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White Paper by the DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies and North Korea's Response Logic to Human Rights Issues

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White Paper Publication as Part of its Response to “Accountability”

On December 11th, in commemoration of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies made its inaugural presentation of a white paper titled *What Does the 75-Year History of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Engrave?*¹⁾ This white paper is perceived as part of North Korea's response to international pressure on human rights, mainly focusing on the theme of ‘accountability.’ In 2013, the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Human Rights in North Korea was established to conduct a specialized investigation into human rights abuses in North Korea, focusing on ‘accountability.’ Based on the investigation results, the COI submitted a report to the UN Human Rights Council in February 2014. In this report, the COI concluded that there were systematic, widespread, and grave human rights abuses in North Korea, constituting ‘crimes against humanity.’ Notably, the COI recommended referring those most responsible for such acts of human rights abuses to the International Criminal Court (ICC) or an ad hoc tribunal based on this assessment.

¹⁾ *Korean Central News Agency*, December 11, 2023.

The UN-led strategy for improving human rights in North Korea has fundamentally shifted its focus to ‘accountability,’ including the highest dignity, as a response to the issue of ‘impunity’ regarding human rights abuses in North Korea. The ‘DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies,’ established on August 27, 1992, and engaging with the international community, including the UN, the US, and the EU, has responded professionally to the North Korean human rights issue. The Association has presented its position through various forms such as ‘white papers,’ ‘complaints,’ ‘public questionnaires,’ ‘protests,’ ‘spokesperson speeches,’ and ‘spokesperson responses,’ simultaneously arguing that the human rights situation in the United States and the West is poor and UN human rights mechanisms are politicized and dominated by the West.²⁾

This recent white paper, published as part of the activities of the DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies, does not introduce new content. Instead, it appears to reiterate existing arguments found in previous documents associated with the organization, such as the *Report of the DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies* and *Speaking about Human Rights*.³⁾

The Fallacy of “Independent Rights”: Rights as “Favors” by the Leader

In this white paper, the DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies defines *human rights* as “independent rights that people should exercise in all areas of social life,

²⁾ North Korea responds to the international community systematically while also criticizing the human rights situation in South Korea in two ways. The organization that specializes in addressing South Korea is the “South Korean Human Rights Countermeasure Association.” They primarily respond by criticizing South Korea’s human rights situation based on the standards they prioritize. The most representative example is the *South Korean Human Rights Abuse Investigation Report* released under the name of the South Korean Human Rights Countermeasure Association. In addition, the Association carries out activities condemning South Korea’s human rights situation in various forms such as “white papers,” “spokesperson speeches,” and “spokesperson responses.” In March 2023, when the government officially published the *North Korean Human Rights Report 2023*, the South Korean Human Rights Countermeasure Association responded by publishing *Human Rights Foundation: Investigating the Reality of South Korean Human Rights* in July 2023 (Pyongyang: Pyongyang Publishers, 2023).

³⁾ *Report of the DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies*, September 13, 2014; Kim, Hye-ryeon, Kim, Seong-ho, Kim, Yeong-il, and Kim, Cheol-jun, *Speaking about Human Rights* (Pyongyang: Pyongyang Publishing House, 2017).

including politics, the economy, and culture.” The core basis of North Korea’s claimed independent rights is the ‘Juche’ idea.⁴⁾ If based on the ‘Juche’ idea, North Korean residents are indoctrinated to view human rights through the theory of socio-political organisms and the ‘Suryong revolution’ theory. Residents forming the political organism centering around the leader can only exercise autonomous rights under the correct guidance of the leader. The inherent rights that all humans should enjoy by virtue of being human are denied, and they transform into rights as favors that can only be enjoyed through loyalty to the leader. Alongside autonomous rights, North Korea prioritizes the collective interest over individual rights, as seen in Article 63 of the socialist constitution, which states that “the rights and duties of citizens are based on the principle of ‘one for all, all for one.’”

While all rights are equally important, North Korea has a selective perspective on human rights, prioritizing certain areas. North Korea emphasizes that it actively fulfills its obligations regarding specific human rights issues, such as those of children, women, and people with disabilities, aligning with international efforts. However, in this white paper, North Korea remains silent on the systematic, widespread, and grave human rights abuses in the country that have drawn condemnation from the international community.

“National Independent Rights”: Using the Justification of “Human Rights is State Sovereignty” to Evade Human Rights Violations

In this white paper, the DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies condemns the human rights situation in the West, including frequent war provocations by the US resulting in death, refugees, violations of the right to development due to oppressive sanctions, and racial discriminative human rights violations by the EU, including sexual harassment and assaults.⁵⁾ Beyond criticism, North Korea goes on the offensive,

⁴⁾ *Report of the DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies*

⁵⁾ In this white paper, the DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies criticizes the human rights situation of European Union countries, claiming that it is no different from that of the United States.

arguing that the human rights situation in European countries is no different from that of the United States, despite Western nations acting as ‘judges of human rights’ while unfairly interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. North Korea also criticizes the West, including the US, questioning human rights issues in North Korea as ‘human rights superiority’ and ‘interference in internal affairs.’ Mainly, by emphasizing the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, North Korea consistently responds to international inquiries into human rights issues with the logic of protecting its ‘sovereignty,’ claiming that “human rights that are not guaranteed by a country’s sovereignty are just a house of cards.” This logic consistently runs through all North Korean documents, including this white paper.⁶⁾ Under the logic that human rights are state sovereignty, that is, the sovereignty of the state, North Korea strongly argues that hostile policies towards North Korea are the greatest threat that violates the human rights of North Korean residents. This white paper sophistically contends that strengthening self-defense capabilities, including nuclear weapons, is inevitable to defend sovereignty and the right to development against such threats.

Strong Relativism Disregarding Universal Standards

The DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies attributes its meaning to key documents forming the “International Bill of Human Rights,” such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. While mentioning the international community’s efforts to protect and promote human rights, North Korea claims to actively participate in these endeavors, aiming to create a human rights-friendly image by publishing this white paper. However, North Korea’s response logic remains far from universal international standards, constituting a solid relativistic perspective. Despite using international standards such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a means to portray itself as human rights-friendly, North Korea’s response logic is nothing more than a solid relativistic view that deviates from universally accepted international standards. Upon examining the human rights

⁶⁾ *Report of the DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies*



The Territory of the Republic of Korea shall consist of the Korean Peninsula and its adjacent islands.

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situation in North Korea, it is evident that systematic, extensive, and grave human rights violations persist without cessation. ©KINU 2023

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