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Written statement* submitted by People for Successful Corean Reunification, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 January 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



DPRK must take immediate steps to address child abuse

Children in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are targeted at an early age to indoctrinate them for exploitation by the State. Child abuse has become institutionalized by the State as it turns a blind eye to offenses, allowing it to propagate. By keeping society ignorant of the fact that child abuse is a crime, the North Korean government is able to promote violence and keep its population compliant. In this statement, PSCORE attempts to outline the abuses that children in the DPRK face and make recommendations to improve their lives.

Physical abuse

In the DPRK, a culture of violence normalizes the physical abuse of children. The warmongering state media brainwashes citizens to think that submission through violence is the only way to resolve conflict. Government facilities also participate in the promotion of violence. Students “would get beaten for various reasons: by teachers when working in their fields, when they would not perform well at school, or when they would steal food to survive.”¹ One defector testified that the government is only concerned with serving and protecting the state for their own status and benefits and ignores domestic violence.² For children in the DPRK, dissatisfying anyone of authority leads to immediate physical punishment. Lee Ga-yeon, a defector, recalls that “no space on our body was spared; if we fell on the floor, it did not matter. The hitting would end when their frustration with whatever misdemeanour subsided. There was no one who came to stop them from beating us.”³ Park Chang-sik, a defector revealed that “violence is perpetrated at all levels in the North Korean society: the family, the society, and the military, all accept ubiquitous violence in their own lives... people behave in abusive ways without thinking of them as abusive or violent.”⁴ In their testimonies, DPRK defectors illustrate the cyclic nature of abuse: “it was not questioned to hit the students as the children received the same education at home and the teachers as well when they were younger themselves.”⁵ The government has a responsibility to put an end to this cycle of physical abuse within their nation but they ignore the issue to keep its population anxious and fearful of the figures of power.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is another form of child abuse that occurs in the DPRK because minors are not a specific demographic defined in legislation. Testimonies reveal that “even today, men in North Korea do not view female children as ‘underage’ and have no feelings of shame or guilt as they sexualize them.”⁶ Although children are particularly vulnerable to coercion and trauma, there is no recourse available for them if they are victims. “The DPRK government almost completely ignores reports of sexual abuse, thereby institutionalizing it and fostering widespread acceptance.”⁷ Moreover, the culture of victim-blaming and shaming victims punishes them, labeling them as someone who is undesirable for marriage. In one testimony, “the girl’s mother reported the case to the police and talked about it in confidence with some friends... Afterwards, people would point at the girl, shaming her, and men particularly insulted her. She had a hard time getting married.”⁸ Citizens of the DPRK are punished by society for speaking up. The lack of sexual education and the years of neglecting investigations have resulted in a society that normalizes sexual violence. In a testimony, “one

¹ People for Successful COrean REunification. *Inescapable Violence: Child Abuse within North Korea*, (Seoul: PSCORE, 2019), 34.

² Ibid, 21.

³ Ibid, 36.

⁴ Ibid, 43.

⁵ Ibid, 44.

⁶ Ibid, 90.

⁷ Ibid, 84.

⁸ Ibid, 83.

defector explained that it did not even occur to her to report her abuse because she did not think of the incident as unusual.”⁹ The issue of sexual abuse in the DPRK causes citizens to be distrustful of each other; only the leader, and his administration, can be trusted. For this reason, the government of the DPRK, while aware of such horrendous abuses, intentionally disregards sexual abuse as an issue, producing a society in which it is tolerated.

Neglect

Neglect is perpetrated by the government of the DPRK as it systematically fails to care for the children within the nation. The North Korean authorities continue to ignore malnutrition and hunger while children are abandoned as a financial burden. One defector stated that “children of all ages are often abandoned if parents cannot afford to raise them.”¹⁰ Even if the children land in the hands of the government, they continue to suffer. Orphanages in the DPRK are often nothing but detainment centers with no regard for orphans’ needs. One testimony highlights “that children in orphanages were usually underfed, receiving just one meal per day. The victim stated that she would look for frozen cabbage roots in the dirt, and if caught she would be beaten.”¹¹ Education is nothing but another form of systematic neglect designed to produce citizens who are mindlessly supportive of the government, and much of it consists of child labor. “Schools in North Korea regularly require students to undertake manual tasks for their teachers, such as farming. These tasks are often arduous and dangerous, and are undertaken with very little regard for the safety of the student.”¹² In addition to the high risk of harm, “public healthcare in North Korea exists but is rarely sufficient or effective. Pediatric care especially is a scarce commodity, with parents having little faith in it.”¹³ Children are taught to take care of themselves if injured “since their absence would mean that there is more work for the other students.”¹⁴ Another way the DPRK government neglects to care for its children is through mass propaganda events, most notably The Mass Games for which students will miss four to six months of school to train extensively. It is not unusual for children to fall unconscious or even die of heatstroke and exhaustion. The only purpose of these events is to show a false image of a successful nation to outsiders who visit the DPRK. To the DPRK government, a citizen’s loyalty and sacrifice to its authority is evidently more important than their physical needs, leaving the children in a situation of neglect.

Psychological (emotional) abuse

Psychological abuse, partnered with other forms of abuse that the government maintains, contributes to life-long traumas that cause children in the DPRK to be in conflict with themselves and others. The government turns a blind eye to the extent and prevalence of psychological anxieties within the children.¹⁵ Children are left alone when dealing with traumas because abuse is normalized within society, and there is a lack of support from both the state and caregivers. The State exposes children to violence, making them witness public executions. Exposure to such graphic violence installs a deep fear of the State which is mistakenly believed to be respect for and loyalty to the authorities. This detrimental mindset follows them into adulthood in which citizens have to be wary of their duty and performance in the eyes of the authorities. At school, children face further psychological abuse by a system that forces competition and hierarchy: teachers “would gather the children in groups and make them compete against each other... at the end of the competition, children who performed poorly within the groups ‘become pariahs or outcasts.’”¹⁶ Teachers exacerbate this by instigating violence, relying “on the hierarchy among students to punish some students

⁹ Ibid, 85.

¹⁰ Ibid, 100.

¹¹ Ibid, 99.

¹² Ibid, 103.

¹³ Ibid, 101.

¹⁴ Ibid, 106.

¹⁵ Ibid, 122.

¹⁶ Ibid, 128.

while not using physical violence themselves.”¹⁷ The DPRK intentionally subjects its vulnerable children to psychological abuse to spread a culture of mistrust among citizens to stand as the only figure of respect worth being loyal to.

Conclusion

DPRK citizens cannot recognize the dire effects of child abuse on their society without the government. This form of child abuse is specific to the DPRK and is systematically perpetrated to indoctrinate its citizens. However, there is hope; “changes within the society came from the outside world... when confronted with other types of society through media or any other type of communication, North Koreans have shown their ability to change.”¹⁸ Because the agents in the DPRK are subjects of such abuse and have normalized it, the DPRK government needs to allow global information into its borders to outline the offenses that are occurring. This way, the DPRK can progress towards a future without child abuse, and aim for its citizens to be more global citizens that live their best life for themselves rather than indoctrinated slaves that live for the government.

In light of these ongoing abuses, PSCORE urges the Human Rights Council to call on the government of the DPRK to:

- Ensure the rights outlined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child for each child in its nation
- Undertake a review of their national criminal legislation to ensure its compatibility with international obligations in regards to children’s rights
- Implement measures based on the recommendations outlined in the 2019 UPR of DPRK
- Take further measures to improve access to basic health care, nutrition, and education for children.

¹⁷ Ibid, 41.

¹⁸ Ibid, 126.