measures taken by the State to support their reintegration into society. As of May 2026, there was no available information on the release of individuals under this amnesty. The Working Group has noted that provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code on "anti-State and anti-national crimes" are vague and overly broad, providing discretion to authorities to apply them arbitrarily.³⁰

D. Digital technologies and human rights

24. During the reporting period, the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continued the expansion of mobile phone usage and cellular network, with more than 1,400 cellular base stations³¹ and at least 24 mobile phone brands reportedly available in the country.³² However, access to the global Internet remained unavailable to the majority of people in the country. State media frequently highlighted advances in electronics production, information technology exhibitions and the introduction of new digital devices, including smartphones and networked systems.

25. The rapid expansion of the use of technology, including mobile phones, has facilitated some efficiency in service delivery and access to government-sanctioned information, as well as entertainment. However, these advancements are happening in a context in which the State has, in recent years, further restricted the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, privacy and movement, and the use of technology to further restrict fundamental freedoms raises concerns. The expansion of harsh penalties for distributing unauthorized foreign information and prohibiting the consumption or dissemination of information from what the State considers as

²⁵ A/HRC/60/26.

²⁶ See <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=30898>.

²⁷ See <http://rodong.rep.kp/en/index.php?OEAYMDI1LTA5LTl5LTAwMkAyQEBAMUAx==>.

²⁸ See <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=30431>.

²⁹ See A/HRC/WGAD/2024/37; and A/HRC/WGAD/2024/59.

³⁰ See, for example, A/HRC/WGAD/2024/59, para. 96; A/HRC/WGAD/2019/57; and A/HRC/WGAD/2019/52.

³¹ See <https://www.38north.org/2026/01/north-korean-cellular-coverage-in-2026/>.

³² See <https://www.38north.org/2026/03/the-big-expansion-of-north-koreas-cellular-sector/>.

“hostile” nations places the population at risk of serious human rights violations.³³ The expansion of digital technologies, including the use of artificial intelligence, has further enhanced State monitoring and surveillance capabilities to collect and analyse data on individuals’ social and economic activities, with potentially significant implications on the enjoyment of human rights. According to media reports, the Government is installing high-performing surveillance cameras with facial recognition capabilities, including at workplaces.³⁴ Other reports detail how mobile phones are extensively monitored, including by taking regular screenshots, raising concerns about the right to privacy.³⁵ The implementation of the Electronic Payment Law 2021 has further restricted economic autonomy of the population as State enterprises are only accepting digital payments rather than cash.³⁶

E. Economic, social and cultural rights

26. In February 2026, the Ninth Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea unveiled the new five-year plan for the country (2026–2030) setting out priorities focused on economic stabilization, technological modernization and improving living standards, alongside the continued prioritization of military and nuclear programmes and self-reliance.³⁷ In his speech, the President of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Kim Jong Un, stated that “our party is faced with heavy and urgent historic tasks of boosting economic construction and the people’s standard of living and transforming all realms of state and social life as early as possible”,³⁸ underscoring the importance of economic development. In October 2025, the State organized the “Development of Light Industry 2025” exhibition in Pyongyang that showcased 68,000 consumer goods products, signalling efforts by the authorities to demonstrate progress in the production of essential goods.³⁹ These objectives are relevant to the progressive realization of rights to an adequate standard of living and health.

27. Recent policy developments suggest that the country is in the process of transforming its health system, with potentially significant implications for the realization of the right to health. The President designated 2025 as the “First Year of the Health Revolution”⁴⁰ and, at the inauguration ceremony of the Pyongyang General Hospital, stated that “Modern medical facilities are indispensable in ensuring that the working people enjoy the rights granted by the state.”⁴¹ Government plans include constructing 20 new city and county hospitals annually, developing additional central hospitals in Pyongyang and upgrading provincial facilities, alongside broader policy reforms and personnel training and scientific research. Reportedly, major infrastructure projects were completed in late 2025, including the inauguration of Pyongyang General Hospital and the completion of Kangdong County Hospital,

³³ For example, the Law on Rejecting Reactionary Thought and Culture (enacted in 2020 and amended in 2022) prescribes that the introduction or distribution of materials from hostile countries to a large number of people may be punished by death.

³⁴ See <https://www.asiapress.org/rimjin-gang/2025/11/photo/cctv-2/>.

³⁵ See <https://www.38north.org/2026/03/the-big-expansion-of-north-koreas-cellular-sector/>.

³⁶ See <https://www.asiapress.org/rimjin-gang/2026/03/society-economy/cashless/>.

