

KOREA (DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF)

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Head of state: **Kim Jong-un**

Head of government: **Pak Pong-ju**

The UN released a comprehensive report on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea, DPRK), which gave details on the systematic violation of almost the entire range of human rights. Hundreds of thousands of people continued to be detained in prison camps and other detention facilities, many of them without being charged or tried for any internationally recognizable crime. Freedoms of expression, religion and movement, both within and outside the country, remained severely restricted. The fate of people forcibly disappeared was still unknown, despite the government admitting the involvement of state agents in the abduction of some individuals.

BACKGROUND

The third year of Kim Jong-un's rule started in December 2013 with the high-profile trial and execution of Jang Song-taek, vice-chairman of the National Defence Commission and uncle of Kim Jong-un. This was believed to be the beginning of a series of political purges in order to further consolidate Kim Jong-un's power, although there were no other confirmed executions of political opponents linked with Jang during 2014.

An officially illegal, but government-tolerated, private economy continued to expand, including privately operated food and clothing stalls. It was feared by observers

that the apparent economic opening could create greater income disparities. It was not accompanied by an improvement in the general human rights situation.

The government attempted to bring in foreign exchange currency, including through tourism. Despite such efforts, the state remained highly sensitive to any actions by foreign visitors that were perceived to be spreading political or religious ideas not compatible with those promoted by the state. Freedom of information was limited and the internet was not publicly accessible. A national "intranet" was set up instead.

A rare display of accountability from the government was seen in May, when state media reported promptly the collapse of an apartment building in the capital, Pyongyang, that killed more than 300 people. Foreign media in Pyongyang reported that citizens had expressed their anger over the incident and the government issued an apology over faulty construction methods.

INTERNATIONAL SCRUTINY

The UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea released its report in February.¹ The 372-page document presented a comprehensive review of "systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations" and concluded that many of these amounted to crimes against humanity.

The report was presented to the UN Human Rights Council in March, where a strong resolution was passed welcoming the report, which garnered support from a majority of Council member states.²

The DPRK underwent a second Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process in May. The government was more engaged than during its first UPR in 2010, and this time gave responses on which recommendations it supported, including those relating to the effective operation of humanitarian aid. However, the government refused to accept more than half of the recommendations, in particular those directed at co-operation

with the Commission of Inquiry and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK. It also rejected outright recommendations to close its political prison camps, or to allow foreign victims of enforced disappearance to return freely to their countries of origin.³

In December, the UN General Assembly passed a strong resolution recommending the referral of the human rights situation in the DPRK to the International Criminal Court.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Hundreds of thousands of people remained detained in political prison camps and other detention facilities, where they were subject to systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations such as extrajudicial executions and torture and other ill-treatment, including beatings, long periods of forced hard labour without rest and deprivation of food.

Many of those held in political prison camps had not been convicted of any internationally recognizable crime, but were relatives of those deemed threatening to the administration. They were detained without a fair trial, through “guilt-by-association”.

The government continued to deny the existence of political prison camps, even though satellite images showed not only their presence, but also ongoing expansion at some of the camps as of the end of 2013.

North Koreans as well as foreign citizens were subject to arbitrary detention after unfair trials. Kenneth Bae and Matthew Todd Miller, both US nationals, were convicted of “hostile acts” against the regime in 2013 and 2014 respectively. Before their release in November, they had begun serving terms of forced hard labour of 15 and six years respectively. In an interview with foreign media in August, Kenneth Bae spoke about the unfair trial he received as well as his deteriorating health while working in a labour camp.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

The practice of any religion continued to be severely restricted. Both DPRK and foreign nationals reportedly received heavy punishments for exercising their freedom of religion, including detention in prison camps.⁴

John Short, an Australian missionary, was arrested for promoting his religious beliefs and was deported in March only after apologizing publicly. Kim Jung-wook, a missionary from South Korea, was detained for more than six months without access to a lawyer, before being convicted of setting up an underground church and spying. He was sentenced to forced hard labour for life.

Jeffrey Fowle, a tourist from the USA, was arrested in May for leaving a bible at a club in Chongjin. He was detained for more than five months without trial before being released in October.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Authorities continued to impose severe restrictions on the exercise of the right to freedoms of expression, opinion and peaceful assembly. There appeared to be no independent civil society organizations, newspapers or political parties. North Koreans were liable to be searched by authorities for the possession of foreign media materials, and could be punished for listening to, watching or reading such materials.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Border controls remained tight. The number of people arriving in South Korea after fleeing from the north remained low in 2012 and 2013 compared with previous years.

The difficulty of crossing the border was increased through enhanced surveillance technology according to media in South Korea, including the use of jamming equipment designed to stop citizens using Chinese cellular phones along the border. The use of mobile phones for citizens remained confined to a closed local network within North Korea.

A group of approximately 29 people, including a one-year-old baby, were forcibly returned to North Korea in early August after being detained in China. While it was not known whether they were charged for crossing the border illegally, they would face possible imprisonment and torture and other ill-treatment, including forced labour, if such charges were brought against them.⁵

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances asked the DPRK in August for confirmation regarding the fate of 47 people who were known to have been abducted on foreign soil by North Korean security agents and who subsequently disappeared. A majority of these were citizens of South Korea.

The government engaged in meetings with Japan in May to address the issue of abductions, and launched a special committee to reinvestigate cases of Japanese nationals abducted during the 1970s and 1980s. The initial report of the reinvestigation was, however, rejected by Japan as it contained no new information about the 12 Japanese nationals already officially admitted by North Korea as having been abducted from Japan by North Korean security agents.

RIGHT TO FOOD

The World Food Programme reported in September that the situation of food availability in North Korea was “severe”. Despite improved harvests in the two previous years, a dry spell in 2014 brought food ration levels down from 410 to only 250 grams per person per day in August, which was widely seen as an indication of imminent shortage in food availability. Latest statistics revealed that rates of chronic malnutrition remained relatively high in 2013, affecting one in four children aged under five.

While North Korea received humanitarian assistance from the World Food Programme and other relief agencies, the government did not allow the agencies to extend assistance

to some of the most vulnerable communities. Restrictions remained in place for those attempting to monitor delivery of food aid to targeted groups.

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1. North Korea: UN Security Council must act on crimes against humanity (Press Release)
www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/north-korea-un-security-council-must-act-crimes-against-humanity-2014-02-17
 2. North Korea: UN vote a positive step to end crimes against humanity (Press Release)
www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/north-korea-un-vote-positive-step-end-crimes-against-humanity-2014-03-28
 3. Urgent need for accountability and cooperation with the international community by North Korea (ASA 24/006/2014)
www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA24/006/2014/en
 4. North Korea: End persecution of Christians after reports US tourist detained (Press Release)
www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/north-korea-end-persecution-christians-after-reports-us-tourist-detained-20
 5. China: Further information: Families forcibly returned to North Korea (ASA 17/048/2014)
www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA17/048/2014/en

KOREA (REPUBLIC OF)

Republic of Korea

Head of state: **Park Geun-hye**

Head of government: **Chung Hong-won**

The rights of workers were violated through the denial of freedom of association, the curtailment of legitimate collective action and, for migrant workers, exploitation under the Employment Permit System. The government increasingly restricted freedom of expression by using the National Security Law to intimidate and imprison people. Police blocked peaceful protests. At least 635 conscientious objectors remained in prison.