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PROGRESS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF KOREA ON THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION
AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Executive Summary

This report serves to inform the United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on the Status of Women on the progress made by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals. This report pays particular attention to the numerous human rights violations suffered by the women of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, paying specific attention to the utter lack of commitment by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to providing protection to women from unlawful abuse and practices in both the private and public spheres, as well as the unwillingness of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea or inability to adhere to and meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action.

In addition to providing a general background on the status of freedom in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, this report draws its information from various non-governmental reports, government statements, news articles, United Nations reports, and other sources to provide evidence to further demonstrate that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is failing in its limited measures to promote gender equality across all sectors. Whenever possible, this report includes information and responses provided by the government of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. However, at the time of the filing of this report, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea has not elected to participate in the Commission’s mandated 25-year National-level review of implementation, nor has it done so in the past.

More tangible, effective, and responsive progress must be made by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Given the continued lack of progress and cooperation with the international community by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, we call upon the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to take notice of the situation of human rights, particularly women’s rights, in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. We strongly encourage the Commission to include this matter in the programme of work.

¹ Jubilee Campaign holds special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

I. Background

Despite the general lack of unbiased and accurate information the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s government disseminates regarding the quality of life within its borders, the international community maintains a wealth of knowledge on the excessive curtailment of freedom, restrictions on religion, media, movement, and speech, the widespread scarcity of food, among many other abhorrent conditions of life that leave citizens starving, impoverished, and ignorant of the outside world.

The above hardships are encountered by the collective public in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea regardless of gender and age, but the status of women is an even more precarious situation that demands a targeted and timely global response. In addition to the regulated surveillance and restrictions that men experience, women are arbitrarily subjected to physical and sexual violence, gendered discrimination, and deception by foreign and domestic sex traffickers.

It is remarkably difficult to gather statistics regarding the situation in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea due to its isolation and secrecy. Most of the information readily available to both the general public and governments is qualitative, yet in no way less valuable or telling.

II. In the last five years, which forms of violence against women and girls, and in which specific contexts or settings, have Democratic People’s Republic of Korea prioritized for action?

As mentioned above the ability to attain reliable information from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is difficult, especially as it relates to human rights abuses, though no less important to report on.

To be able to report progress over the past five years is difficult as reliable information on the human rights situation can only be attained by North Koreans who are able to leave the country. The reports referenced here are largely based on interviews conducted among North Koreans in the Republic of Korea and other countries in Asia, some between January 2015 and July 2018. Of all those interviewed, the majority left the country after 2011, which helps provide updated information on the situation for women in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea at the present time.

To address this topic however, it is only necessary to look through the reports filed by the government of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to see what they, themselves, have prioritized.

	Intimate partner violence/domestic violence, including sexual violence and marital rape
	Sexual harassment and violence in public places, educational settings and in employment
	Violence against women and girls facilitated by technology (e.g. cyber violence, online stalking)
	Femicide/Feminicide
	Violence against women in politics
	Child, early and forced marriages

	Other harmful practices
	Trafficking in women and girls
	Other

In their most recent Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) report, Article 5 on *Elimination of stereotypes and violence against women*, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea highlighted their measures made during the reporting period to “eliminate traditional and stereotyped beliefs and attitudes towards the responsibilities and roles of men and women that are lingering in the society and families.” The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea however, makes no subsequent mention of domestic violence or steps taken to curb any violence against women. This is concerning considering domestic violence is prevalent in Democratic People’s Republic of Korea² and is the most common and widespread violation of women’s human rights according to UN Women.³

In Article 6 of the same Democratic People’s Republic of Korea CEDAW report, the government voiced their concern for sexual exploitation of women, regarding it as, “a serious crime that violates their [women’s] human rights and dignity.”⁴ Their main courses of action have been to criminalize prostitution and those who lure women into it, to ban pornographic material and punish those who own it. There was no mention of sexual harassment or exploitation of women in public places or workplaces, nor the reports of severe sexual violence from detentions. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in Article 6, Section 68, claims “sexual exploitation of women is in no way a social problem in the DPRK.”⁵

Criminal Law in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea criminalizes a man who rapes a woman but grants a more lenient punishment for a man who “has sexual intercourse with a girl under the age of 15.”⁶

Moreover, in Article 12 Section 192, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea argues that “contraceptive prevalence rate among married women was reported to be 70.7 percent in 2011, 67.3 percent of which used modern contraceptive method.”⁷ This statement contradicts the findings of Human Rights Watch’s interview of individuals who defected after 2011, who stated

² Human Rights Watch “You Cry at Night but Don’t Know Why” (2018), url: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/northkorea1118_web2.pdf.

