

**Statement on the Human Rights Situation
in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea
UPR Info Pre-Sessions 47
28 August 2024, Geneva**

(Slide 1)

My name is Hanbyeol Lee. I am an escapee from the DPRK and a representative of Improving North Korean Human Rights Center. I will speak on behalf of KOCUN and other 9 organizations.

Due to time constraints, when I present each issue, I will skip the previous recommendations, but focus on new developments and recommendations.

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The FIRST ISSUE is the RIGHT to FOOD.

During the COVID pandemic, the borders were closed and international assistance was not accepted. Food distribution system stopped functioning. Except in Pyongyang, people in rural areas faced severe food shortages, resulting in a number of deaths, especially among the vulnerable groups.

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We hereby recommend that the DPRK:

- Ensure that all people, especially children, women, persons with disabilities and the elderly, have access to adequate food necessary for their survival, without discrimination on the basis of class, region, occupation, or institution, and in cooperation with international community.

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The SECOND ISSUE is the RIGHT to HEALTH.

The system of free medical treatment has totally collapsed. Most local clinics lack proper medical equipment. Doctors are not paid proper salaries. The "Household Doctor System" is only available to the privileged class.

Despite the new law on epidemic prevention, enacted in October 2021, only Pyongyang residents have been vaccinated up to three times, while rural residents have not received even the first dose.

The law guarantees free, preventive medical services such as health checkups, but no one has actually received one.

The drinking water is not safe. There are frequent outbreaks of infectious diseases such as cholera, resulting in numerous fatalities.

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We recommend that the DPRK:

- Equip local clinics with the necessary medical equipment.
- Ensure that doctors receive a sufficient monthly salary that allows them to sustain their livelihood.
- Provide free comprehensive health checkups for all citizens every two years.
- Ensure access to safe drinking water.
- Accept international assistance and cooperation in the area of health.

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The THIRD ISSUE is LABOR RIGHTS and SOCIAL SECURITY RIGHTS.

The serious problems are:

- People cannot choose work freely. Individuals are placed to a designated job. To change the workplace, bribery is needed.
- Workers are not paid proper salaries. If salary is paid at all, it is barely enough to buy a kilogram of rice. For occupational accidents, no compensation is paid through the social security system. There is no severance pay system.
- Women are mobilized for forced labor and subject to bear the extra burden of collecting all sorts of goods and materials and turning them over to the authorities. Children are also given the similar assignments by the school. In addition, children are forced to attend military training after school.
- Overseas workers are forced to work long hours, paid inadequate wages, and kept in confinement, where they are unable to receive proper treatment for diseases, such as tuberculosis.

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Our recommendations are that the DPRK:

- Ensure people's right to choose work freely. Pay all workers a decent monthly salary in line with ILO standards;

- For overseas workers, end forced labor and confinement, guarantee freedom of movement, and ensure adequate health care.
- Stop forcing children and women to forced labor and extra burden, as well as military training for children.
- Stop the forced labor in detention centers.

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FINALLY, regarding INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS and the NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTION.

In 2018, the DPRK submitted its first report on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and is continuing its engagement.

We welcome this positive development.

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We recommend that the DPRK:

- Ratify the Convention against Torture, its Optional Protocol and other core international human rights treaties it is not yet a party.
- Submit, as soon as possible, its reports on the two Covenants, ICCPR and ICESCR, which are long overdue;
- Allow the visits of the Special Rapporteurs;
- Establish an independent national human rights institution, in compliance with the Paris Principles.

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Thank you for your attention.