

15. The situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

During the period under review, the Council held one meeting under the item entitled “The situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea”, which took the form of a briefing.⁵⁴⁹ More information on the meeting, including on participants and speakers, is provided in the table below.

At the meeting, which was held on 18 August at the request of Albania, Japan and the United States, the Council discussed the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and heard briefings by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and a civil society representative.⁵⁵⁰

In his remarks, the High Commissioner noted the existence of human suffering in the country on a scale and of such magnitude that engendered instability internally and had wider implications, particularly as a result of Government policies that were initially linked to containing the COVID-19 pandemic but had grown even more extensive as the pandemic waned. Specifically, he noted the increasing repression of the rights to freedoms of expression, privacy and movement, the persistence of widespread forced labour practices and a worsening situation for economic and social rights. He also noted the widespread imposition of forced labour by the State, including its extension to children and that borders closures made offers of humanitarian support impossible. The High Commissioner emphasized that many of these severe, widespread and long-standing human rights violations stemmed directly from, or supported, the increasing militarization of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. He underscored that the Charter made it clear that human rights violations of that order were a matter of international concern, adding that sustainable peace can be built only by advancing human rights and its corollaries: reconciliation, inclusion and justice. The High Commissioner encouraged the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to respond positively to the offer of technical assistance

⁵⁴⁹ For more information on the format of meetings, see part II, sect. I.

⁵⁵⁰ See [S/PV.9398](https://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire).

of his office and urged it to engage in meaningful dialogue and to reset much-needed freedom as a foundation for enduring peace.

In her statement, the Special Rapporteur stressed that the prolonged border shutdown, which started in early 2020, has brought increased hardship. She expressed particular concern over the situation of women and girls who were subject to torture, ill-treatment, forced labour and gender-based violence. She emphasized that peace and security must be approached in a comprehensive manner that combined stability, equality, truth and justice, guided by human rights norms. The Special Rapporteur further stressed that negotiations to end the state of conflict should include clear benchmarks on progress on human rights and that women should be included as decision makers in any peacemaking process. Finally, she called on the Council to place the protection of human rights at the centre of a reinvigorated peace and security agenda.

Sharing his own experience, the civil society representative described the life of people living in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, stating that they had no human rights, freedom of expression or rule of law. He urged the Council to continue discussing the human rights situation and to work to overcome the Government's physical and digital self-isolation so that the people of his country could see the outside world.

Following the briefers, the representative of the United States, the presidency of the Council for the month, explained why her delegation had joined Albania and Japan in requesting the meeting, noting the human right situation in the country had not improved since the issuance of the report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea a decade ago,⁵⁵¹ and was an undeniable matter of international peace and security demanding the Council's attention.⁵⁵² The representative of the United States stated that inaction was unacceptable and that the Council had to continue to speak out against injustice and its destabilizing impact on regional and international peace and security. In the discussion, a number of speakers pointed to the link between human right violations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and regional and international peace and security, stressing in particular that the militarization of the country and its development of nuclear programmes was financed

⁵⁵¹ See [A/HRC/25/63](#).

⁵⁵² See [S/PV.9398](#).

through forced labour.⁵⁵³ Several Council members underscored the need for the Council to address the massive and systematic violations of human rights, ensuring accountability and promoting peace and stability in the region and the world.⁵⁵⁴ The representative of Ecuador opined that the Council had responded to the issue in its past resolutions which underscored the need for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to respect and ensure the welfare and inherent dignity of its people, while also deploring the severe hardships to which the people had been subjected. Several speakers also called on the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to allow full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout the country.⁵⁵⁵

While also expressing concern over the persistent reports of human rights violations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, other Council members emphasized the need to avoid politicizing human rights issues and expressed the view that the Council was not the appropriate forum for discussions of human rights issues, which should instead be dealt with by relevant United Nations human rights bodies or mechanisms.⁵⁵⁶ Expressing reservations with the Council's consideration of the matter, the representative of Ghana stated that a narrow and limited exception in that regard could only be for instances in which a systematic and widespread violation of human rights aggravated an ongoing conflict situation while a State was either incapable of addressing or unwilling to address the matter, as verified by independent sources. The representative of Brazil opined that discussions on human rights were most effective when avoiding selectivity and seeking to implement rights for all. Furthermore, while recognizing that rule 2 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure provided that the President should call a meeting at the request of any member of the Council, he reminded that the subject of the meeting had to come under the mandate of the Council.⁵⁵⁷ The representative of China stated that pushing the Council to discuss the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea would not help to ease the situation but would rather escalate it and that concerned countries should rather take concrete action to promote mutual trust and resume talks. Similarly, the

⁵⁵³ Ibid., Albania, Japan, Malta, United Kingdom and Republic of Korea.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., France, Ecuador and Switzerland.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., France, Switzerland and Malta.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., Ghana, Brazil and Gabon.

⁵⁵⁷ For more information on rule 2, see part II, sect. I.

representative of the Russian Federation stated that linking human rights to international peace and security was artificial and the attempts to introduce into the Council's work issues that did not fall within its mandate, divided its attention, politicized the discussion and thereby undermined the Council's overall authority.

Meetings: The situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

<i>Meeting and date</i>	<i>Sub-item</i>	<i>Other documents</i>	<i>Rule 37 invitations</i>	<i>Rule 39 and other invitations</i>	<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining)</i>
S/PV.9398 17 August 2023			Republic of Korea	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ms. Ilhyeok Kim, civil society representative	All Council members, all invitees	