



**JUBILEE CAMPAIGN USA
ECOSOC Special Consultative Status (2003)**

**With:
NORTH KOREA FREEDOM COALITION
DEFENSE FORUM FOUNDATION
ISABELLA FOUNDATION
CHRISTIAN FREEDOM INTERNATIONAL
PSALT NK**

**United Nations Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review - FOURTH CYCLE**

**Submission to the 47th session of the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review Working Group
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Democratic People's Republic of Korea

A Vital Voice for Those Suffering in Silence

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JUBILEE CAMPAIGN IS A NON-PROFIT, TAX EXEMPT, CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES

**United Nations Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea**

I. Background.

1. **Jubilee Campaign** is a non-governmental organization which holds consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2003 and whose work focuses on promoting the rights of religious and ethnic minorities and raising the status of vulnerable women and children to protect them from bodily harm and exploitation.
2. **North Korea Freedom Coalition (NKFC)** is a nonpartisan coalition founded in June 2003 to work for the freedom, human rights, and dignity of the North Korea people. The Coalition currently has over 70 public member organizations representing millions of American, South and North Korean, and Japanese citizens as well as other nations, along with many individual members. NKFC also has private members that provide humanitarian relief inside North Korea and members in China and other nations that feed, shelter, and rescue North Korean refugees.
3. **Defense Forum Foundation** is a non-profit foundation dedicated to promoting a strong national defense and promoting freedom, democracy, and human rights abroad. It is best known for its Congressional Defense and Foreign Policy Forums, held regularly on Capitol Hill for the benefit of congressional staff, and for its work abroad promoting the freedom, human rights and dignity of the people of North Korea, and self-determination for the people of Western Sahara.
4. **Isabella Foundation** is an organization dedicated to the cause of North Korean human rights. Its founding mission is to assist in the rescue and resettlement of North Korean orphans. Isabella Foundation works to raise awareness of human rights in North Korea with government institutions, international bodies, and the general public.
5. **Christian Freedom International** is a human rights organization that aids, equips and advocates for Christians who are oppressed or persecuted for their faith. CFI provides spiritual and physical help for suffering Christians, by offering ways to ease the burdens of persecution through prayer, action, and giving.
6. **PSALT NK (Pray Serve Act Love Truth for North Korea)** is a United States-based Christian non-profit organization, founded in 2006, dedicated to increasing awareness of the crisis in North Korea and mobilizing people to pray, support rescue work, and participate in outreach efforts to assist resettling refugees. Domestically, PSALT provides outreach to refugees resettled throughout the United States, particularly in the areas of educational development/resources. Overseas, PSALT provides long-term missionary support for rescues, and aid to marginalized North Korean defector communities.

II. Scope of international obligations and cooperation with international human rights mechanisms and bodies.

We urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to:

7. Ratify the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture; the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to the abolition of the death penalty; the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; the Interstate communication procedure under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

