

# Improving Human Rights in North Korea



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All human beings  
are born free  
and equal  
in dignity and rights.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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# International Community on North Korean Human Rights

## United Nations' continuous efforts to improve North Korean human rights

Since the mid-1990s, the United Nations has continuously made efforts to improve the dismal situation of human rights in North Korea.

1997	2003	2004	2005	2009	2012	2013	2014	2014	2014
UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights adopts North Korean Human Rights Resolution. From there onwards the Resolution is adopted every year.	UN Commission on Human Rights adopts North Korean Human Rights Resolution; from there onwards the Resolution is adopted every year.	UN Commission on Human Rights adopts a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in North Korea.	UN General Assembly adopts North Korean Human Rights Resolution; from there onwards the Resolution is adopted every year.	UN Human Rights Council conducts its first Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on North Korea.	Both UN General Assembly and UN Human Rights Council adopt North Korean Human Rights Resolution without a vote.	UN establishes the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.	UN Human Rights Council conducts its second Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on North Korea.	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) announces plan to establish a UN North Korean Human Rights Office in South Korea.	UN Security Council adopts North Korea's human rights situation as an agenda.



### UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the DPRK

The establishment and activities of the UN COI on Human Rights in the DPRK transformed the international community's stance on North Korea's human rights situation from one of observation to one calling for accountability. Whereas North Korea's human rights situation was previously seen as a situation requiring improvement, it is now viewed as a problem concerning justice in which perpetrators must be identified and punished.

- 31 March, 2013 – Decision is made to establish a Commission of Inquiry.
- 7 May, 2013 – Commission members (Michael Kirby, Marzuki Darusman, and Sonja Biserko) are appointed.
- 17 February, 2014 – Written report is published.
- 17 March, 2014 – Official report is presented at the 25th Session of the UN Human Rights Council.

### Second Universal Periodic Review on North Korea

The second Universal Periodic Review on North Korea was conducted from 28 April to 9 May, 2014. Out of the 268 recommendations, North Korea rejected 93, accepted 113, partially accepted 4, and noted 58.

### Decision to establish a UN North Korean Human Rights Office in South Korea and preparation for its launch

The UN COI on Human Rights in the DPRK recommended the establishment of a field-based structure that would allow them to have access to human rights victims and first-hand witnesses as well as to take steps towards establishing accountability. To this end, the UN OHCHR agreed to establish a North Korean Human Rights Office in Seoul in 2015. Steps are currently being taken to coordinate details.

### UN Security Council's adoption of North Korea's human rights situation as an agenda for the first time

On 22 December, 2014, the UNSC officially adopted North Korea's human rights situation as an agenda. The decision reflects the international community's concerns that North Korea's human rights violations can have a significant impact on international peace and security.

# North Korea's Human Rights Violations

Information on North Korea's human rights violations has been drawn from the main findings of the UN COI.

## *freedoms of thought*

### **Violations of the freedoms of thought, expression and religion**

- The state monopolizes information and exercises total control of organized social life.
- The state operates an all-encompassing indoctrination machine that takes root from childhood to propagate an official personality and to manufacture obedience to the Supreme Leader (*Suryong*).
- Citizens are denied the rights to have access to information from independent sources.

### **Discrimination**

- Decisions about residency, occupation, access to food, health care, education and other services have been contingent on *songbun*.
- Discrimination remains a major means for the leadership to maintain control against perceived threats, both internal and external.

## *movement and residence*

### **Violations of the freedom of movement and residence**

- Citizens are not even allowed to leave their province temporarily or to travel within the country without official authorization.
- The state imposes a virtually absolute ban on ordinary citizens travelling abroad.

## *discrimination*

## *right to food*

### **Violations of the right to food and related aspects of the right to life**

- Food is used as a means of maintaining control over the population.
- Hundreds of thousands of people have died of starvation, and survivors suffer from permanent physical and psychological injuries.

## *arbitrary detention*

### **Arbitrary detention, torture, executions, and prison camps**

- Arbitrary arrest and detention are widely practiced.
- The use of torture is an established feature of the interrogation process.
- Public executions are regularly held to instill fear of the regime in the general population.
- Persons who are found to have engaged in major political crimes are disappeared, without trial or judicial order, to political prison camps.
- Deliberate starvation, forced labor, executions, torture, rape, denial of reproductive rights, forced abortion, infanticide, etc., take place in political prison camps.

