



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

**Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee regarding
The Democratic People's Republic of Korea
For the 131st session
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LIST OF ISSUES PRIOR TO REPORTING**

Submission by
Jubilee Campaign

Jubilee Campaign is a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2003. Our 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 sexual exploitation.

I. Introduction

Jubilee Campaign, in special consultative status with ECOSOC, submits this analysis of religious freedom and human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a contribution to the List of Issues Prior to Reporting in advance of the Human Rights Committee's 131st Session in March 2021. This report takes into consideration that the Democratic People's Republic has not met the standards of reporting to the Human Rights Committee, and that the last state party report was submitted in 2000. This report will refer to the March 2000 State Party Report and the Committee's August 2001 Concluding observations to demonstrate that little to no progress has been made in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with regards to fully implementing the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

II. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights¹

Article 6(1)

Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.

Article 7

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation.

Article 12(2)

Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own.

Article 18(1)

Everyone shall have the right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

III. The Situation of Torture and Inhuman Treatment in North Korean Prisons

Not only does the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) prohibit torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, but multiple UN bodies have also outlined what other actions constitute maltreatment or are prohibited by international norms. Many of these have been reported by North Korean defectors who spent time in detention.

¹ UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 16 December 1966, United Nations, Treaty Series, vo. 999.

According to the UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, “It shall be prohibited to take undue advantage of the situation of a detained or imprisoned person for the purpose of compelling him to confess, to incriminate himself otherwise or to testify against any other person” [Principle 21.1].² Moreover, the Human Rights Committee in its Concluding Observations on Argentina (2000) indicate that access to food, water, and viable sanitary conditions are protected under the ICCPR:

“The Committee is deeply concerned that prison conditions fail to meet the requirements of articles 7 and 10 of the Covenant. It considers the severe overcrowding and the poor quality of basic necessities and services, including food, clothing and medical care, to be incompatible with the right to be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person to which all persons are entitled.”³

In October 2020, Human Rights Watch (HRW) published its report, *Worth Less Than an Animal: Abuses and Due Process Violations in Pretrial Detention in North Korea*, in which they discuss the severe torture and inhumane, humiliating treatment that prisoners face in North Korean pre-trial detention centers and . Through interviews with 30 individuals - 22 of whom were former prisoners - and eight former authorities, HRW gathered pertinent information that exposed immense human rights violations in North Korea’s judicial and criminal system.

Within pretrial detention facilities and interrogation facilities, the most common torture method is physical abuse, which is often used to elicit confessions of crimes. Former North Korean police officers reveal that, even though the regulations themselves disallow “beatings”, officers are compelled to use physical means in order to get individuals to share information or admit to crimes. Former detainees explain that for most of the day in these facilities, they are required to sit, immobile, for up to seven or eight hours without the slightest speech or eye movement. Those that break these strict rules are punished with physical beatings with objects such as wooden sticks and leather belts, and sometimes they are required to do extremely strenuous physical activities such as 300-lap runs or 300-rep squats. Below are just some testimonies of the torture and abuse occurring in pretrial facilities:

“I was hit so much the only thing I could do was to say I was wrong.... I lost consciousness after being beaten for an hour. I woke up and I was in the questioning room. I opened my eyes, but I was hit so much, I couldn’t see anything. I thought it was incredible how much a person could be beaten. I remember thinking there you’d confess to anything you haven’t done. Every time they hit me, it’d be for three or four hours.”⁴

“Sometimes, if we moved or talked, they would ask us to extend our hands through the cell bars and hit us on the hands with their rifle. Once my hands were so swollen and thick, and so painful, I thought I’d never be able to use them again. But at the time, it didn’t even occur to me that there could be a doctor there, able to treat me if I was injured, or that I

² United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*, Adopted by General Assembly resolution 43/173, 9 December 1988.

³ UN Human Rights Committee, Seventieth session, *Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee: Argentina*, *CCPR/CO/70/ARG*, 15 November 2000.