III. Violations of human rights obligations, considering applicable international human rights legislation.

A. Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

8. Article 68 of the Socialist Constitution¹ guarantees citizens the right to “freedom of religious belief”, with the caveat that religion is not used as a tool for the alleged infiltration of foreign or western elements into North Korean society. However, this article is de facto illegitimate as an earlier article establishes Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism (the words and instructions of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il) as the guiding principle of the nation.²
9. Enacted in December 2020, the Reactionary Ideology and Culture Rejection Act, which does not explicitly codify the prohibition of religion, includes vague and overbroad language interpreted to extend disproportionately severe penalties to individuals and entities who engage with “rotten ideology and culture of hostile forces including South Korean publications that paralyzes the people’s revolutionary sense of ideology and social class, and deteriorates and depraves our society, as well as all types of impure and absurd ideology and culture that are not in our own style”.³ Christianity is considered by the North Korean government to be foreign/Western imperialist, “superstitious”, “counter-revolutionary”, and predisposed to collusion.⁴ Consequently, individuals associated with this faith can be liable to prison terms for smuggling, purchasing, using, distributing, etc. Christian materials which are deemed objectionable and reactionary.
10. In 2024, Christian woman Ji Ho (pseudonym) recalled to Open Doors the incident in which she witnessed her father being arrested by North Korean security forces after they had searched the home and discovered a Bible wrapped in plastic buried in the residence’s garden. Ji Ho shared that, despite her father’s arrest, she was considered lucky, as typically the entire family of an offender would be interned in political camps or killed for their relation to the ‘criminal’. Ji Ho continues to listen to religious services on her father’s radio which remained confiscated, and she has witnessed the secret church grow in North Korea.⁵ In January 2023, Voice of the Martyrs Korea reported that their five daily Christian radio broadcasts - featuring bible recitations and sermons - were the primary target for North Korean radio frequency blocking efforts, indicating that both Christian fellowship and faith-based persecution are expanding.⁶ North Korea’s September 2023 protocol with Russia to expand technology sharing has heightened concerns about the former’s possibly increasing capabilities to obstruct Christian radio services.⁷
11. Currently an entire 27-member family of Christian converts remain imprisoned in North Korea. Originally provided smuggled bibles in the early 2000s by a man who accepted Christianity while on a prolonged business trip in China and was recruited to receive a package of bibles following his return to North Korea, the family members all came to the Christian faith and initiated regular nightly worship and scripture meetings. After a neighbor reported their religious activities to the police, the entire family was arrested and sent to a prison camp. The bible distributor was later arrested while attempting to defect to China, and he met the imprisoned family to whom he provided the scriptures years prior. He spent seven months in detention and, though he felt guilty for unintentionally endangering the family by introducing them to faith in an illiberal society, he was encouraged to hear the imprisoned Christian family optimistically praying in their cells.⁸
12. In 2023, defector Kim Eujin reflected on her teenage years in North Korea and specifically recalled that individuals who allegedly committed “minor offenses” were detained for between six and twelve months in penal labor colonies before returning to their homes in North Hamgyong Province. However, those who were rumored to have been arraigned for being in possession of a Bible or being involved in underground church networks remained in state custody to never return home. These secret Christian networks became more difficult to maintain clandestinely as their membership grew, and the government’s realization of how robust the Christian community was

¹ Constitute Project, [Korea \(Democratic People's Republic of\) 1972 \(rev. 1998\)](#).

² Cheon Soram, [“Exclusive: Kim Jong Un is now ‘Great Comrade,’ no longer ‘Great Leader’”](#), *Radio Free Asia*, 29 February 2024. ; Daily NK, [“What remains when socialism is removed from North Korea”](#), 1 September 2016.

³ Seulkee Jang, [“Daily NK acquires full text of the anti-reactionary thought law”](#), *Daily NK*, 21 March 2023. ; Daily NK, Lawyers for Human Rights and Unification of Korea, North Korean Human Rights, & People for Successful Corean Reunification, [Reactionary Ideology and Culture Rejection Act of The Democratic People's Republic of Korea](#), 2023.

⁴ Kyung Hoon Leem, Sun-Woo Lee, Sung Chull Kim, Byung-Yeon Kim, Philo Kim, & Heonik Kwon, [The North Korean \[redacted\] under Kim Jong-un](#), Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.

⁵ Open Doors, [“In North Korea, Ji Ho counts the cost of following Jesus every day”](#), 15 January 2024.

⁶ Voice of the Martyrs Korea (VOMK), [“NK Expands Efforts to Jam Gospel Broadcast”](#), 31 January 2023.

⁷ VOMK, [“NK: Radio Broadcasters Prepare for More - and Better - Jamming Efforts”](#), 23 January 2024.

⁸ Voice of the Martyrs (VOM), [“North Korean Smuggles Bibles, Family of 27 Come to Christ”](#), 18 October 2023.

became grounds for the implementation of harsher penalties. Eujin noted that she “never met a person who had come out of a camp after being caught for being religious. They just did not survive”.⁹

