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**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

Jubilee Campaign promotes the human rights and religious liberty of ethnic and religious minorities, advocates for the release of prisoners of conscience, and promotes the safety of women and children from sexual exploitation.

This report seeks to inform the United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on the Status of Women regarding 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 continues to be a safe haven for sexual exploitation of and domestic violence against North Korean women. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has several domestic laws that claim to protect women's rights (i.e., guaranteeing gender equality, prohibiting domestic violence, or criminalizing sexual violence), but the reality on the ground illustrates that these policies have been poorly enacted or enforced, if at all.

Testimonies from North Korean women demonstrate that they experience violence both at home and in the public arena. The frequency of intimate partner violence perpetrated against women is significantly higher among North Korean refugee populations than South Korean citizens (Boyoung Nam, Jae Yop Kim, & Wonjung Ryu, *Intimate Partner Violence Against Women Among North Korean Refugees: A Comparison With South Koreans*, 2020).

Given that North Korean women are the breadwinners in 80-90 percent of households and men are required to work in state mandated jobs, resentment and alienation professionally and at home can fuel domestic violence (Chad O’Carroll, NK News, 2022). No prosecution services are available to victims of domestic abuse; police have been reported to laugh at and berate women who attempt to report cases.

North Korean women similarly face abuse and exploitation in the military. Joining the nation's Korean People's Army is one of the few ways to join the Workers’ Party of Korea, and to therefore have a sustainable life free from the struggles of ordinary civilians such as starvation and destitution. Women in the military are subjected to sexual violence and coercion by superior military officials who exploit their vulnerabilities to prey on them (Julia Campbell, NK Hidden Gulag, 2022). One soldier estimated: “I think almost 70% of female soldiers are victims of sexual assault or sexual harassment” (The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, YouTube, 2021).

Escaping the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is one of the gravest crimes in the country; women who unsuccessfully try to defect or are otherwise repatriated could be punished with labor reform, sexual violence (forced nudity, invasive body searches, rape, sexual assault, forced abortion), and even the death penalty upon repatriation (OHCHR, 2020).

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

The People’s Republic of China continually refuses to classify the North Korean defectors as “refugees,” and instead labels them as “economic migrants.” As such, defectors

are not guaranteed human rights in China and they are provided no formal protection from exploitation or trafficking; instead, if caught by Chinese agents, they risk being forcibly repatriated to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea where they face severe punishments. The People's Republic of China is obligated to refrain from refouling refugees, pursuant to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. From 2021 to 2022, “[t]he government did not undertake efforts to identify trafficking victims within the People's Republic of China's highly vulnerable North Korean migrant population, nor did it provide suspected North Korean trafficking victims with legal alternatives to repatriation” (United States Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022).

The illegal business of selling North Korean women is worth an estimated \$105 million annually (Dr. Ewelina U. Ochab, Forbes, 2019). Within the first year of leaving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, defector women are often sold more than once and forced to partake in at least one form of sexual slavery. Around 60 percent of female North Korean refugees in the People's Republic of China are trafficked into the sex trade, 50 percent of whom are then forced into prostitution, 30 percent sold into fraudulent and marriages marked by sexual and domestic servitude, and 15 percent pushed into the illicit and highly lucrative cybersex industry (Yoon Hee-soon, Korea Future Initiative, 2019). Even if Chinese men enter marriages with North Korean women, the nation does not legally recognize them, and North Korean-Chinese children may only obtain a birth registration document by losing their mothers to refoulment (Chae Mims, Washington College of Law

Journal, 2020). As a result, there are approximately 30,000 half-Chinese half-North-Korean children residing in China that lack legal citizenship and face statelessness (Rachel Judah, The Independent, 2018).

THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

In the first half of 2022, the Republic of Korea welcomed only 3 male and 15 female defectors (South Korea's Ministry on Unification). This is a substantial decline from the 63 cross-border defections of 2021. The past two years have shown atypical numbers due to the coronavirus pandemic, but a political dynamic also sheds a light on the dwindling numbers. President Moon Jae-in, in an effort to strengthen relations with the Kim regime, has restricted speech and activities critical of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, while also decreasing support for defector-run organizations.

South Korean men—a large portion of the cybersex industry's customer base—have shown preference for illicit content featuring trafficked North Korean girls and women (Su-Min Hwang, British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019). In 2021, the South Korean government reported investigating at least 64 potential cases of trafficking. The frequency of “spycam” crimes are rising; Human Rights Watch reported that “total prosecutions of sex crimes involving ‘spycam’ victims rose from 4 percent of sex crime cases in 2008 to 20 percent in 2017 (Jason Bartlett, The Diplomat, 2022). As a signatory to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, the Republic of Korea must take measures to prosecute South Korean citizens and businesses that

benefit from the cybersex trafficking of North Korean women and girls (United Nations General Assembly, 2000).

Recent statistics reveal that 30.9 percent of North Korean defector women are victims of intimate partner violence from their current partners in the Republic of Korea (Violence Against Women, 2022). Adapting to the culture of a new nation is difficult for North Korean defectors and can “increase her dependency on her husband, who in turn may exert more control over his wife” (Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 2018). The Republic of Korea has not even taken situations of domestic violence between South Koreans seriously, let alone the violence suffered by North Korean women. As an example, a young South Korean woman was violently beaten to death by her boyfriend in Seoul in 2021; even though much of the assault was captured on security camera footage, and her cause of death was tied to the assault, the court accepted her boyfriend’s claims that her death was accidental and he was only sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment (Korea Herald, 2022).

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family of the Republic of Korea has reported that approximately 65.2 percent of female refugees suffered chronic diseases, 50 percent were at risk of developing depression, and over 25 percent suffered with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Human Rights Council, 2020). Yet, North Korean defectors have experienced problems recognizing their own psychological problems, because in their home country there is no concept of ‘depression’ (우울증) or ‘mental health’ (정신건강) (NK News, 2021).

To further exacerbate these issues, North Korean defectors face considerable stigma due to their identifiable differences from South Korean civilians - for example, speech

dialect, hairstyles, dress. This manifests into difficulties finding steady employment and building a social life (Jeea Yang, Struggles of resettlement: North Koreans in South Korea, 2018).

CONCLUSION

North Korean women are unable to avoid the cycle of vulnerability, inequality, and exploitation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China, and the Republic of Korea. We urge these three nations to take measures to protect and empower North Korean defector women, and we renew our call on the Commission on the Status of Women to incorporate consideration for these marginalized women into its program of work.