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Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Call for submissions

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ms. Elizabeth Salmón, will submit a report focusing on the human rights of women and girls to the Human Rights Council in March 2023. To raise awareness of the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, she has decided to pursue a more detailed analysis of the human rights situation of specific groups, starting with women and girls. The aim of focussing on specific groups is to improve understanding of their situation and explore ways to better protect and promote their human rights. To inform the upcoming report and follow up activities, the Special Rapporteur is seeking inputs on the topic from States, victims, civil society organizations, academia, and other stakeholders through responses to the brief questionnaire below.

Questionnaire

Human rights of women and girls in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

General questions

1. What information do you have about actions that the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has taken to improve the human rights situation of women and girls and the existing policies to address their human rights?

The DPRK, like any other country, has laws against women and children. However, the law is not only an ineffective law lacking active practice in the field, but it is also a formal measure to show women's liberation and gender equality to the outside world through the decorative law. The law on gender equality (1946), and the women's rights protection law (2011) clearly state the prohibition of discrimination in the entire social life, including the law on the protection of women's rights. However, the law is not only an ineffective law lacking active practice in the field, but also a formal measure to show women's liberation and gender equality to the outside world as decorative laws.

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2. What is the human rights situation of women and girls in detention in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea? Please also share information about women and girls in *kwanliso* (political prison camps).

Even if they are criminal, the basic human rights must be upheld. However, in political prison camps, not to mention basic food, clothing, and housing security, but also all kinds of forced labor, torture and violence, and rape of female prisoners are being committed in a poor environment. In addition, there is a cynical and callous disregard for human life. According to the testimony of a young female North Korean defector who is in contact with Mulmangcho, she was deported after defection from the DPRK and sent to a prison camp. She was brutally abandoned outside in order to prevent infection in the camp as soon as she gets cholera. This is contrary to Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 'Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.'

3. What information do you have about North Korean women and girls crossing the border? What are the difficulties they face, including violence, before, during and after crossing the border?

Female North Korean defectors who cross the border are forced to marry and give birth, because their status is not stable. North Korean defectors who have been forcibly sold by human traffickers are treated as goods sold for money rather than human beings. Six out of ten North Korean women who defected to China get involved in prostitution, and some of them are forced to prostitute and even cyber sex, which is no exception to young girls.

4. What is the situation regarding sexual and reproductive health of women and girls in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea?

Women in the DPRK are not guaranteed sexual rights initiative and physical autonomy. Everything is being forced. In addition, due to the preference for sons in North Korea, forced abortion is frequent. The abortion issue is so serious that the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling, which has recently become a hot topic of conversation, contains information on North Korea's abortion. 'Only a handful of countries, among them China and North Korea, permit elective abortions after twenty weeks, the rest have coalesced around a 12-week line'. Most of North Korean women are already malnourished and abortion worsen their physical conditions. In addition, North Korea has a social structure that is difficult to

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raise gender-related issues in public. Furthermore, the cause and effect of all problems are often attributed to women's problems, and the cheapening of women life is a widespread trend in this country.

5. What is the situation on domestic violence in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea?

A North Korean defector once said on a broadcast that domestic violence is a daily occurrence in North Korea. The DPRK government claims that there is gender equality in North Korean society, but it is not practiced even in families, which are the smallest society groups.

In North Korea, women have little right to self-determination under the patriarchal system, and women's labor exploitation is severe, and despite frequent abortions and red lights due to unwanted pregnancies, they have to go to the living front and make money.

Domestic abuse, domestic violence against women and children, is a serious and widespread problem in North Korean families. Over 50 percent of North Korean families experienced domestic violence from husbands.

6. What is the situation regarding women's rights in *Jangmadang* (local informal markets)? Has women's economic and social participation made an impact on women's lives and opportunities?

Only 15 years ago, North Korea forced women to wear skirts, and even women who came to the market were banned from wearing pants. Ironically, in a society where women are forced to live only by women rather than being treated as one person, women maintain their livelihoods. North Korean men must serve in the military for 10 years and try to work for the party. They dismiss market business as shameful and embarrassing. Therefore, women sell things on the streets and often bribe party executives who control the market to support their family. In the process, sexual violence and trafficking were carried out against women, and they still lack respect for their personalities.

Of course, it is true that the market economy was introduced to North Korea even though it is still weak, and women who actively participated in the market economy for the purpose of maintaining their livelihood increased their voice and status. However, as women are still often ignored, it is hard to say that socioeconomic participation has had a significant impact on North Korean women's lives.

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7. What are women's particular vulnerabilities to forced labour in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea?

North Korean workers are not free to choose jobs and are forced to work for companies designated by the government after graduation, so they often leave their families and work alone in rural areas. The children of prisoners of the Korean War, who has been called "No. 43", must work in coal mines even if they graduate from a good university.

In this way, forced labor in North Korea occurs regardless of gender, but women are more vulnerable in some areas. In North Korea, women are mobilized for forced labor under the pretext of gender equality. Not only men but also women will be involved in dangerous work such as the reconstruction of the bridge.

Grils are not free from forced labor, either. According to the testimony of North Korean defectors at the Mulmangcho school, schools in North Korea constantly demanded money from students, even for restoring broken school windows at their own expense. In addition, especially girls had to do vacation homework such as hunting raccoons and gathering medicinal herbs.

8. What positive changes do you think women and girls can make to society and human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea? What is the role of women in pursuing peace and security in the region? How do you think the international community should support women and girls in this regard?

The North Korean regime insists on equality between men and women, but the only women in the North's Supreme People's Assembly are royal families such as Kim Kyung-hee and Kim Yeo-jung. In North Korea, it is impossible for women to enter society due to its social structure. South Korea is also said to have a low index of women entering society, but North Korea is in an unimaginable situation. Therefore, it is difficult to expect positive change in the DPRK from North Korean women and girls right now.

What measures can the international community take in such a desperate situation for North Korean women.

First, a substantial support system must be established. More than half of North Koreans, except Pyongyang, are undernourished. In particular, children are suffering from health problems such as swelling and not growing taller due to iodine deficiency. Medical support is urgently needed. However, it was found that some high-ranking officials monopolized the medicine that entered the market. Assistance is important, but it is necessary to establish a valid system that can be delivered to actual consumers.



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Second, at the international community level, the international community needs to judge whether North Korea's human rights situation is actually reflected or not, along with an on-site investigation of North Korea's human rights situation for women and girls. The first step should be to pressure the North Korean regime to establish a system to guarantee human rights that meet global standards.

Ultimately, North Korea needs to change its regime, which is maintained at the expense of women and girls.

9. According to your information, what do North Korean women and girls want in terms of securing peace and enhancing their human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea?

Above all, They don't want to starve anymore. North Korean women will want to be guaranteed the right to life and the right to self-determination. North Korean women are living a difficult life of three roles per person, taking care of their children, housework, even forced labor and economic activities. Women and girls living in North Korean society, which represents a patriarchal male power, will want to be respected as equal members of society and have freedom of their choice.

For submission:

Please send your responses to the questionnaire, including name and contact details, in Word format by email to hrc-sr-dprk@un.org by **16 December 2022**.

We kindly request that your submission be concise and limited to a maximum of 5 pages (or 2,000 words) and welcome the inclusion of links to online documents.

Due to a limited capacity for translation, we also request that your inputs be submitted in English. We may accept submissions in Korean in exceptional circumstances, please contact hrc-sr-dprk@un.org if you do not have the capacity to submit your responses in English in advance.

All submissions will be made publicly available and posted on the Special Rapporteur's homepage at the OHCHR website, unless it is indicated that the submission should be kept confidential.