³⁷ See <https://dprk.un.org/en/310999-9th-workers-party-congress-unveils-new-five-year-plan-2026-2030>.

³⁸ See <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1771567300-369278249/respected-comrade-kim-jong-un-s-opening-address-at-ninth-congress-of-wpk/>.

³⁹ See <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1760160829-73013261/light-industrial-goods-exhibition-development-of-light-industry-2025-opens/>.

⁴⁰ See <https://kcnawatch.de/newstream/1739154836-532275441/respected-comrade-kim-jong-un-makes-speech-at-groundbreaking-ceremony-of-hospital-and-leisure-complex-in-kangdong-county-for-regional-development-20%C3%9710-policy/>.

⁴¹ See http://www.moph.gov.kp/immortal_leadership/view/597.

Kusong City Hospital and Kusong County Hospital.⁴² The Government has also reportedly introduced a new smartphone health app to enable the purchase of medicines, remote medical consultations and access to pharmaceutical databases, listing over 3,000 medicines including traditional medicines from several countries.⁴³ While these measures indicate efforts to improve access to health services, their overall effectiveness remains difficult to assess in the absence of independent monitoring. The extent to which these efforts to modernize health infrastructure and use technological innovations will contribute to realising the right to health will depend on the Government's ability to improve availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of health services, without discrimination, in accordance with its obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

28. OHCHR monitoring has detailed obstacles preventing access to the right to health in the country, including chronic shortages of medicines, medical equipment and reliable electricity, as well as inadequate remuneration to medical staff. Although the country has free universal healthcare in its legal and policy framework, individuals have consistently reported that access to healthcare is almost always contingent on an individual's ability to provide informal payments or in-kind contributions.⁴⁴ During the reporting period, a possible shift away from free universal healthcare to a paid health insurance system was reported.⁴⁵

29. Disruptions to international cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic had led to significant declines in vaccination coverage and reduced access to essential medicines, undermining the availability and quality of basic health services. Sustained international cooperation has demonstrated the potential for measurable progress in the realization of the right to health in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. By the end of 2025, 99 per cent of the birth cohorts from 2022 to 2025 who had missed their full routine vaccinations were fully immunized.⁴⁶ The vaccination coverage levels have returned to the level before the COVID-19 pandemic, with less than 1 per cent of children remaining unvaccinated. Support from United Nations agencies for maternal care programmes, midwifery education, maternal and prenatal death surveillance, service delivery and nutritional assistance have benefitted maternal and newborn care.⁴⁷ These gains, however, remain highly dependent on continued external support.

30. A March 2026 report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) indicated that, as of August 2025, just before the start of the main harvest, vegetation conditions across most of the country were generally favourable, suggesting favourable yields and production prospects.⁴⁸ Weather conditions between October 2025 and February 2026 were also favourable, facilitating sowing operations and supporting satisfactory crop germination and establishment. The country recorded a positive harvest of the 2025 main food crops, which accounted for about 90 per cent of the total annual production and consisted mostly of rice and maize, plus small quantities of soybeans, potatoes, millet and sorghum. However, the emergence of a severe drought in April 2026 posed risks to early season crops. State media reported efforts to secure water resources and maintain irrigation systems to respond

⁴² See <https://kcnawatch.us/newstream/1767262274-13038849/inauguration-ceremony-of-hospital-and-regional-industry-factories-in-ryonggang-county-held-with-splendour/>.

⁴³ See <https://www.38north.org/2025/06/north-koreas-health-app-offers-medicines-on-demand/>.

⁴⁴ See A/HRC/60/58, para. 35.

⁴⁵ See <https://www.spnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=105873> (available in Korean only).

⁴⁶ See <https://dprk.un.org/en/309984-2025-immunization-program>.

⁴⁷ See <https://open.unicef.org/download-pdf?country-name=DP%20Republic%20of%20Korea&year=2025>.

⁴⁸ See <https://www.fao.org/giews/countrybrief/country.jsp?code=PRK>.

to drought conditions.⁴⁹ Despite the positive harvests, access to food remained limited for the general population⁵⁰ due to the depreciation of the won, substantial increase in food prices, tighter State regulations and control in private economic activities, absolute State control of food production, management and distribution, restrictions on market activities and limited opportunities for income-generation.