## *abduction & enforced disappearance*

### **Abductions and enforced disappearance of persons from other countries**

- Since 1950, North Korea has engaged in the systematic abduction, denial of repatriation and subsequent enforced disappearance of foreigners on a large scale and as a matter of state policy.

# South Korea's Efforts to Improve Human Rights in North Korea

In order to promote interest in and improve the situation of human rights in North Korea, the South Korean government has been putting various efforts at home while cooperating with the international community. The establishment in 1994 of a center at KINU devoted to North Korean human rights and inter-Korea humanitarian issues is an example of such efforts. The Center for North Korean Human Rights Studies has been continuously operating the following activities since its foundation.



## Publication of research materials and reports

- The Center has biannually published *North Korean Human Rights* since 2006.
- The Center has published research reports on the issue-by-issue status of North Korean human rights as well as reports on strategies for improving North Korean human rights.
- The Center has translated the Report of the COI on Human Rights in the DPRK into Korean.



## Data collection on the situation of human rights in North Korea

- The interview team has conducted general surveys of 5,421 people since 2010 (as of 10 January, 2015).
- Face-to-face in-depth interviews with 1,255 people have been conducted since 2008 (as of 10 January, 2015).
- The Center has annually published *White Paper on Human Rights* in North Korea, as well as special reports, to be used as basic resources for North Korea's human rights index.



## Establishment of a network for North Korean human rights

- Council on North Korean Human Rights has coordinated with 21 North Korean escapee organizations to discuss activities and policy tasks for North Korean human rights.
- Inter-Ministerial Council on North Korean Human Rights has established a cooperative system with relevant ministries including the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Unification, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the National Human Rights Commission to support and develop government policies.
- Research Society on Inter-Korean Exchanges and Cooperation has established a cooperative system with private organizations promoting humanitarian aid to North Korea to reflect on-site workers' opinions on policies.

During the discussion for establishment of the UN COI on Human Rights in the DPRK, the South Korean government expressed its support through various channels.

In anticipation, the Ministry of Unification, Ministry of Justice, and KINU, a government-funded research organization, formed a consultative body centered around the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The South Korean government eagerly supported holding public hearings, which formed the core of the Commission's activities. As a result, it was able to provide both quantitative and qualitative assistance of the COI investigations and reports.

“The human rights situation in the DPRK is also the subject of profound interest and concern for the international community... the UN office that will soon be set up in the Republic of Korea to investigate human rights abuses in the DPRK is expected to reinforce such efforts [to implement the recommendations made by the COI].”

Address by President Park Geun-hye at the 69th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations (24 September, 2014)

“North Korea’s nuclear problem and its human rights situation are at the core of our agenda in North Korea policies to make the Korean Peninsula peaceful and happy.”

Statement by President Park Geun-hye at the State Council (30 September, 2014)



# KINU's Main Activities Regarding Human Rights in North Korea

## International conference on North Korean human rights



### KINU Human Rights Forum in Europe

In order to establish an international cooperative network that can bring about substantive improvements in North Korea's human rights situation, the KINU Human Rights Forum in Europe has been held every year since 2012.

- November, 2012 International Forum on North Korea: Support for North Korean Democracy, Development, and Human Rights (Oxford University, United Kingdom)  
– Co-hosted by the Henry Jackson Society, The National Endowment for Democracy (NED)
- November, 2013 The Current North Korean Situation and Technical Cooperation to Improve North Korean Human Rights Conditions (Geneva, Switzerland) – Co-hosted by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea in Geneva
- November, 2014 The Current North Korean Situation and Humanitarian Cooperation to Improve Human Rights Conditions (Brussels, Belgium) – Co-hosted by the European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS)

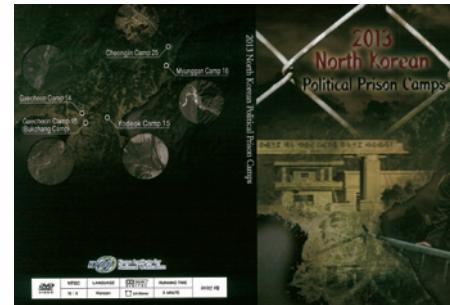


### Chaillot Human Rights Forum

In efforts to provide the foundation for improving North Korea's human rights situation, KINU has hosted the Chaillot Human Rights Forum since 2011. "Chaillot" is a reference to the Palais de Chaillot in Paris where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted.