⁴ *ibid.*

could have any rights to ask for treatment.... there, you are just treated like you are worth less than an animal, and that's what you end up becoming."⁵

"If you speak, the only thing you do is to increase the possibilities for incriminating yourself in more possible crimes. The police beat you so you say those things. But if they continue but you don't give information, they can't just continue hitting you. If they hit you and really hurt you [become severely injured, or die], the police officer is blamed. After being beaten just for three days, I couldn't walk properly, and my eyes really hurt."⁶

"We had to sit without moving. When I moved, the guard would hit me. If you fell asleep, they'd make you stand and squat up to 1,000 times. You think it is too many and you cannot do it, but if they force you, you can. The body is in extreme pain and you think you'll die, but you do it. Sometimes, all the detainees are punished with you."⁷

Another commonly reported problem that many of the interviewees addressed was scarcity of edible food and subsequent hunger and malnutrition. Though the majority reported that they were provided with some form of food three times a day, it was often no more than a handful of corn kernels, a miniscule cup of wild greens soup, or kimchi. Not only food supplies, but other basic living supplies were in scarcity as well. Every single former detainee reported that they did not receive soap, clothing, or bedding, and many were without access to running water, air conditioning, or heating systems. Female detainees reported that pretrial and investigation centers often did not have sanitary products or menstrual pads. As a result of the unsanitary, overcrowded, and inhumane living conditions, many detainees reported that they themselves, or other detainees, would be covered in mites, lice, bedbugs, and fleas.

"Hunger was the worst.... I was hungry all the time.... In the morning we got one third of a bowl of grated corn with some fermented bean paste soup with cabbage in the same bowl, which we'd eat in three or four spoons. The spoons didn't have the stick, so it couldn't be used to hurt ourselves."⁸

"I think police don't improve the food because it is better for them that detainees are hungry and suffering.... Food was boiled crushed corn cobs, which amounted to five big tablespoons. It was supposed to be 70 grams, but it wasn't that much. There was no soup, but they gave some boiled water with salt and wild greens."⁹

"We did not have toothbrushes in that district police detention and interrogation facility.... There wasn't any toilet paper. I didn't go to the toilet once over two weeks, we were almost starving. I think others washed with water.... The waiting cell didn't have blankets, but the detention and interrogation facility did, one per person."¹⁰

"We were all in similar situations, so we women shared our things, but I heard that men didn't, that the men that didn't have relatives suffered more and were all covered by lice,

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

but the other men didn't care [and didn't share]. [The first time I was detained,] family members could send [menstrual] pads. One detainee [who had no relatives] had to wash a sock and use it as a [menstrual] pad.”¹¹

IV. The Situation of Religious and Spiritual Adherents

North Korean citizens that are suspected of having engaged in religious or spiritual belief, worship, teaching, or proselytism often face torture similar to that which ordinary, non-religious prisoners are subjected to. However, there are some variations in terms of the treatment that religious prisoners experience. In October 2020, Korea Future Initiative published Volume 1 of its new series, *Persecuting Faith*, in which they comprehensively discuss the myriad religious freedom violations that occur in North Korea. 117 surviving defectors were interviewed, some of them witnesses of the rights of others being violated. Some initial statistics revealed that “of the 273 documented victims, 215 had adhered to Christianity and 56 had adhered to shamanism”, that 85 North Korean facilities were reported to engage in religious freedom violations, and that the years in which these violations took place range from 1990 to as recently as 2019.¹²

Though Article 68 of the North Korean constitution claims that “citizens have freedom of religious belief”, the following clause implies that the government sees religious affiliation as a threat to the nation’s order: “religion must not be used as a pretext for drawing in foreign forces or for harming the State and social order”.¹³ Korea Future Initiative examined numerous Workers’ Party legal commentaries from 2018 and identified some inflammatory remarks towards religion, notably Christianity:

“Workers and young people do not believe in any religion, because they deeply understand the profound truth of the Juche ideology”.^{14, 15}

“The American imperialists have used religion as a tool to invade our country in the past and, today, they are viciously plotting to spread religion to paralyse the class consciousness and revolutionary consciousness of the people and crush our republic”.¹⁶

“[necessity to be] on high revolutionary alert to prevent enemies from using religion to attract foreign powers and to harm the national social order, which is an important issue for adherence to our socialist system”.¹⁷

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Korea Future Initiative, *Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea, Volume 1*, October 2020.