³ Simonovic, Dr. Dubravka; *International Framework on Violence Against Women with Focus on the CEDAW*, UN Women, EGM/PVAWG/EP.7. p.2.

⁴ UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), *UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: State Party Report, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea*, 1 June 2016, CEDAW/C/PRK/2-4, url: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/PRK/2-4&Lang=en

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), *Considerations of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention*, 3 May 2016, CRC/C/PRK/5, available at: <https://undocs.org/CRC/C/PRK/5> [accessed 31 July 2019].

⁷ *UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: State Party Report, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea*, 1 June 2016, *supra note 4*.

they were never provided any education on contraception or safe sexual practices, including how to prevent acquiring and spreading STIs.⁸

The summation of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s prioritization of action to address violence against women and girls does not correlate with the prevalent forms of such violence in the country which will be reviewed in the following section.

III. In the last five years, which forms of violence against women and girls have been prevalent in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea?

The most recent Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) report submitted to the international community by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was on June 1, 2016. In Article 6, Section 68, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea claims “sexual exploitation of women is in no way a social problem in the DPRK.”⁹ This however has not been found to be the case during the reporting period.

i. Trends of partner violence/domestic violence

Human Rights Watch’s report “‘You Cry at Night but Don’t Know Why’: Sexual Violence against Women in North Korea” discusses the prevalence of and shocking indifference toward domestic abuse within the home.¹⁰ Due to the subordinate status of women in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea that is indoctrinated as early as young adolescence, not only do women face daily physical punishment and abuse from their husbands, but they find it ordinary, inevitable, and shameful to be the victim of.¹¹ Despite the pervasiveness of domestic abuse towards women in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, most of the women interviewed by Human Rights Watch could not identify this activity as domestic violence. This is due in part to the blind acceptance by women of abuse as a recurring reality rather than an undeserved rarity. The only way to describe such detestable spousal relations is with the Korean phrase for “men who hit their women.”¹²

ii. Trends of sexual harassment and violence

In detention centers and prisons

In interviews with North Korean defectors, a Human Rights Watch report from November 2018 shows that “37.7 percent of the respondents said sexual harassment and rape of inmates at detention facilities was ‘common.’”

⁸ Human Rights Watch (2018) *supra note 2*.

⁹ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: State Party Report, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, 1 June 2016, *supra note 4*.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch (2018) *supra note 2*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

In public spaces and in employment

Abuse is not limited to the detentions and prisons; Human Rights Watch cites the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on human rights in North Korea that found targeted sexual abuse and harassment is commonly used by officials as a way to control female trade workers.¹³ As married women are not required to work for the North Korean government, many take up jobs as travelling traders, which publicly exposes them to abuse at the hands of party officials, policemen, and soldiers, Human Rights Watch reports. This abuse more often than not is of a sexual nature, including groping and rape. These working women have no choice but to accept such abuse in order to avoid the threat of confiscated working permits and travel passports.¹⁴

North Korean women have reported being subject daily to some form of gender-based violence including excessive groping, physical abuse, unwarranted and arbitrary beatings, sexual harassment, rape, penetrative searches, and more.¹⁵

Women in the army

Even in the military, women are exposed to sexual harassment and rape. Lee So Yeon, who served for ten years in Korean People's army, although never the victim of rape during her military service, reveals that many of her peers were.¹⁶ In recent years, numerous testimonies have been recorded from former female military officers and soldiers on what life is like as a woman in the Korean People's Army. An article by the BBC told the story of Lee So Yeon, who served for ten years. Lee recalled the reality of sharing a single room with approximately 30 other soldiers and sleeping on beds made of rice, which absorbs the odors and sweat of the soldiers to foster unsanitary and unsatisfactory living and sleeping conditions. Soldiers are unable to wash themselves properly due to the lack of regular, warm water provision. Moreover, bathrooms are more often than not un-gendered, forcing women to share the same facilities as men.¹⁷

Lee explains that, like many other women drawn into service, she was enticed by the promise of a daily meal. This meal, however, is all but satisfactory or nutritious, at times amounting to no more than a small portion of rice. Malnourishment in the barracks causes many female soldiers to stop menstruating around six months into their mandatory 7-year service term. And for those that continue to have their period, very