- November, 2011 North Korea's Human Rights Conditions and Measures for Effective Intervention
- June, 2012 International Cooperation to Improve North Korean Human Rights Conditions under the Kim Jong-Un Regime
- August, 2013 UN Human Rights Mechanisms and Improvement of Human Rights Conditions in North Korea
- November, 2014 North Korean Human Rights and Happiness for a Unified Korea

## Audio-visual materials on North Korean human rights



- *No Tears* (2011)
- *Political Prison Camps* (2013)

## Joint research with domestic and foreign institutions

- "Population Estimation of North Korean Refugees and Migrants and Children Born to North Korean Women in Northeast China," Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (2013)
- "Comprehensive Study on North Korean Escapees' Trauma," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2014)
- "Situation and Human Rights of North Korean Laborers Abroad: Focus on Laborers in the Maritime Province," Waseda University (2014)



# Improving Human Rights in North Korea

## Goals of North Korean human rights policies

- The objectives of North Korean human rights policies are to improve North Korea's human rights conditions, protect the rights of escapees, and resolve inter-Korean humanitarian issues so that each individual living in the Korean Peninsula can lead happier lives; and to boost human rights in both North and South Korean societies so that a foundation for a 'happy unification' can be established.

- The prevention of human rights violations, as well as the protection and promotion of human rights must be reflected and realized in all aspects of the road to a peaceful unification.

### A balanced and integrated approach

- The universality, interrelatedness, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights must be considered.
- A balanced and integrated approach will allow various human rights issues to supplement and mutually strengthen each other.

### The mainstreaming of human rights values

- The values of North Korean citizens' freedom, equality, and dignity must be brought into the mainstream and systematically reflected in policies on North Korea and unification.
- The mainstreaming of human rights values means policies on North Korea and unification must harmonize with international human rights efforts to consolidate our unification capacity.

## Strategies

1

### Harmonizing international cooperation and inter-Korean relations

A mutual understanding must be reached with the international community regarding the perception of North Korean human rights, objectives, and measures for improvement. Efforts must be made to boost North Korea's acceptance of international human rights standards through inter-Korean dialogue and exchange.

2

### Feasible policies

Declarations are not enough. The feasibility of policies should be enhanced by utilizing various measures of pressure and engagement and by supporting North Korea's own efforts to improve human rights.

3

### "Rights up front" approach

Human rights values should be brought to the mainstream in South Korean government's policies by adopting a "rights up front" strategy and advocating human rights in all aspects of North Korea-related activities.

## Tasks

1

### Establishing a governance system to address North Korean human rights policies

The South Korean government, domestic and international private organizations, the UN and other international organizations, and individual countries should create a governance system so that policies on North Korean human rights can be promoted systematically.

2

### Opening inter-Korean human rights dialogue

Inter-Korean human rights dialogue should be promoted to prioritize humanitarian issues between the two Koreas. An environment conducive to further dialogue can be created through discussions on human rights issues with (East) Asian human rights agencies.

3

### Providing inter-Korean human rights technical support

Legal assistance and other means of support should be provided to North Korea to encourage it to accept international human rights standards and be recognized as a member of the international community.

# A ‘Happy Unification’

## **Harmony between human rights values and unification values**

The international community’s basic human rights values include freedom, equality, and dignity. Such universal values are not different from the values of a ‘happy unification,’ which emphasize the freedom, prosperity, and self-realization of all individuals on the Korean Peninsula. The values of human rights and those of unification coexist and they are not separable.

“North Korea’s human rights problem must be resolved not only to protect the values of humanity but also for the future of a unified Korea.”

Statement by President Park Geun-hye at the 3rd Conference of the Presidential Committee for Unification Preparation (2 November, 2014)

## **Substantive improvements in North Korean human rights and a ‘happy unification’**

The Park Geun-hye administration sees the improvement of North Korean citizens’ quality of life as a core task for achieving a ‘happy unification.’ Unification in which individual people lead happy lives is possible when human rights values are in accordance with unification values and when these are translated into the capacity for unification. Substantive improvement in North Korean human rights will strengthen Korea’s capacity for unification and ultimately become the foundation for a ‘happy unification.’

**In the process of making  
efforts to improve  
North Korean human rights,  
we will find ourselves  
a step closer to the happiness  
for a unified Korea where  
human rights, trust,  
and democracy blossom.**

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