¹³ *Korea (Democratic People’s Republic of)’s Constitution of 1972 with Amendments through 2016*, Constitute Project.

¹⁴ *Juche* refers to a North Korean government-promoted ideology of ‘self-reliance’ that calls for citizens to obey and place absolute trust in the nation’s supreme leader. (Zack Beauchamp, “Juche, the state ideology that makes North Koreans revere Kim Jong Un, explained”, *Vox News*, 18 June 2018.)

¹⁵ Korea Future Initiative, *Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea, Volume 1*, October 2020.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

KFI also uncovered documentation used to train North Korea's Ministry of State Security (MSS), the nation's major investigation body. Much of this instructional material also maintains a negative and unaccepting stigma towards religion:

“We must fight firmly against religion and superstition [...] Religion and superstition are like poison that break down the socialist ideological foundations and paralyse class consciousness”.¹⁸

“If we are tainted with religion and superstition, which the enemies are spreading, we will be blinded by a non-existent God and lose sight of class that can identify friend or foe, and we will end up hating the fights that accompany sacrifices”.¹⁹

The most common religious freedom violations against North Korean religious and spiritual followers include arbitrary arrest and prolonged imprisonment, physical and other torture, coerced labor, forced exile, 24-7-365 surveillance, and re-education in prison camps. The individuals who are subjected to such treatment and violation of human rights often receive the following associated legal charges: ownership of a Bible and religious materials; the act of “believ[ing] in Jesus”; visiting houses of worship; having interpersonal contact with religious adherents; propagating religious or spiritual beliefs; practicing shamanism; participating in clandestine prayer groups; singing hymns; using personal electronic devices to download religious text; etc. Below are some of the most telling testimonies of defectors, which reveal the extent to which the human rights and religious freedoms of North Korean citizens are violated to the point that they are essentially nonexistent:

“My mother used to evangelise in North Korea. She was a very passionate person. There were 10 people in her religious circle and my mother knew them all personally. Then one of them was arrested [...] He was tortured, interrogated, and sent with his entire family to a political prison camp.”

“I could hear the sound of torture from the cell where my husband was held [...] Until the end, my husband declared, ‘Why is it a crime to believe in God?’”

“People who practice shamanism will be sentenced to a maximum of five-years in a re-education camp if the penalty is harsh. They used to be sentenced to a labour training camp for three or six-months, but the sentence has been made much stricter.”

“They shackled us all in handcuffs [...] As an adult, it was heart-breaking to see children being handcuffed. Our [child] was only 13-years old at the time.”

“I was sent underground and placed inside a cage at Hoeryong City MSS pre-trial detention centre. There were steel bars on all four-sides that were heated with electricity. Usually prisoners lasted only 3-4 hours in the cage, but I sat there for 12-hours and prayed. I kept praying to God to save me.” [This prisoner further revealed that while they were in the electrical cage, they urinated on themselves and eventually passed out. When they came to, they were covered in injuries and bruises they had acquired after being beaten while unconscious.]

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

“They tilt a person’s neck backwards. They mix the red pepper powder into a water kettle and pour the water into the nostrils. At first, they hold you tightly by tying you from the back. As you sneeze and cough [...] you tell false statements about things you have never done [...] Among the pretrial examiners, there is one person I remember.”

“It was really bad in 2019. There were many others who were arrested on the allegation of superstitious acts. Kim Jong-un is trying to cut the roots of all religious acts. He ordered that all ideologies be rooted out. This message was spread by the people’s unit and through lectures.”

