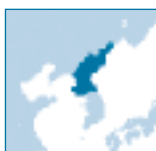


## The Democratic People's Republic of Korea



The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (the DPRK) has one of the worst human rights records in the world. The DPRK denies access to human rights organisations, including the UN. But information from a variety of sources, much of it from defectors from the DPRK, paints a picture of serious and widespread abuse. This includes political prisons and labour rehabilitation camps; regular use of the death penalty (including extrajudicial and public executions); routine use of torture and inhumane treatment of its people; and severe restrictions on the freedom of speech, movement, assembly and information.

The DPRK operates a population classification system in which the ruling elite and those most loyal to the regime enjoy better access to food than others, especially those hostile to the authorities. There are recurrent concerns about the treatment of refugees returned from China, which we raise at all opportunities. Although healthcare is free by law, the DPRK's economic difficulties have led to a shortage in medicines and a deteriorating public health system.

The DPRK has repeatedly invoked sovereignty, non-interference and cultural differences to avoid its human rights responsibilities. Humanitarian aid workers and diplomats in the capital, Pyongyang, are subject to severe internal travel restrictions. Some regions remain inaccessible "for reasons of national security". The DPRK's approach to human rights also has wider humanitarian impacts. Many potential donors are unwilling to provide assistance unless the DPRK cooperates by offering greater access to those most in need.

The regime is determined to maintain its grip on power. It recently introduced a number of measures, including revaluation of the currency, intended to tighten control over all economic activity and to stifle the previously expanding market sector. But without further reforms and an opening up of the economy, there will not be the economic development needed to improve living standards and quality of life.

One positive development was DPRK's engagement with UNICEF and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, including an invitation to the Committee to review progress in improving children's rights. Some



Human rights groups in Seoul protest against DPRK abuses

positive legal and practical steps concerning the rights of people with disabilities were also taken in 2009. After the adoption in 2003 of a law reforming the incarceration of people with disabilities in special education units, the DPRK now intends to reintegrate such people fully into society.

The DPRK says it has increased spending on health through a Strategy for the Promotion of Reproductive Health 2006–10, a Strategy for Prevention of AIDS for 2002–07, and a Primary Health Care Strategy 2008–12. However, according to the UN there remains a shortage of reliable medicines and medical equipment. Progress will be slow in the absence of improved access for the World Health Organisation (WHO) and international NGOs working in the health field to assess the extent of the problem and the needs of the most vulnerable. The DPRK says it has also increased spending on education in recent years. It formulated a National Programme of Action of the Well-Being of Children 2001–10, reflecting some of the UN Millennium Development Goals. Without independent verification it is difficult for the international community to assess the impact of these initiatives.

We regularly raise human rights issues in our contacts with the DPRK at ministerial and official level. We have told the DPRK government that we stand ready to help, including through the provision of technical assistance, in return for further progress on human rights. To date, the DPRK has shown no interest in our offer.

The EU raised its concerns during the Troika visit to the DPRK in October and pressed them to resume the human rights dialogue with the EU, which was suspended in 2003. The EU re-iterated its offer of expertise and constructive cooperation in specific areas in an attempt to overcome the DPRK's insistence that dialogue is not possible until the EU drops the resolution on the situation of human rights in the DPRK it tables annually at the UN General Assembly.

The DPRK consistently denies the existence of any human rights problems and rejects as unjust both this resolution and that tabled each year at the UN Human Rights Council. However, the DPRK engaged with the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process in December. It submitted a national report asserting that their constitution ensures the protection of citizens' rights to freedoms of opinion, expression and assembly, and that all religions are treated equally.

At the UPR the UK expressed concern on a range of issues, including the right to life, freedom of religion, freedom of association and the existence of political prison camps. Our recommendations included granting access to UN Special Rapporteurs. Others raised concerns about political prisoners, food distribution, torture, the death penalty, forced labour, abductees, freedoms of expression, assembly and religion, and returnees from China (see page 100). The DPRK responded to most concerns at the review. In addition to previous statements on the rights to freedoms of opinion, expression, religion and assembly, the DPRK asserted that prison camps did not exist and that political views were not subject to control. It said that solving the food challenge was a top priority.