31. During the reporting period, State media reported a number of senior middle school graduates in various parts of the country volunteering and making public pledges to join the Korean People's Army.⁵¹ At a national conference marking the eightieth anniversary of the Socialist Patriotic Youth League, the President praised the young people who had been deployed to labour camps and to overseas military operations.⁵² There were also reports of thousands of citizens from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea being dispatched to work in construction, mine clearance and reconstruction efforts in the Russian Federation,⁵³ and female workers being dispatched to China to work in factories.⁵⁴ OHCHR has extensively documented cases of forced labour involving overseas workers from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in several countries. In paragraph 8 of its resolution 2397 (2017), the Security Council decided that Member States shall repatriate to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea all Democratic People's Republic of Korea nationals earning income in that Member State's jurisdiction, subject to certain exceptions. During the reporting period, State media reported the organized mobilization of young people into labour-intensive "youth shock brigades" deployed to coal mines,⁵⁵ infrastructure projects and construction sites.⁵⁶ OHCHR monitoring has documented that members of these brigades often endure long working hours, inadequate food and housing and physically demanding and hazardous conditions, including in remote areas. As participation and work performance in these shock brigades is often tied to the possibility of obtaining party membership, those deployed to them often work without any remuneration and have either limited or no freedom to refuse or leave their job, rendering them vulnerable to abuse and forced labour.⁵⁷

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

32. On 30 March 2026, during its sixty-first session, the Human Rights Council adopted, by consensus, resolution 61/27, which expressed concern regarding the ongoing human rights violations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and urged the Government to take concrete steps to improve its human rights situation. In

⁴⁹ See <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1775293898-457170094/dprk-farms-make-efforts-to-cope-with-drought/>.

⁵⁰ See <https://www.nknews.org/pro/surging-north-korean-inflation-exposes-the-costs-of-major-economic-changes/>.

⁵¹ See <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1774345327-695644773/school-graduates-in-dprk-volunteer-for-military-service/>.

⁵² See <https://kcnawatch.de/newstream/1768903848-681572835/respected-comrade-kim-jong-un-%E2%80%99s-speech-at-a-conference-in-celebration-of-the-80th-anniversary-of-the-founding-of-the-socialist-patriotic-youth-league/>.

⁵³ See <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/top-russian-security-official-holds-talks-with-nkoreas-kim-second-time-two-weeks-2025-06-17/>.

⁵⁴ See <https://www.rfa.org/korean/in-focus/2026/02/18/north-korea-female-workers-china/?utm>.

⁵⁵ See <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1761289694-717140548/many-coal-mining-youth-shock-brigades-in-dprk-fulfill-their-yearly-economic-plans/>.

⁵⁶ See <https://kcnawatch.us/newstream/1740465427-797369565/young-volunteers-increase-in-dprk/>.

⁵⁷ See <https://seoul.ohchr.org/en/node/572>.

response, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea issued a statement rejecting the resolution, describing it as a violation of the principles of sovereignty, equality and non-interference in internal affairs.⁵⁸ The country maintained its rejection of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The State also did not accept any visits from the thematic special procedure mandate holders during the reporting period. No standing invitation has been issued to special procedure mandate holders.

33. On 22 September 2025, during its sixtieth session, the Human Rights Council held an enhanced interactive dialogue to discuss the 10-year assessment report of the High Commissioner, regarding the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,⁵⁹ prepared pursuant to Council resolution 55/21. Presenting the report, the High Commissioner noted that despite some limited improvements, the overall human rights situation had worsened in key areas.⁶⁰ The Democratic People's Republic of Korea did not engage in the dialogue, consistent with its rejection of the country-specific reports and discussions by the Council.

34. During the reporting period, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea engaged in high-level exchanges with the United Nations. In September 2025, for the first time in seven years, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs attended the general debate of the eightieth session of the General Assembly in person. He also held a bilateral meeting with the Secretary-General, during which they discussed the situation on the Korean Peninsula and ways to strengthen cooperation between the State and the United Nations.⁶¹ Visits by United Nations officials to the country remained extremely rare. One example was a technical mission by the International Maritime Organization to Pyongyang in November 2025 to audit the country's implementation of maritime governance and international maritime safety, security and environmental standards. No international staff of the United Nations or international humanitarian organizations have been allowed to return permanently to the country since 2021. The lack of access has significantly constrained the implementation of the existing strategic framework for cooperation, currently valid until December 2026,⁶² as well as the development of a new cooperation framework.