13. In April 2023, Radio Free Asia received reports that authorities in South Pyongan province’s Tongam village, responding to an informant’s alert, detained five Christians who had gathered secretly at a farmhouse early one Sunday morning for their weekly prayer meeting and Bible study. During the arrest in which the Christians were charged with “believing in God”, authorities additionally seized numerous bibles and religious pamphlets. The Christian population in Tongam dates back to the 19th century when a large church stood in the village prior to the Japanese occupation; the surrounding Shuchon area was home to two Catholic and 31 Protestant churches.¹⁰
14. In mid-2023, it was revealed that the nickname “Judas” was adopted in North Korean general population to refer to individuals who act as informants and report to the government on their peers’ allegedly suspicious behavior. Citizens’ knowledge of the story of Judas as a traitor to Jesus “indicates that despite North Korea’s best efforts to stamp out Christianity, the religion still maintains a presence there”.¹¹
15. Open Doors in 2023 noted that between October 2021 and September 2022, there were at least nine cases in which Christians (not solely an individual but could have been a group) were transferred to labor camps or executed.¹²
16. In 2022, Open Doors received a letter from an underground church leader, Ms. Bae (pseudonym), who during the days engages in strenuous agricultural labor and in the evenings welcomes secret local Christians into her home - whose windows are covered and concealed with blankets - for Bible worship. After they were discovered, authorities destroyed their Bible and relocated the group of Christians to an isolated rural village where they must remain despite inadequate food resources. Recently, Ms. Bae was able to cross into China and acquire food, medicine, and a new Bible from a group of Chinese Christians; despite having the choice to stay, she returned to her family and community in North Korea and continued her leadership in the underground church. Ms. Bae shares with the outside world: “From your perspective...our suffering must appear as though we live a cursed life. However, we see it as a blessing because it is a shortcut to the father.”¹³
17. In 2022, Korea Future Initiative published its study *North Korean Prison Database* reviewing human rights violations committed against detained citizens in penal facilities across North Hamgyong Province, the region of North Korea with the largest Christian demographic. Researchers counted 796 incidents of “denial of the right to freedom of conscience, thought and religion”, the third most recorded violation behind denial of health (1162 cases) and denial of freedom of expression (1061). Religious freedom violations were recorded at an even higher rate than incidents of forced labor (359 cases), deprivation of liberty (512), denial of the right to life (124), and sexual violence (155). Korea Future Initiative lists the following acts as violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief which have occurred in North Korea: coercion to renounce one’s faith via threat of violence or harsher punishment; prohibition of adopting, changing, or abandoning one’s religion; interrogation about one’s attendance at places of worship or participation in faith-based activities; and proscription against “manifesting” one’s faith. Detainee A0001 witnessed one of her peers being sentenced to 8 years’ at Chongori Re-education Camp for “the crime of religious practice”. Detainee A0909 was forced to participate in regular 1-hour ideological sessions alongside prisoners charged with religious practice; “inattentive” students would be disciplined via sleep deprivation torture.¹⁴
18. In December 2021, Korea Future Initiative reported on 331 cases of violations of the human rights of North Korean women of faith, including:

⁹ Julian Ryall, “North Korea tightens its repression over religious groups”, *DW*, 2 June 2023.

¹⁰ Son Hyemin, “North Korea arrests 5 Christians during underground church service”, *Radio Free Asia*, 28 May 2023.

¹¹ Son Hyemin, “In North Korea, ‘Judas’ is nickname for informer and betrayer”, *Radio Free Asia*, 21 May 2023.

¹² Nicola Smith, “Christians being sent to labour camps and executed in North Korea”, *The Telegraph*, 25 February 2023.

¹³ Missions Box, “Life as a Persecuted Christian in North Korea: Bae’s Story”, 3 February 2022.

¹⁴ Korea Future Initiative, *North Korean Prison Database: Volume 1*, 2022.

“...arbitrary deprivation of liberty; torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment; forced labour; the denial of fair trial rights; the denial of right to life; refoulement; and sexual violence. These violations were based on acts protected under international law, such as religious practice, attending a place of worship, possessing religious items, and being in contact with religious persons.”¹⁵

Out of 151 Christian women surveyed, 140 were arbitrarily deprived of their liberty; 33 were subjected to torture & cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment; 11 were refouled; five were forced to perform labour; and one was subjected to sexual violence.¹⁶ In a similar manner, a study of 180 Shamanic women revealed that 157 were arbitrarily deprived of liberty, 26 were subjected to torture & cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment; 53 were forced to perform labour, and one was subjected to sexual violence.¹⁷