Other incidents that Korea Future Initiative reported include numerous public executions [often by firing squads] of some individuals who evangelized and others who practiced shamanism; the disappearance of family members after their religious affiliation was revealed; violent verbal assault and interrogation from MSS officials; physical assault on religious prisoners with *oseungogakja* [wooden clubs]; detained religious individuals being forced to crawl on their hands and knees; deprivation of sleep, food, and water for upwards of one month; the detention of mothers with their newborn infants; overcrowding in small prison cells; prisoners being forced to sit in fixed positions for upwards of twelve hours; slamming prisoners’ faces against prison cell bars; prison detention officials pouring pepper powder into prisoners’ nostrils; strangulation of prisoners; solitary confinement; forced ingestion of polluted or expired food; prisoners being hung from the ceiling and beaten; water and electric torture being used against prisoners; denial of emergency and routine medical care; etc.

In October 2020, one North Korean Christian by the name of Timothy Cho told his story of the torture he both witnessed and experienced after he was repatriated to North Korea. Cho witnessed prison guards ask his cell mate if he went to church in China. When the man answered yes, “the police took off his handcuffs. Then, with the handcuffs, they beat his head and [they were] just smashing him and the blood was streaming down.”²⁰ One morning, Cho woke up to see a dead body of the man next to him, who he believed died as a result of both severe torture as well as a high fever. Cho himself received similar abuses due to the fact that he participated in Christian worship while he was in China.

In February 2019, Open Doors shared the story of one North Korean Christian woman who suffered in prison for her faith. She refers to herself as ‘Prisoner 42’, the name that the prison officials gave her upon her detention. She reveals what her daily life was like while in the detention facility: she would leave her prison cell by crawling through a tiny door-flap, and she would then face hours-long interrogation with questions such as ‘Why were you in China?’, ‘Did you go to church?’, ‘Did you have a Bible?’, ‘Are you a Christian?’.

“Am I a Christian? Yes. I love Jesus. But I deny it. If I admit that I was helped by Chinese Christians, I will be killed, either quickly or slowly. They will murder me in this North Korean prison. Every day, I’m beaten and kicked – it hurts the most when they hit my ears. My ears ring for hours, sometimes days.”²¹

²⁰ Dan Hall, “Leap of Faith: I was beaten in cramped North Korea cell as prisoners next to me were tortured to death for not worshipping Kim Jong-un”, *The Sun*, 19 October 2020.

²¹ Lindy Lowry, “Naked, Shaved and Stripped of Her Name – Life in a North Korean Prison”, *Open Doors*, 7 February 2019.

‘Prisoner 42’ remembers that in 2017, she was brought in front of a court for a trial. She had no legal representation, the only other person there aside from the judge and the prison guards was her husband. She explains that she looked at her husband’s sad and loving eyes, and when the judge asked her husband if he wanted to divorce her, he said yes. If he were to remain married to her, he and the couple’s children would likely be punished with imprisonment as well. While in prison, ‘Prisoner 42’ befriended another Christian believer:

“One day, we were working outside. Nobody was near, and I walked up to her and said, ‘Hello, greetings in Jesus’ name.’ She was completely shocked. Fortunately, I could calm her down quickly before her gasps alerted the guards. Inside this North Korean prison, we wound up forming a secret church. When we met and felt safe enough, we prayed the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed. She was actually much braver than I was. She spoke to others about Christ as well. That’s why one day a car came to pick her up. When I saw her leave, I knew they were taking her to a maximum-security *Kwan-il-so* [political labor camp]. I knew I would never see her again.”²²

In March 2018, Open Doors published the stories of a few North Korean Christians regarding what life as a believer is like in the most oppressive nation in the world.²³ Two of the individuals were Christian sisters, aged 17 and 20 years old, who escaped North Korea after their father was killed by prison guards for attempting to share his faith with other prisoners. Their mother, who eventually escaped to South Korea some years later, has been unable to discuss the experiences she faced in North Korean prison, as they caused so much trauma. One elderly woman explained that her husband was in prison from when their children were very young. Even though he wanted to share his faith with his children when they came to visit, he was unable to speak about Christianity; he wrote on his hand to show them, ‘believe in Jesus.’ He was eventually killed in prison for refusing to renounce his faith.