35. Government officials participated in several capacity-building and training programmes organized by United Nations entities. In May 2026, a delegation from the Central Bureau of Statistics participated in training in Thailand on strengthening statistical knowledge for quality data collection and analysis, organized by FAO and the Asian Institute of Technology.⁶³ In October 2025, the World Health Organization organized a two-day virtual orientation on strengthening the capacity of the Health Emergency Operations Centre in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.⁶⁴ In August 2025, an official delegation from the Academy of Agricultural Sciences participated in a training in Thailand on strengthening the digital agriculture ecosystem and developing e-agriculture solutions, organized by FAO and the Asian

⁵⁸ See <https://kcnawatch.de/newstream/1775174745-711210566/press-statement-of-dprk-foreign-ministry-spokesperson/>.

⁵⁹ A/HRC/60/58.

⁶⁰ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/09/high-commissioner-turk-democratic-peoples-republic-korea-change>.

⁶¹ See <https://dprk.un.org/en/302459-dprk-vice-minister-foreign-affairs-addresses-unga-and-meets-un-secretary-general>.

⁶² See <https://dprk.un.org/en/290311-un-strategic-framework-2017-2021-extended-31-december-2026>.

⁶³ See <https://dprk.un.org/en/315093-rc-meets-delegation-dprk-central-bureau-statistics>.

⁶⁴ See <https://dprk.un.org/en/309809-who-virtual-orientation-strengthen-health-emergency-operations-dprk>.

Institute of Technology.⁶⁵ FAO also provided in country training to 255 key technicians and 770 farmers across 14 cooperative farms. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) facilitated capacity-building training for 144 newly appointed paediatricians across 72 counties and hospitals on updated guidelines on integrated management of newborn and childhood illnesses, while the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) provided training to medical professionals on emergency obstetric and newborn care.

36. In 2025, UNICEF shipped 3.3 million vaccine doses, including against hepatitis B, measles-rubella, pentavalent and inactivated poliovirus vaccines. Despite continued logistical constraints, UNICEF supported the delivery of these through six chartered flights, enabling the Ministry of Public Health to conduct two nationwide catch-up immunization campaigns and restore routine vaccination services. UNICEF also supported the delivery of essential medicines to over 1,850 health facilities, provided oral rehydration salts and zinc and supported the administration of antibiotics to 33,199 children with pneumonia. Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and UNICEF procured and installed cold-chain equipment to strengthen storage and distribution systems. UNFPA and UNICEF supported improvements in national data systems, including by strengthening the maternal and perinatal death surveillance and response system.

37. In August 2025, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reviewed the initial report of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, following its ratification of the Convention in 2016.⁶⁶ In its report to the Committee, the Government outlined a number of legislative and policy measures it had taken to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities, including institutional reforms and the adoption of a law on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities.⁶⁷ The Government also highlighted improvements it had made to living conditions, access to services and participation. In its concluding observations, the Committee welcomed the measures taken by the State party, while expressing concern regarding persistent discrimination, stigmatization and limited inclusion, including in relation to access to education, employment and public life.⁶⁸ It noted that infrastructure and services remained largely inaccessible, inclusive education was insufficiently developed, and reliable data on persons with disabilities was limited. The Committee further underscored concerns about the broader human rights environment, including restrictions on freedoms and limited space for independent monitoring, which constrained the effective implementation of the Convention. The Committee urged the Government to take concrete measures to ensure the full implementation of the Convention, including by strengthening legislative protections against discrimination, improving accessibility of infrastructure and services and expanding inclusive education and social protection systems. It urged the Government to introduce enhanced data collection and monitoring mechanisms, greater awareness-raising to combat stigma and strengthened international cooperation. It also emphasized the need for ensuring meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes and aligning national frameworks more closely with international human rights standards.

38. In August 2025, with the support of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, OHCHR organized a two-day information session in Geneva

⁶⁵ See <https://dprk.un.org/en/300190-rc-meets-pyongyang-delegation-participating-fao-training-program>.

⁶⁶ CRPD/C/PRK/CO/1.

⁶⁷ See CRPD/C/PRK/CO/1, and https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCRPD%2FAIS%2FPRK%2F64053&Lang=en.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

for government officials participating in the review by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The session covered United Nations human rights mechanisms, follow-up to the recommendations from the universal periodic review and the rights of persons with disabilities, including intersections with the Sustainable Development Goals. Similar workshops for State officials were also held in 2024 and 2019.⁶⁹ OHCHR continued to engage regularly with the Permanent Mission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations in Geneva on human rights issues.

V. Conclusions

39. The deteriorating human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to be a cause for serious concern, including the expanded use of the death penalty, continued use of political prison camps, widespread arbitrary detention, failure to address torture and ill-treatment and institutionalized forced labour. The State's continued prioritization of military and nuclear programmes, reaffirmed at the Ninth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea, raises concern regarding the availability and allocation of key resources for improving the enjoyment of human rights, including the rights to health, food and education, and adequate standard of living. The current trajectory in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea risks bringing further suffering to a population that has endured so much for decades.