19. Korea Future Initiative has listed the following more specific forms of physical torture inflicted upon individuals detained in North Korea for faith-related reasons: fixed stress positions designed to injure tendons, muscles, and ligaments; violent removal of hair; kicking; physical assault with and without objects; strenuous and repetitive physical exercises such as squat-jumping; suspension from ceilings; deprivation of toilet use; auditory overload; sleep deprivation; starvation; coerced agricultural labor for between 14 and 15 hours per day; forced ingestion of contaminated and rotten food; and denial of hygienic practices. Authorities also impose mental and emotional torture upon detainees, including: mixed messaging and “uncertainty of release”; degradation and humiliation; verbal threats; fostering a visually “oppressive environment”; sowing distrust between prisoners by encouraging snitching; exposure to witnessing brutal acts of torture on others; prolonged solitary confinement; and 24/7 surveillance.¹⁸

Recommendation(s).

We urge the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to:

20. Permanently cease the infliction of physical torture and degrading treatment in all facilities within North Korea’s vast penal system, including, as highlighted by Korea Future Initiative: detention centers; labor training centers, waiting rooms, holding centers, re-education camps, labor training camps, and political prison camps. Each of these installations - though comparable in the reported forms and extent of torture occurring on their premises - are distinct from each other in that they “correspond to the different stages of detainees’ cases and the severity of their alleged crimes”,¹⁹
21. In accordance with domestic legislation which protects the rights of citizens to freedom of religion or belief, cease all practices of charging individuals with ‘religious’ crimes and subsequently imposing harsh interrogation, physical torture, and in some cases, execution.

B. Gender-based violence, discrimination, and insecurity.

22. The December 2010 Women’s Rights Act Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women fails to: define and outline forms of violence against women, recognize sexual violence and harassment of women, and establish any legal bodies to address violations of the rights of women.²⁰ The only remaining legislations which address the rights of women are the 2009 Family Law, which grants women the right to enter marriages upon their own will, and the 2010 Law on Socialist Labour Rights which guarantees mothers maternity leave.
23. In January 2024 it was revealed that Article 319 of the new Criminal Code of 2022 reduces the term of “labor correction” for sexual assault by one year. Whereas the previous 2015 Criminal Code stipulated a maximum of five years of penalty for such a crime, the updated version only prescribes four years.²¹

¹⁵ Korea Future Initiative, [Religious Women as Beacons of Resistance in North Korea](#), 22 December 2021.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Korea Future Initiative, [Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea](#), Volume 2, 2021.

¹⁹ Korea Future Initiative, [Evidentiary Developments Concerning Human Rights Violations in the DPRK Penal System](#), Position Paper 1, March 2024.

²⁰ Left Review Online, [Gender Equality in the DPRK Seen by Law](#), 19 July 2021.

²¹ Seulkee Jang, [“New report expresses concern about continued sexual violence against North Korean women”](#), *Daily NK*, 11 January 2024.

24. Female defectors have reported that the primary body which is tasked with educating women about their rights and freedoms, the Socialist Women's Union of Korea, is in actuality a tool "for political indoctrination"²² and "social control and material coercion"²³ through which the government forces women to partake in unpaid strenuous labor and relinquish foodstuffs and large sums of money for redistribution. Specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic, to counteract the national famine and shortage of raw materials - exacerbated by the government's refusal of external assistance and food aid²⁴ - the Women's Union coercively mobilized elderly and married women to participate in agricultural labor and construction of a border wall to prevent defections and transnational smuggling.²⁵
25. During the Arduous March in the 1990s, families became unable to sustain themselves financially and materially, and as men's mandatory labor in the official state mandated workforce became increasingly irregular and unprofitable, women took up the task of working in illicit marketplaces, a job which is relatively lucrative but exposes them to abuse by government officials. While North Korean women acquired financial power through such work, according to the Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, "their economic empowerment is ironically another way to cement women's role as dutiful mothers, wives, and daughters, because it reinforces the role of women's being primarily responsible for the well-being of their families".²⁶
26. On International Women's Day, 8 March 2024, North Korean women expressed discontent with an editorial circulated by the government's official Rodong Sinmun newspaper claiming that women enjoy "precious lives of happiness" and that they have the "blessing and joy" to respect Kim Jong Un. One female reader responded to the article, telling Daily NK, "Blessings and joy are the kind of things you talk about when people have enough to eat... For mothers who weep to see their hungry children growing even more emaciated, it's hard not to curse at the false propaganda". Another woman lamented that "we women are plagued not only with our family livelihood but also with economic contributions and social responsibilities. I'm so exhausted when I get up in the morning I sometimes wish I could just sleep forever instead... It's infuriating to see them [government media] spouting all this ridiculous propaganda in feigned ignorance of our suffering".²⁷
27. In March 2024, Daily NK published findings of its "2023 North Korean Women's Rights Survey" of thirty female respondents. 36.7% (11 women) responded that their rights are "not well protected", 30% (9 women) responded that their rights were "not protected at all", and 20% (6 women) responded that their rights were only "partially protected". The remaining four surveyed women (13.3%) responded that they were unsure whether their rights were protected; not a single woman affirmed that their rights were "well protected by the government". 21 surveyed women (70%) stated that they had never even heard of the 2010 Women's Rights Act, and 25 (80%) reported never receiving education regarding their rights as women.²⁸
28. 27 out of 37 (73%) female respondents of a 2018 survey revealed that they mainly use their income to finance their husbands' and sons' education and advancement in the Workers' Party. This is because, despite a woman's fiscal accomplishments and stability, there is a glass ceiling which restricts them from "moving up the hierarchy in political positions or to succeed in society".²⁹
29. North Korean defector women reported having been subjected to verbal, physical, and sexual harassment, violence, and intimidation by Party officials; however, they had no choice but to continue to work in order to support their family. Even if women want to report such incidents, there are no means of legal remedy to achieve justice against perpetrators. Other women, in order to