V. The Situation of Women

North Korean women face some specific types of human rights violations due to their status as a gender minority. Human Rights Watch’s report *You Cry at Night but Don’t Know Why* references a survey conducted by the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) between 2010 and 2014; of the 1,125 respondents – both male and female – 48.6% reported that rape and sexual harassment of women in North Korea is ‘common’.²⁴ The Human Rights Committee itself has made suggestions that sexual violence, rape, and forced and unsafe abortions, all fall under the category of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment:

“To assess compliance with article 7 of the Covenant, as well as with article 24, which mandates special protection for children, the Committee needs to be provided information on national laws and practice with regard to domestic and other types of violence against women, including rape. It also needs to know whether the State party gives access to safe abortion to women who have become pregnant as a result of rape. The States parties should also provide the Committee with information on measures to prevent forced abortion or

²² *ibid.*

²³ Robert Kenna, “3 Unforgettable Stories from North Korean Christians”, *Open Doors*, 8 March 2018.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, *“You Cry at Night but Don’t Know Why”: Sexual Violence against Women in North Korea*, 2018.

forced sterilization. In States parties where the practice of genital mutilation exists information on its extent and on measures to eliminate it should be provided. The information provided by States parties on all these issues should include measures of protection, including legal remedies, for women whose rights under article 7 have been violated.”²⁵

Moreover, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT), established by the UN General Assembly in 1981, asserts that "rape is considered by all courts as a grave violation of women' integrity and therefore may amount either to torture or to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment" and that it considers the "sexual humiliation" and "stripped naked" as acts of rape.²⁶

a. In Detention Centers

In particular, women prisoners – especially those that are forcibly repatriated to North Korea after escaping – torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in the form of sexual violence as well as forced abortion and infanticide. Pregnant women who are forcibly repatriated to North Korea face horrific abuse. Despite that the government of North Korea claims to protect and preserve the rights of pregnant women through its Law on the Protection of the Rights of Women, security is not provided to women who are repatriated. Testimonies from myriad North Korean defector women reveal that this was a common form of punishment:

"I suffered no violence but the other woman had become pregnant in [another country] so the guards knew that her baby had [mixed race] blood. This was an issue as the local laws prevented any North Korean woman from giving birth to a mixed race baby. The doctor at the MPS center told her to get an abortion despite the fact that she wanted to keep the baby. She was eventually forced to have an abortion and sent to a *kyohwaso*."²⁷

Many defector women reported that they mistakenly believed that they would receive better treatment due to their pregnancies, but they instead endured mistreatment and abuse; some revealed they were kicked repeatedly in order to induce miscarriages. One woman described how guards at the Ministry of People's Security holding centre forced a defector woman to fall on her hips in order to induce a miscarriage.²⁸ When she attempted to do so and her pregnancy was unchanged, she was escorted out of the detention center and administered an injection that made her miscarry. The injection also did not work, however, and the woman gave birth to her child before the newborn infant was confiscated by prison officials. The mother did not receive any prior medical treatment and subsequently passed away, and it is assumed that the baby died as well due to the DPRK's reputation of permitting forced infanticide.

With regards to the practice of forced abortion and infanticide on North Korean defector women and their newborn children, COVID-19 has drastically altered the nations' current practices. Due to the looming threat of COVID-19, North Korea has taken more extreme measures to seal its

²⁵ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Human Rights Committee Sixty-eighth session, *General Comment No. 28, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.10*, 29 March 2000.

²⁶ United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT), *Interpretation of Torture in the Light of the Practice and Jurisprudence of International Bodies*, 2011.

²⁷ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], *"I still feel the pain...": Human rights violations against women detained in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, 28 July 2020.

²⁸ *ibid*.

border. While this is potentially harmful to women who are desperate to escape the authoritarian regime, it has essentially protected the lives of pregnant women and their unborn children who have defected and would have otherwise been repatriated if there was no global pandemic. Some 20 individuals, including one pregnant woman, are imprisoned in third countries and would have been repatriated to North Korea under "normal" circumstances. The family of this woman are reported to be thankful for the current situation because the woman and her unborn child have been spared from being forcibly returned to North Korea and likely undergoing forced abortion or infanticide.²⁹

Nearly all North Korean female prisoners are subjected to other forms of sexual violence, including invasive searches of body cavities in order to confiscate any smuggled items, and, in the cases of defector women, to determine if they had given birth while outside of North Korea. Often, women are forced to strip naked and perform squats and jumps in front of officers.³⁰ The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in its 2020 report that "forced nudity is a recognized form of sexual violence which can also amount to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment prohibited by article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."³¹ Moreover, every single North Korean defector woman interviewed by the OHCHR revealed that they were subjected to invasive body searches.