40. Legislative, policy and institutional measures aimed at reinforcing comprehensive State control over people's lives continued to expand in scope during the reporting period. These developments, coupled with the growing use of surveillance and digital technologies, further restricted the right to freedom of expression, access to information and freedom of movement. While digitalization has the potential to improve service delivery, facilitate public participation and expand economic activities, its application in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea appears to have been used predominantly in a manner that restricts, rather than enables, the enjoyment of human rights.

41. Longstanding and unresolved human rights concerns, including enforced disappearances, abductions and the continued separation of families, remain unaddressed. It is vital that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea engages with other relevant Member States on these issues to end decades of anguish endured by hundreds of thousands of victims in multiple countries, many of whom are now of an advanced age. Meaningful progress on abductions, enforced disappearances and separated families would show a commitment towards addressing these long-standing human rights concerns. At the same time, individuals forcibly repatriated to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continue to face risks of serious human rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment. Member States should fully respect the principle of non-refoulement. I also call 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 without permission as criminals.

42. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as the primary duty bearer, is responsible for ensuring accountability and effective remedies for violations of international human rights law, and for investigating, prosecuting and punishing perpetrators of certain violations, including those amounting to crimes under

⁶⁹ See [A/80/312](#), para. 41; and [A/74/268](#), para. 55.

international law. In the absence of identifiable progress made towards accountability by the State, victims in Japan and the Republic of Korea have sought justice in domestic courts, resulting in these courts ordering reparations in cases of human rights violations committed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Member States should promote victim-centred justice at the international and national levels and uphold the rights of victims of human rights violations and international crimes wherever they may live. Non-judicial approaches to accountability such as truth-telling and memorialization should be pursued in parallel.

43. A notable feature of the reporting period has been the growth in engagements between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United Nations. These include information sessions organized by OHCHR and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, as well as technical training on food, health and disaster risk reductions organized by United Nations entities. Such engagements are important and have, in the past, contributed to tangible improvements, demonstrating the value and potential of sustained cooperation. These interactions also provide important entry points for dialogue and confidence-building. However, the Government's continued failure to allow the return of international staff of the United Nations assigned to the country constrains engagement with the Government in a more robust manner.

44. The lack of coordinated international actions risks further marginalization of human rights within broader diplomatic and security engagements. I reaffirm the continued importance of ensuring the centrality of human rights in the country and in the peace and security discourse on the Korean Peninsula and urge the pursuit of dialogue and engagement grounded in international law. The international community, particularly Member States with the capacity to influence and that maintain relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, has a crucial role to play in improving the human rights situation and furthering peace and development.

45. In the absence of sustained dialogue, tensions continue to persist. Sustainable peace and the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula can be advanced through confidence-building measures and strengthened diplomacy that recognizes the centrality of human rights as both a foundation for and an outcome of durable peace. The United Nations stands ready to assist in such endeavours, including through the good offices of the Secretary-General.

VI. Recommendations

46. 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, in accordance with international law, including international human rights law, and ensure that victims and their families know the truth about the violations and crimes that have been committed;

(b) End all forms of forced labour, in accordance with its obligations under international law and introduce structural reforms to the system of labour, to place workers and their rights at its centre;

(c) 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 countries of origin, identify and repatriate the physical remains of those who have died;

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

(e) 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;

(f) 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;

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

(h) Ensure that all surveillance systems in place fully comply with international human rights law and the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality and the pursuit of a legitimate objective, avoid their use as instruments of political oppression and ensure that they are subject to independent, effective judicial review;

(i) Ratify or accede to all core international human rights treaties to which the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is not already a State Party, as well as the optional protocols thereto, accept the individual communications and inquiry procedures provided for in those treaties and submit its remaining reports which are due to the human rights treaty bodies;

(j) Continue to deepen engagement with United Nations human rights mechanisms, including through acceptance of visits by special procedure mandate holders;

(k) Increase engagement with the United Nations 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.

47. The Secretary-General recommends that Member States:

(a) Pursue principled, consistent and sustained engagement with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on the situation of human rights, including on the implementation of its accepted recommendations from the universal periodic review;

(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 the principles of extraterritorial and/or universal jurisdiction, consistent with international law, and by engaging with and providing relevant 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 and refugee 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 implement projects approved under humanitarian exemptions as well as 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.