²² Daye Gang, Joanna Hosaniak, Sohee Kim, Ji-yoon Lee, Eui Hwan Cho, & Sook Yi Oh, "[The only claim that things have changed...: Discrimination against Women in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea](#)", NKHR Briefing Report No. 8, Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, July 2018.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ The Guardian & Reuters, "[Poisoned candy: North Korean state media shuns food aid despite hunger crisis](#)", 21 February 2023.

²⁵ Kang Mi Jin, "[N.Korea's women are called on to support farming activities](#)", *Daily NK*, 11 June 2020. ; Lee Chae Eun, "[Elderly members of Socialist Women's Union mobilized to take part in farm work](#)", *Daily NK*, 29 June 2021. ; Jieun Kim, "[North Korea Mobilizes Women for Border Wall Construction Near China](#)", *Radio Free Asia*, 12 July 2021.

²⁶ *Supra note 22.*

²⁷ Lee Chae Un, "[Rodong Sinmun editorial rubs some N. Korean women the wrong way](#)", *Daily NK*, 14 March 2024.

²⁸ Daily NK, "[North Korean Women Speak: The DPRK's Failure to Protect the Rights of Women](#)", 2024. ; Mun Dong Hui, "[New survey finds that most N. Korean women think government fails to protect their rights](#)", *Daily NK*, 11 March 2024.

²⁹ *Supra note 22.*

avoid punishment for their work in illegal markets and continue generating the revenue necessary to support their families, have resorted to providing sexual favors to state authorities and male tradesmen. One former trader, Ms. Choi Dal Mi, explained to Human Rights Watch in 2018 that “having sex with men who have power over you or letting them touch all over your body is a necessity to survive. It never occurred to me that I could or would want to do anything about it. It was just how things are.”³⁰