¹³ Human Rights Watch (2018) *supra note 2*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Mohan, Megha. "Rape and No Periods in North Korea's Army," *BBC*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

few to no female sanitary items are provided, leaving them no choice but to reuse products after cleaning them in the secrecy and privacy of night.¹⁸

iii. Other harmful practices: Forced abortions

Among the most egregious of human rights violations committed at the hands of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea towards women is the proven occurrence of forced abortions performed on repatriated North Korean women who become pregnant abroad.¹⁹ Both the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB) and surveys conducted by Human Rights Watch confirm the existence of such despicable practices. The Cornell International Law Journal states plainly and inarguably that “this counters women’s reproductive rights protected under the CEDAW and violates the DPRK’s own law that states pregnant women should be protected.”²⁰ In a Hearing on “Protecting North Korean Refugees” that occurred on December 12, 2017 before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Human Rights, and International Organizations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives, defector Hyeona Ji made her statement that her forced abortion was carried out with no anesthetic and caused her lose a tremendous amount of blood.²¹

iv. Trafficking of women and girls

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea stated in Article 6 Section 73 that “human trafficking is inconceivable in the DPRK.”²² However, a report by Korea Future Initiative reveals that a large portion of North Korean women that are sold into sex work or marriage in the PRC are approached and recruited while they are at work in North Korean villages by individuals who have connections with or work for Chinese pimps.²³ The DPRK government however, makes no mention of the women who have been trafficked to the PRC nor the women who are repatriated from the PRC, making effective action plans against this form of violence non-existent.²⁴

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Yang, Jina, “Women’s Rights in the DPRK: Discrepancies Between International and Domestic Legal Instruments in Promoting Women’s Rights and the Reality Reflected by North Korean Defectors” *Cornell International Law Journal* 51, no. 1(2018): 219-243. url: <https://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/research/ILJ/upload/Yang-final.pdf>

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Protecting North Korean Refugees*, 115th Cong., 1st sess., 2017.

²² *UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: State Party Report, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea*, 1 June 2016, *supra* note 4.

²³ Yoon, Hee Soon, “Sex Slaves: The Prostitution, Cybersex & Forced Marriage of North Korean Women & Girls in China,” Korea Future Initiative (2019), <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/sex-slaves-the-prostitution-cybersex-forced-marriage-of-north-korean-women-girls-in-china/>

²⁴ *UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: State Party Report, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea*, 1 June 2016, *supra* note 4.

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea should accept the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women’s recommendation and adopt legislation to criminalize trafficking in persons in accordance with international standards, and decriminalize and provide adequate protection and support for women who were victims of trafficking.²⁵

IV. Statistics

- 32% of women within the reproductive age range have “poor nutritional status.”²⁶
- 23% of women within the reproductive age range are classified as underweight.²⁷
- 31% of women within the reproductive age range are anemic.²⁸
- In rural regions, 2% of women above 19 years old are still enrolled in schools or educational facilities.²⁹
- Nationally, women contribute almost 50% of the work force of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.³⁰
- As of 2015, 12% of Supreme National Assembly judges were women.³¹
- As of 2014, an SDHS survey reported that 12% of female respondents had an abortion, stillbirth, or miscarriage since 2009.³²
- 2.4 million people- many of them being pregnant women and young children- in the “most food insecure provinces depend on regular food aid.”³³
- Human Rights Watch cites a survey conducted by the Korea Institute for National Unification in 2015 on 1000 men and women defectors, which revealed that approximately 50% of respondents claimed rape and sexual abuse towards women as a common occurrence.³⁴
- Of the North Korean women and girls sold into the Chinese sex trade, 41% were sold once, 45% were sold twice, 7% were sold thrice, and 7% were sold more than three times (statistics from interviews).³⁵
- Of the most forms of sexual abuse faced by North Korean female sex slaves in China, the most common experienced by the group of 45 women surveyed by Korea Future Initiative are groping (approximately 40 experiences), penetrative vaginal rape (approximately 32 experiences), forced masturbation (approximately 17 experiences),

²⁵ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Concluding observations on the combined second to fourth periodic reports of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea*, , 17 November 2017, CEDAW/C/PRK/CO/2-4, para. 28 (a), available at:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/PRK/CEDAW_C_PRK_CO_2-4_27658_E.docx [accessed 31 July 2019].

