



GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

High Commissioner's Report on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

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PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT

Ms. Nada AL-NASHIF, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Deputy High Commissioner is pleased to present the High Commissioner's **Report on Promoting Accountability for Human Rights Violations** in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

The report covers the two-year period between 1 November 2022 and 31 October 2024. While it focusses on accountability, it also highlights OHCHR's continued serious concerns over violations in the DPRK, particularly in relation to the rights to food, where state policies appear to have exacerbated severe hunger and severe restrictions on freedom of expression. It includes the work of OHCHR in the past year on the issue of enforced disappearances and abductions, as well as the use of forced labour both in the DPRK and other countries. The High Commissioner will present a comprehensive report in September on human rights in the DPRK over the past decade.

Regrettably, there has been no significant movement over the last two years towards **criminal accountability** for human rights violations committed in the DPRK. However, there has been some progress internationally in related areas.



First, OHCHR is continuing to build the central **repository of evidence of human rights violations in the DPRK**, as mandated by the UNHRC. The repository doubled in size during the reporting period and now includes hundreds of witness testimonies covering more than 1,000 victims of human rights violations. The repository enables deeper analysis of patterns of violations for many years, including imprisonment, torture, enslavement, enforced disappearance and abductions, overseas forced labour and trafficking. OHCHR analysis provides **reasonable grounds to believe that international crimes** may have been committed in the DPRK over a period of several decades, and indeed they continue to be committed. However, further investigations are needed to build out the evidence base, and in particular to link the evidence more clearly to the specific individuals responsible.

During the reporting period, OHCHR conducted **175 interviews with escapees** from the DPRK, victims of human rights violations, and families and relatives of victims. OHCHR staff also interviewed former senior officials who provided critical information about state policies, structures and decision-making processes. OHCHR stands ready to cooperate with Member States on judicial investigations or other approaches providing forms of redress to victims, including by sharing information from the repository in accordance with the UN Secretariat's cooperation framework.

Second, while criminal accountability is completely absent, a number of civil cases have drawn attention to human rights violations by the DPRK. Victims groups and civil society organisations have filed **civil claims seeking damage** in several different countries. For example, ethnic Koreans living in Japan have filed civil claims relating to being lured from Japan to the DPRK under false pretences and subjected to human rights violations there.

Third, OHCHR is exploring **potential paths towards accountability** through competent judicial authorities, UN investigative bodies, human rights mechanisms, and civil society. This engagement has opened up the space for the exchange of best practises from around the world to help develop the capacities of civil society partners and to promote the needs of victims. In this regard, in February of last year, OHCHR hosted a conference in Seoul to mark the 10-year anniversary of the landmark report of the Commission of Enquiry on Human Rights in the DPRK. The conference brought together expertise on **judicial and non-judicial forms of accountability** from around the world, including the leading UN mechanisms, providing a space for victims, for civil society organisations, and governments to better understand the pathways to accountability from other contexts.

Fourth, non-judicial initiatives for accountability, including **forms of memorialisation and education**, have increased during this reporting period. For example, in May of last year, 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 DPRK in 1977 and 1978. These initiatives are an important part of truth-telling, of establishing a common narrative, and of acknowledging people's pain and suffering. Recalling violations and remembering victims is an essential part of strengthening the respect for human rights now and in the future. Such approaches are therefore a very important complement to the pursuit of criminal accountability.

Fifth, as requested by the UNHRC, OHCHR held **consultations with a broad cross-section of people affected by human rights violations** in the DPRK to solicit their views on appropriate



forms of accountability. Almost all those consulted emphasised the importance of prosecuting those responsible for crimes as soon as possible. Given the passage of time, they noted the challenges in pursuing prosecutions and emphasised once again their interest in non-judicial forms of accountability.

OHCHR is gravely concerned about the **continuing widespread impunity**, including the total absence of criminal accountability, for human rights violations that may amount to international crimes in the DPRK. OHCHR urges the DPRK to take immediate action to prevent and address these violations, ensure accountability for those responsible, and fulfil the rights of victims to **truth, justice, and reparations**. The DPRK has primary responsibility for respecting and protecting the human rights of its citizens. It is currently engaging with the UPR process and pursuing some other engagements within the UN system, including OHCHR, thereby urging the authorities to deepen this engagement.

The Deputy High Commissioner also calls on the UNHRC and the Member States to consider the recommendations in the report. She urges states to bring up human rights in all interactions with the DPRK, to conduct domestic investigations and prosecutions in line with international standards, and to support non-judicial approaches to accountability for victims on their territory.

Given the gravity, scale, and seriousness of the violations, and the inability or unwillingness of the DPRK to pursue accountability, international accountability options must be considered, including **referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court**. At the same time, OHCHR will continue every effort to engage with the DPRK, to encourage meaningful steps for the implementation of the recommendations of the human rights mechanisms, and to advance the promotion and protection of human rights.

STATEMENT BY THE COUNTRY CONCERNED

The delegation of the **Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea** is not present.