30. In late January 2015, it was reported that the North Korean government had mandated military service for women between the ages of 17 and 20 years who have graduated either middle school or high school; however they were not required to serve a full decade but only until the age of 23.³¹ In March 2023, the mandatory military service term for women was extended to eight years.³²
31. As the military is largely male-dominated, female soldiers have been subjected to violent and repeated rape and sexual aggression by their male comrades and superiors.³³ One North Korean female soldier stated “[b]ased on my experience, I think almost 70% of female soldiers are victims of sexual assault or sexual harassment”. In January 2023, lecture materials distributed to military officers divulged an incident in 2022 in which a then-18-year-old female soldier was gang raped by male colleagues at a mixed-gender military base.³⁴ Female troops who become pregnant as a result of sexual assault during military service often go to extreme measures to hide it—from “taking anthelmintic medicine (antiparasitic drugs designed to remove parasitic worms from the body), or jumping off and rolling down the high mountain hills.”³⁵
32. A 2023 survey on North Korean women counted 22 out of 30 respondents (73%) who “had encountered cases in which colleagues in the workplace, military, or markets either demanded sexual favors or coerced manipulated, or deceived them into sex by offering opportunities related to work, promotions, or their market business.”³⁶
33. In April 2024, it was reported that three male students at Pyongsong No. 1 High School had been expelled for distributing nude photos of several female students. The first culprit had taken images of his girlfriend while engaged in intimate relations and sent the photos to a friend who circulated them more widely. Two other male students had taken pictures of female students in the restroom and shared them to peers via cell phone. Such conduct is reprehensible no matter the location of the activity, however in this case the perpetrators faced more stringent punishments for committing these offenses while enrolled in the city’s premier secondary school reserved for the most distinguished local students.³⁷
34. A 2020 study of the husbands of North Korean defector women revealed that 56.1% of North Korean male respondents reported having perpetrated some form of physical violence against their partner within the past year. Furthermore, 21.4% of North Korean refugee husbands reported inflicting severe violence – including choking, beating, and/or use of a knife or gun – upon their partners.³⁸ In a 2018 Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights survey, 92% of respondents reported that authorities do not treat domestic violence as egregious conduct deserving of punishment, and 86% indicated that police never respond to incidents.³⁹
35. The unending spate of violence within the home has increased divorce rates; women’s increasing financial agency has enabled them to take action to dissolve their marriages in the interest of escaping abuse and mistreatment. However, in March 2023, the government launched “an

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, [“You Cry at Night but Don’t Know Why”: Sexual Violence against Women in North Korea](#), 2018.

³¹ Choi Song Min, [“North Korea introduces ‘mandatory military service for women’](#)”, *The Guardian*, 31 January 2015.

³² Jieun Kim, [“Where else in the world is there this kind of slavery?”](#), *Radio Free Asia*, 10 March 2023.

³³ Voice of North Korea by Yeonmi Park, [“Shocking Sexual Abuse of North Korean Female Soldiers”](#), *YouTube*, 14 December 2020. ; The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, [“The Shocking Life of a North Korean Female Soldier: The Reality of North Korea!”](#), *YouTube*, 29 November 2021.

³⁴ Seulkee Jang, [“N. Korea’s female soldiers still face sexual harassment, even rape, in the military”](#), *Daily NK*, 28 April 2023.

³⁵ Julia Campbell, [“The Horrors of Being a Woman in the North Korean Military”](#), *NK Hidden Gulag*, 14 July 2022.

³⁶ *Supra note 28*.

³⁷ Jong So Yong, [“Three Pyongsong high schoolers in trouble after sharing nude photos of female students”](#), *Daily NK*, 3 April 2024.

³⁸ Boyoung Nam, MSW, Jae Yop Kim, PhD, & Wonjung Ryu, BA, [“Intimate Partner Violence Against Women Among North Korean Refugees: A Comparison With South Koreans”](#), *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2020.

³⁹ *Supra note 22*.

education campaign” which demonized women seeking to obtain divorces and characterized such actions as “escap[ing] life’s difficulties” and “giving up on their families”.⁴⁰

36. In 2013, 40 out of 60 defector women survey respondents revealed that they had earned only enough money for food and could not afford other daily necessities including medicine and clothing.⁴¹ In 2018 60% of female survey respondents could not afford a primary care physician and instead treated themselves with medication they could only afford via the black market.⁴²
37. In a 2020 survey of defector women who had experienced menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and postnatal/postpartum care while in North Korea, respondents reported (1) having never received formal sex education; (2) having false knowledge on the causes of pregnancy; (3) lack of bodily autonomy; (4) illegal and unsafe abortions; (5) dangerous contraceptive methods; and (6) postpartum infection.⁴³
38. Crossing the national border of the DPRK without prior approval remains one of the most egregious crimes both in the eyes of the government and according to law. A 2020 report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reveals that sexual violence, including forced nudity, invasive body cavity searches, penetrative rape, sexual assault, and groping are a common reality for North Korean women who have been repatriated.⁴⁴
39. Though the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Women stipulates that pregnant women are suspended from criminal liability from three months prenatal to seven months postpartum, such protections are not extended to repatriated pregnant defector women who are perceived to be traitors to the DPRK, and many are subjected to forced abortions and post-birth infanticide. Women who are forced to undergo abortions and even women who proceed to birth their infants have in some cases died as a result of insufficient medical care post-abortion and post-birth. While some pregnancy termination operations were performed surgically, survivors have reported that authorities would sometimes resort to physically beating and kicking pregnant women, or forcing them to conduct overly strenuous labor in order to induce a miscarriage.