Women with religious affiliations or who attended church or religious services outside of North Korea reportedly face similar hardship according to the testimonies of former defector women. In October 2020, Korea Future Initiative revealed through defector interview responses the abuse that female religious prisoners face in North Korean prison camps:

"In another case, a respondent explained to investigators how they were forced to undergo an abortion following a ruling that pregnant women could not be tried at court. The respondent had been refouled from China and was detained after being suspected of attending a church. Three named MPS officers escorted the respondent to Kyongwon County Hospital. The respondent was handcuffed and injected by a named doctor. The respondent underwent an induced abortion the following day after 21-weeks of pregnancy. The infant's head was injected and the body placed into a plastic bag. Later, an MPS officer buried the body. The respondent was immediately removed from the hospital and was placed on trial three-days later."³²

b. In the Trade Industry

Sexual violence as a form of degrading treatment is also leveraged against women in the workplace, especially those that work as traveling merchants. Defector women have reported that sexual harassment and rape are often used by government officials to exert dominance over female trade workers in North Korea. As married women are not required to work for the North Korean government, many take up jobs as public merchants and sellers which often expose these women

²⁹ Jong So Yong, "N. Korea refuses repatriation of defectors imprisoned in Dandong", *Daily NK*, 4 March 2020.

³⁰ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], "*I still feel the pain...*": *Human rights violations against women detained in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, 28 July 2020.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Korea Future Initiative, *Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea, Volume 1*, October 2020.

to abuse from Party officials, police officers, and soldiers.³³ Often, the abuse that these women face in this sector is of sexual nature, including rape, groping, and penetration. These working women have no choice but to accept or overlook this sexual violence in order to avoid the threat of confiscated work permits.³⁴ In some cases, North Korean women working as traveling merchants without legal permits are coerced into performing sexual acts as a form of bribery to prevent arrest. Additionally, should a woman refuse unwanted sexual advances from their abusers, they are more likely to have their wares and earnings confiscated, face stricter monitoring by officials, be forced to relocate their markets to remote areas, and in some instances, can be sent to prison camps. One North Korean defector woman who formerly worked as a trader, Oh Jung Hee, revealed the following:

“You never know how it starts, but [when you are in crowded areas] you always end up having a man’s hand or body part touching your breast, your back or some part of your body. I was scared of reprisals, so I’d act as if I didn’t notice and move away. It happens so often nobody thinks it is a big deal. Men who sexually assault women don’t think it’s wrong, and we [women] do not either. We don’t even realize when we are upset. But we are human, and we feel it. So sometimes, out of nowhere, you cry at night and don’t know why.”³⁵

The extent to which sexual violence against women in the workplace is overlooked and ignored is further revealed by Human Rights Watch. Some male traders and government officials interviewed expressed that they believe North Korean women are at an advantage because they are able provide sexual acts in return for favors.³⁶ Even husbands of female traders have resigned to admit that sexual violence against women in the marketplace "is part of social and market dynamics in North Korea."³⁷

c. In the Military

One of the last major arenas in which North Korean women experience sexual violence is in the military. One North Korean defector woman soldier, Lee So Yeon, detailed to BBC the types of sexual violence she witnessed her comrades being called by the company commander to his room, where he would rape female soldiers repeatedly.³⁸ In a 2017 interview with a South Korean YouTuber, one North Korean former woman soldier reveals that she was a victim of sexual violence herself in the military:

