



## **Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General  
December 2020

Original: Language

---

### **Commission on the Status of Women**

**Sixty-fifth session**

15-26 March 2021

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Jubilee Campaign, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

---

\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

## Statement

This report seeks to inform the United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on the Status of Women on the conditions faced by North Korean women in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China, and the Republic of Korea.

### THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea ratified in 2001 the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and there exist constitutional guarantees of equal medical, labor, marriage, divorce, inheritance, employment, and educational rights for North Korean women. However, reports illustrate that women frequently fall victim to discrimination and abuse.

The extent of violence against North Korean women that are repatriated to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is concerning. According to a July 2020 report by OHCHR titled, "Human rights violations against women detained in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea 'I still feel the pain...'", upon refoulement, women have reported forced abortion, sterilization, infanticide, physical abuse, sexual assault, rape, starvation, torture, forced labor, and unsanitary living conditions.

Forced abortion and infanticide is a tactic used to terminate pregnancies conceived while women were outside of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as well as an attempt to rectify forced miscarriages that did not result in terminating pregnancies. Ibid. A 2018 Human Rights Watch report "You Cry at Night but Don't Know Why" reveals that when surveyed, 37.7 percent of North Korean defector women reported that sexual assault and rape were commonplace in detention facilities. During their prolonged period of detention, these women are starved to the point that they become malnourished and their menstruation ceases.

First-hand testimonies of the inhumane treatment that North Korean defector women suffer in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are disparaged by the North Korean government, which claims in its 5 July 2017 "Replies of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea" that "the information gathered by 'human rights' international investigations'... is based on false testimonies made by the criminal 'defectors' who fled the country leaving their loved ones after committing grave crimes." CEDAW/C/PRK/Q/2-4/Add.1. It is reprehensible that the North Korean government attempts to discredit defectors' very real trauma and refer to them as criminals.

### THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Concerns regarding the status of North Korean women in the People's Republic of China stem from their lack of refugee status, making them more vulnerable to exploitation. Yoon, "Cosmopolitanism: The Foundational Ground for a More Inclusive Understanding of Belonging to Protect the Human Rights of North Korean Stateless Women", 20 June 2019, *International Migration*, 58(2). Because they are not classified as refugees, these women often do not receive medical treatment, even for such serious illnesses as COVID-19. DailyNK, "Sick N. Korean defector turned away from hospital in China", 27 February 2020.

According to an OHCHR survey of 636 women who had reached safety in the Republic of Korea between 2018 and 2019, most had spent several years in the People's Republic of China and many of the women were trafficked. See OHCHR report, *supra*. NGOs estimate that 70% to 80% of North Korean women who make it to the People's Republic of China are trafficked, for between 6,000 and 30,000 yuan (USD \$890 and \$4,500). CNN, "These North Korean defectors were sold into China as cybersex slaves. Then they escaped", 10 June

2019. Of women sold in the sex trade in China, 7% reported being sold more than three times, 7% three times, 45% were sold twice, and 41% were sold once. See Yoon, *supra*.

Common outcomes that North Korean women face due to trafficking include being forced into marriages with Chinese men, as well as being sold into forced prostitution and into the cybersex industry. Victim testimonies show that women sold by brokers to Chinese men are forced to perform domestic, agricultural, and manual labor, and are subjected to sexual abuse at the hands of their “husbands.” *Ibid*. Even though prostitution is criminalized in the People’s Republic of China, forced prostitution and sexual exploitation are common experiences for North Korean women in China. North Korean women are also trafficked into the cybersex industry and forced by their traffickers to engage in live-streamed rape, masturbation, sexual assault, and other forms of exploitation. *Ibid*.

In addition, as many as 30,000 children born in the People’s Republic of China to North Korean women and Chinese men are not registered upon birth in China and vulnerable to exploitation. The Independent, “On Kim Jong-un’s birthday, remember the 30,000 stateless children he has deprived of recognition”, 7 January 2018. Because they are born to North Korean women who are married to Chinese men, these children are also not recognized by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, rendering them stateless. If these women leave China, they often must leave their children in China. See OHCHR report, *supra*.

#### THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The majority (85.2% as of 2018 and 80.7% in 2019) of the 30,000+ North Korean defectors residing in the Republic of Korea are women, and it is concerning that despite the South Korean government having established multiple programs to aid defectors in their assimilation to a new environment, North Korean defectors often face long-term social stigma and continued vulnerabilities. See Republic of Korea Ministry of Unification, “Policy on North Korean Defectors”.

Due to their negative experiences in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, potential abuse and trauma endured as refugees, and the pressure of rehabilitation in an unfamiliar environment, many North Korean women suffer from depressive disorders. It is revealed in the Human Rights Council “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea” that 65.2% of female refugees have chronic diseases, 50% are at risk of depression, and over 25% suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. A/HRC/43/58.

As a result of the negative stigma surrounding North Korean defectors and rape victims, North Korean women have reported difficulty finding steady employment. In 2018, only 56.6% of these women had found jobs in the Republic of Korea and only 24.4% of all North Korean defectors reported seeing benefits from the South Korean government. Lack of education, career-building skills, and government assistance make the existence of North Korean women in South Korea particularly fragile. In July 2019, North Korean defector Han Sung-ok and her special needs son were found dead in their apartment, having starved to death in May. It is believed that the reason for the deaths are that Han was unable to find employment to care for herself and her son. See BBC, “Han Sung-ok: Was this North Korean defector failed by the South?”, 23 August 2019. These horrific circumstances demonstrate that the South Korean government has failed to uphold its obligations “to encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life” as outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. 1249 UNTS 13.

North Korean women also face the threat of being exploited and sexually trafficked both within and without the Republic of Korea by South Korean men and businesses. Reports on the exploitation of women defectors on their route to South Korea show that women who are prostituted are often done so at the hand of South Korean citizens working in the People’s Republic of China. See Yoon, *supra*. South Korean businesses operating in

China are complicit in these activities. North Korean defector women are also vulnerable to virtual trafficking. Sexual exploitation of defector women through cyber-trafficking is of particular concern for South Korea. Even though the physical acts may place in China, a large percentage of online male consumers of these exploited women are South Korean men. BBC, “The North Korean Women who had to escape twice”, 18 January 2019. These websites have been promoted by businesses operating in South Korea. Such acts by South Korean citizens and businesses in South Korea, abroad, and virtually are alarming. South Korea must combat these human rights violations attributable to their own citizens and businesses.

## CONCLUSION

North Korean women are some of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations in the world, evidenced by the fact that they face hardships and human rights violations in their home nation and in countries they escape to in hopes of a better life. They are effectively unable to escape the cycle of vulnerability, abuse, inequality, and exploitation in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the People’s Republic of China, and the Republic of Korea.