Recommendation(s).

We urge the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to:

40. Improve legislative protections of women from violence and discrimination, including amending Women’s Rights Act Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women and the national Criminal Law to define and prescribe punishments for such gender-based criminal conduct; accordingly, expand gender sensitization and public awareness about the inherent dignity of women;
41. Take observable measures to (1) prohibit, (2) eliminate, and (3) prosecute acts of sexual violence against North Korean women – including rape, invasive body examinations, forced nudity, and forced miscarriages and abortions – as a form of torture and cruel treatment;
42. Restructure and transform the Socialist Women’s Union from an agency of exploitation and subjugation into a mechanism that represents the interests of North Korea’s female citizens and educates them about their rights and how to seek legal remedy for violations thereof;
43. Guarantee long-overdue, accessible, and adequate gender-specific services and benefits, including obstetric and gynecological care, postpartum care, maternity leave, affordable feminine hygiene products, domestic violence shelters, and gender-sensitive counseling.

⁴⁰ Myung Chul Lee, “[North Korea launches anti-divorce campaign, targeting women](#)”, *Radio Free Asia*, 30 March 2023.

⁴¹ Joanna Hosaniak, Andrew Wolman, Eunyoung Kim, Sohee Kim, Sehyek Oh, Lilian Lee, Young-ja Kim, Eui Hwan Cho, & Sook Yi Oh, [Status of Women’s Rights in the Context of Socio-Economic Changes in the DPRK](#), NKHR Briefing Report No. 7, Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, 2013.

⁴² *Supra* note 22.

⁴³ Jung Jin Han, PhD. & Seung Jin Oh, PhD., [North Korean women’s reproductive health experience](#), Public Health Nursing, 2021.

⁴⁴ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Human rights violations against women detained in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea: ‘I still feel the pain...’](#), July 2020.

44. Allow UN mechanisms unrestricted access to the country to monitor the situation.

IV. Non-compliance with UPR recommendations.

45. The North Korean government is in violation of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group's 2019 recommendations⁴⁵, including:

- Integrating human rights standards into national domestic legislations (recommended by: Belgium, 126.181; Canada, 127.44; Costa Rica, 126.138; Côte d'Ivoire, 126.180; Croatia, 126.26; Estonia, 126.27; Ethiopia, 126.79; France, 126.182; Greece, 126.136; Honduras, 126.103; Iceland, 126.183; Israel, 126.133; Lao, 126.73; Latvia, 126.28; Mexico, 126.185; Namibia, 126.192; Nepal, 126.80; Nigeria, 126.81; Philippines, 126.84; Russian Federation, 126.75; Syria, 126.77; Turkmenistan, 126.72; Zimbabwe, 126.78);
- Granting international humanitarian agencies unimpeded and secure access into the country to deliver aid and assistance (recommended by: Afghanistan, 126.56; Ireland, 126.58; Norway, 126.59; United States of America, 126.57);
- Guaranteeing citizens the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as well as manifestations thereof (recommended by: Greece, 126.136; Ireland, 126.137; United States of America, 127.42);
- Working towards the realization of gender equality and the elimination of discrimination and violence against women (recommended by: Argentina, 126.172; Australia, 126.173; Belgium, 126.181; Bhutan, 126.174; Bulgaria, 126.175; Côte d'Ivoire, 126.180; France, 126.182; Iceland, 126.183; Israel, 126.184; Mexico, 126.185; Norway, 126.186; Viet Nam, 126.179);
- Eliminating the infliction of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment against prisoners of conscience and repatriated defectors (recommended by: Argentina, 127.51; Australia, 127.53; Austria, 126.128; Germany, 126.129; Netherlands, 127.25; New Zealand, 127.52; Spain, 126.130; Thailand, 126.131).

⁴⁵ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, [A/HRC/42/10](#), 25 June 2019.