“So after enlisting, I was assigned to do the military parades. But I was in the early stages of malnutrition.... So, the Major General was this man who was around 45 years old and I was only 18 years old at the time. But he once tried to force himself on me. So, soldiers who are seriously injured or sick get sent to a hospital off base. But me, my condition wasn’t that serious, I just had a minor case of malnutrition. So one day, he tells everybody else to leave except for me [be]cause he had to consult with me about something. Then he abruptly tells me to remove all my clothes. So I ask why and he says he needs to physically examine me to see exactly how bad my condition is.... So since I didn’t have much of a

³³ Human Rights Watch, *“You Cry at Night but Don’t Know Why”: Sexual Violence against Women in North Korea.*

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Megha Mohan, *“Rape and no periods in North Korea’s army”*, *BBC*, 21 November 2017.

choice, I thought, well, it's the Major General. Surely there's a good reason for this. I never could have imagined he'd try something. But then he tells me to remove my bra and panties as well. But there's no reason I have to get completely naked. So then out of nowhere he comes at me, so I start screaming and tell him to stop. And in a small tent like that everyone can hear the screaming. So, then he covers my mouth and starts beating on me. Just hitting me. So, then somehow when he hit me in my left ear, blood came out of my right ear.... He hit me so much that even some of my front teeth started becoming loose.... So there I am, only wearing my undergarments trying to crawl out of there. So then he grabs me by my hair and said, 'How do you think this is going to make me look?' Because he would get dishonorably discharged for this. So, he tosses my clothes at me and tells me to get dressed. So as I'm getting dressed, he told me not to say a word about this. 'If you tell anyone about this, you're going to get discharged and I will make your life a living hell. But if you don't tell anyone, I'll make your life a lot easier here.'"³⁹

“And also another thing, senior military officers would send out a request to another base to send one of their female soldiers with ‘good penmanship’. So as you may know, computers aren't commonly used in everyday life in North Korea. So, everything is done by hand, especially in the military. So, they might ask ‘Eun-kyung writes well, right? Send her over to us.’ Then that basically implies she's pretty. And if we don't send her, they keep hounding us. So someone finds her and says, ‘The senior officers need you to do some writing.’ At that point, she'll already understand the implications and think: ‘Well, I really need to get into the Workers' Party. So, I guess there's nothing I can do about it.’ So then she would be told it might speed up the application process. She without much of a choice, she becomes a plaything for the senior officers. So even though she got passed around, she's still able to get into the Party. So what a lot of girls do before joining the military is get on birth control. Because if a girl get[s] knocked up, they wouldn't be able to get married later. It would bring great shame.... Sexual abuse is a serious problem. So then women in the North really have to be careful. So for example, if a girl were to get pregnant as a result of forced sexual intercourse, and she starts showing, she would get discharged.... It's clearly the guy at fault here, but they blame the girl instead.”

One notable former North Korean defector and human rights activist, Yeonmi Park, discussed in a December 2020 video on her YouTube channel the problems that female North Korean soldiers face. Yeonmi shows a video in which a North Korean female soldier is sexually harassed and touched by another male soldier or officer. “Some women, in order to find, you know, one bowl of corn starch, they just accept all this sexual abuse.”⁴⁰

VI. Conclusion & Recommendations

Jubilee Campaign urges the Human Rights Committee to make the following recommendations to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea:

1. Permanently cease all practices of physical torture and degrading treatment [including unsanitary living conditions and forced starvation] in North Korean pretrial detention facilities and prisons, in accordance with Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil

³⁹ Alex Lockie, “Female North Korean soldiers describe horrific sexual abuse from superior officers”, *Business Insider*, 28 August 2017.

⁴⁰ Voice of North Korea by Yeonmi Park, *Shocking Sexual Abuse of North Korean Female Soldiers* [video], 14 December 2020.

and Political Rights; similarly, ratify the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

2. In conjunction with the ICCPR as well as North Korean 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 even execution, all of which are prohibited under ICCPR Articles 6(1) and 7.
3. Allow for freedom of expression and religion and media freedoms. Grant access to religious material such as Bibles, in homes and prisons.
4. 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 proscribed by Article 7 of the ICCPR.
5. Allow UN bodies unrestricted access to the country to monitor the situation.