

United Nations Security Council Arria-formula Meeting
“The Situation of Human Rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea”

Friday, March 17, 2023

Trusteeship Chamber, United Nations Headquarters, New York, NY

10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

The United States Mission to the United Nations and the Permanent Mission of Albania to the United Nations, with co-sponsors the Permanent Missions of Japan and the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, will hold an Arria-formula meeting of the United Nations Security Council to shed light on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s human rights abuses and violations, and their intrinsic link to international peace and security.

Background

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) has one of the world's most egregious human rights records. The UN Secretary-General’s July 2022 report on human rights in the DPRK describes significant concerns, including the “widespread and systematic use of torture,” lack of meaningful public participation in the political process, severe penalties for distributing foreign media content, and the “absolute denial of the freedom to express views or criticism of the Government,” as well as of the “right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.” The first report, in October 2022, from Ms. Elizabeth Salmón, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, drew attention to hundreds of unresolved cases of reported international abductions and enforced disappearances by the DPRK government from outside its territory, including from Japan and the Republic of Korea, as well as prisoners of war and detainees. Salmón committed to advocate for mechanisms of accountability, while actively expanding space for dialogue and cooperation with the DPRK to address the human rights situation.

These human rights abuses are unfortunately not new. The first mandate holder, Mr. Vitit Muntarbhorn (2004-2010), made clear that no attempt to understand the human rights situation in the DPRK can be separated from the challenges of: 1) Democratization in the country; 2) Peace and security in the region; 3) Demilitarization and disarmament in the region; and 4) Sustainable development and the need for broad-based popular participation, with attention to protection of vulnerable groups. Additionally, the Commission of Inquiry (COI) on human rights in the DPRK found in its 2014, report, A/HRC/25/63, that the DPRK’s human rights practices amounted to crimes against humanity. In the report, the Commission also found that

rather than using its maximum available resources to feed those who are hungry, the DPRK government has prioritized military spending – predominantly on hardware and the development of weapons systems and its nuclear [weapons] program – even during periods of mass starvation. As well, the report found that the State even failed to feed all the soldiers of its army. The report also found that the State committed systematic, widespread, and gross human rights violations. The report identifies the main perpetrators as officials from security institutions, the army, and the judiciary, among others, who are acting under the effective control of the central organs of the Workers’ Party of Korea, the National Defence Commission and the Supreme Leader of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

In 2017, the last time the Security Council met for an open briefing on the DPRK human rights situation, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs stated that, “The international community has a collective responsibility to protect the population of the DPRK if the State does not protect its own citizens,” and that it must also “consider the wider implications of the reported grave human rights situation for the stability of the region.”

The DPRK government responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with further isolation and repression, including shoot-to-kill orders. The DPRK government has increased efforts to suppress fundamental freedoms and the free flow of information, with reports of thousands of new arrests and harsh imprisonments. Today, a total of 80,000 to 120,000 political prisoners are reported to be in prison in the DPRK.

The DPRK’s human rights violations and abuses threaten international peace and security and are directly linked to the country’s unlawful weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missile programs. It is the repressive political climate that allows the government to exert near total control of the information environment to spew false propaganda and lies to keep their own population misinformed of the diversion of such a large share of resources and to divert the large share of resources to weapons development without comment from the population, which suffers from severe economic hardship and malnutrition. Forced labor – domestic and overseas – plays a key role in sustaining the government and generating revenue for its weapons programs and mass mobilizations, including of school children, are a key component of the State-run economy. The DPRK’s systematic human rights violations and abuse remains on the list of items with which the Council is seized.

Objectives

The meeting will highlight the ongoing violation and abuses of human rights by the DPRK. It will identify opportunities for the international community to promote accountability for the DPRK’s human rights violations and abuses. The meeting will underscore how the DPRK’s human rights violations and abuses are inextricably linked with the threats to peace and security posed by the DPRK’s unlawful WMD and ballistic missile programs.

Briefers

The Security Council will hear from the following briefers:

- Ms. Elizabeth Salmón, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea
- A DPRK refugee

Interventions

Co-sponsors, and Member States or Observer Offices speaking on behalf of groups of two or more Member States or Observer Offices, will be invited to deliver statements after the briefers and UN Security Council Members. We ask delegations to speak for no more than four (4) minutes in order to allow more time to hear from the briefers and to let the briefers respond to comments from Member States. Translation will be provided in all six UN languages.

Attendees are requested to register for the list of speakers by emailing Alana Garellek (garelleka@state.gov) and Ingrid Prizreni (Ingrid.Prizreni@mfa.gov.al) by close of business Wednesday, March 15 with the subject line "Arria List of Speakers."