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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 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.

[7 February 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



Written statement submitted by the US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK), a nongovernmental organization in special consultative status

Worsening Humanitarian and Human Rights Situation

The NGO US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK) expresses its concern regarding the worsening humanitarian and human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, primarily due to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's self-imposed isolation.

The situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remains dire and has been exacerbated within the past two years by the COVID-19 pandemic. The country currently finds itself on the verge of an economic and humanitarian crisis, resulting from a variety of factors, including draconian COVID-related restrictions and a fragile food and nutrition situation. Chairman Kim Jong-un is taking advantage of the pandemic to oppress the North Korean people even more and continues to impose restrictions on basic freedoms. Despite these containment measures, the public health situation remains worrisome and average citizens lack access to necessary treatment, and vaccines. Notably, all international humanitarian aid workers, as well as nearly all diplomatic staff of foreign embassies, have left the country, which makes it extremely difficult to monitor the situation on the ground.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has not been transparent in disclosing a single case of COVID-19 among its population. Reports have emerged in recent months of soaring food prices and lack of basic imports, which led to deaths by starvation and an increased number of North Koreans begging for food.

COVID-19 prevention continues to be used by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a tool of oppression, cracking down on markets and information from the outside world.

Under Chairman Kim Jong-un, there has been an intensive crackdown on escape from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Increased security measures on both the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and China sides of the border resulted in only 63 new North Korean escapees arriving in the Republic of Korea as of December 2021, a record low since the 1990s.[1] With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has implemented even more draconian border policies, including reported "shoot-to-kill" orders for those trying to flee the country. These security measures have also likely led to a higher number of individuals arrested, detained, and tortured in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's detention system where crimes against humanity are ongoing.

Recommendations

1. As North Koreans continue to suffer the dire consequences of Chairman Kim Jong-un's oppressive policies during a global pandemic, it is critical that UN Member States continue to press the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on its human rights commitments made during its Universal Periodic Review (33rd Session) in 2019 and continue to condemn and raise awareness of the long-standing and ongoing gross human rights violations, at times rising to the level of crimes against humanity.

2. Due to the grave consequences of Kim Jong-un's COVID and border-related policies, Human Rights Council Member States should engage with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to provide necessary assistance to vulnerable North Koreans, beginning with urgently needed humanitarian and human rights assessments that factor in a Human Rights Up Front approach.

3. Human Rights Council Member States should urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to accept visits by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights after the COVID-19 pandemic. Their visits would be opportunities to assess the impact of COVID-19 on aspects

focused on human security in general, including the nutritional and health insecurity of vulnerable groups in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, including the disabled, women and children, and political prisoners. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea should include human rights non-governmental organizations and humanitarian aid organizations in these visits, perhaps beginning with civil society organizations with United Nations consultative status. This would facilitate a more comprehensive dialogue, cognizant of both the human security needs of the North Korean people and a United Nations Human Rights Up Front approach.

4. Human Rights Council Member States should urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to end its practices of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and forced labor, often culminating in crimes against humanity being committed against prisoners in particular, and allow international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross to access the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's prison camps.

5. Human Rights Council Member States should assist North Korean refugees in China and other countries with safe passage and the opportunity to seek asylum under applicable international human rights and refugee law.

[1] https://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/relations/statistics/defectors/