²⁶ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Situation Analysis of Children and Women in the Democratic Republic of Korea* (2017), url: <https://www.unicef.org/dprk/media/171/file/Sit-An.pdf>

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Human Rights Watch 2018) *supra note 2*.

³⁵ Yoon, Hee Soon, Korea Future Initiative (2019), *supra note 23*.

drug facilitated rape (approximately 16 experiences), penetrative anal rape (approximately 12 experiences), gang-rape (approximately 7 experiences), and oral rape (approximately 5 experiences).³⁶

V. UN Sustainable Development Goals

In regards to the information above which illustrates the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s inability to provide for and reluctance protect its female citizens, it is imperative that we draw attention to the failure of the Democratic Republic of North Korea to comply with and implement the Sustainable Development Goals associated with Goal 5 listed below that correspond with violations mentioned in the above sections³⁷:

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 5 ³⁸
5.1 Eliminate all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all decision-making in political, economic, and public life
5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

VI. SDG Indicators

Below are some of the specific indicators that are of pertinence when considering the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s failure to meet the UN Sustainable Goal 5 and its subset of related goals listed above. It is important to note that timely and accurate statistics regarding the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea are difficult to obtain, and therefore our notations of what indicators are vital in understanding the status of women in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea are based primarily on qualitative observations and documents/reports from organizations.

SDG Indicator ³⁹

³⁶ Yoon, Hee Soon, Korea Future Initiative (2019), *supra note 23*.

³⁷ “Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality.” UN Women, www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

24 (5.2.2) Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence
30 (5.6.1) Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care
35 (5.c.1) Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment
50 (16.2.2) Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex and age

Supplemental Gender-Specific Indicators
1 Prevalence of anemia among women of reproductive age
2 Share of women aged 15-49 whose BMI is less than 18.5 (underweight)
9 Proportion of women who ever experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner

Other Official SDG Indicators ⁴⁰
1 (2.1.2) Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) (by sex)

VII. Beijing Platform for Action

In September of 1995, at the Fourth World Conference on women, an international dialogue on the economic, political, and social status of women around the world, Beijing released a Platform for Action that focused on urging governments to take action to ensure gender equality and empowerment of women in certain aspects of life, including health, media, the environment, society, the economy, the political sector, domestic life, and more.⁴¹ Below are selected actions that are not being met by the Democratic Republic of Korea to full or adequate capacity and/or points that are of great significance:

Category	Recommendation to Government
C. Women and Health	106, e. Provide more accessible, available and affordable primary health-care services of high quality, including sexual and reproductive health care, which includes family planning

³⁹ Division, U. (2019). SDG Indicators — SDG Indicators. [online] Unstats.un.org. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/> [Accessed 31 Jul. 2019].

⁴⁰ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) (2018) "Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development," Annex 1. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4332>

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

	information and services, giving particular attention to maternal and emergency obstetric care, as agreed to in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development;
D. Violence Against Women	124, b. Refrain from engaging in violence against women and exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons;
D. Violence Against Women	124, o. Adopt laws, where necessary and reinforce existing laws that punish police, security forces or any other agents of the State who engage in acts of violence against women in the course of the performance of their duties; review existing legislation and take effective measures against the perpetrators of such violence;
D. Violence Against Women	126, a. Develop programmes and procedures to eliminate sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women in all educational institutions, workplaces and elsewhere;
E. Women and Armed Conflict	143, c. Take action to investigate and punish members of the police, security and armed forces and others who perpetrate acts of violence against women, violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict;
G. Women in Power and Decision-making	190, b. take measures, including, where appropriate, in electoral systems that encourage political parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective public positions in the same proportion and at the same levels as men;
I. Human Rights of Women	230, n. Strengthen the implementation of all relevant human rights instruments in order to combat and eliminate, including through international cooperation, organized and other forms of trafficking in women and children, including trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, pornography, prostitution and sex tourism, and provide legal and social services to the victims;

Concluding Remarks

It is with the above statistical data, witness testimonies, and information regarding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the UN Sustainable Goal 5 as well as its SDG Indicators, and the Beijing Platform for Action that we conclude that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is not actively striving to promote and ensure gender equality and protect the human rights of its female citizens. We urge the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to make genuine, calculable efforts towards empowerment and protection of women and call on the International Community to ensure that the basic objectives and goals of the international conventions are met in order to prevent continued gendered abuse and human rights violations.

We renew our call to the Commission on the Status of Women to take notice of the situation of human rights, particularly women's rights, in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and again urge the Commission include this matter in the programme of work.