Through our Embassy in Pyongyang, and with the DPRK Embassy in London, we take every opportunity to raise human rights issues. In October, our Embassy in Seoul hosted a briefing by NGOs for 80 diplomats, press and South Korean officials to raise awareness of human rights abuses and the UPR. Our Embassy in Pyongyang sponsors a range of small-scale projects to promote longer-term cooperation with the DPRK. This includes the installation of a central heating system at a local nursery school; upgrading the sanitation and incineration system at a local hospital; and provision of 75 hand-propelled tricycles to a disability association. Our Embassy in Seoul sponsored the publication of four reports on prison camps, torture, children's and women's rights in October. The South Korean NGO that produced the reports used them to

lobby the UN Human Rights Council Member States to raise these issues at the DPRK's UPR. In November, Foreign Office Minister Ivan Lewis hosted a DPRK human rights roundtable, attended by Lord Alton, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea, NGOs and academics. This was an opportunity for the Minister to express his strong concern about human rights in the DPRK and to discuss UK engagement.

### **Food**

The DPRK government prevented the UN Food & Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP) from carrying out the crop and food assessment planned for October. The international community therefore cannot make an accurate assessment of food shortages, nor work with the DPRK and international agencies to tackle them. The UK recommended improved access to the DPRK at the UPR.

Official DPRK statistics indicate a small increase in the October rice harvest. Some external assessments suggest weather conditions and lack of fertiliser point to a decline in the harvest. The WFP remain concerned that high rates of malnutrition continue among millions of children and women in the DPRK. The situation is more acute during the winter as temperatures drop and energy needs become greater for the vulnerable. The international community, including the Republic of Korea and the US, has indicated that it will provide assistance if there is another major food crisis. In the past, the DPRK has usually been reluctant to ask for help.

Continued DPRK obstruction of UN agencies may impact on the effectiveness of humanitarian projects. For example, because of restrictions on access, the WFP is now delivering food in only 62 counties and districts, down from 131 last year. DPRK actions tend to undermine donor confidence. The recent currency devaluation is likely to make it even harder for ordinary North Koreans to use local markets to supply the food that the state system fails to provide.

### **Freedom of Religion**

There is no freedom of religion in the DPRK. Although there are Anglican, Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches in Pyongyang, we believe these to be show churches, for the benefit of foreign visitors. We include religious freedom in our regular lobbying on human rights issues in the DPRK, and have worked closely with religious NGOs in the run-up to the UPR.

## Torture

According to the DPRK's national report submitted ahead of their UPR, measures have been introduced requiring judicial authorities to uphold the right to a fair trial and to prohibit torture or beatings. However, due to the lack of transparency and independent verification, we cannot assess whether the judiciary and other law-enforcement entities uphold these rules. At the UPR, the DPRK delegation admitted that there are public executions, and it seems that extrajudicial killings also take place. At the UPR, the UK recommended that the DPRK become a party to the UN Convention against Torture and take the necessary national measures to comply with its provisions. The DPRK response is due in March 2010.

## The Democratic Republic of Congo



In 2009, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continued to struggle with the effects of more than a decade of regional and internecine conflict. Since 1998, the International Rescue

Committee (IRC) estimates that over five million people have died directly and indirectly as a consequence of conflict in the DRC. The UN estimates that there are 1.6–1.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the DRC. Since the Sun City peace

agreement to end the Congo wars in 2003, conflict in the region has continued between a variety of armed groups, with the main actors being the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) and the Congolese army (FARDC). In March, the CNDP signed a peace deal with the government of the DRC and integrated into the FARDC. However the integration process has led to its own problems as the already weak administrative systems struggle to assimilate the extra men.

Congolese men, women and children are at greatest risk of serious abuses in eastern DRC. However, human rights abuses, such as arbitrary arrest and detention, extortion, beatings, and sexual and gender-based violence occur throughout the DRC. The problems are compounded by the need for administrative and institutional development – the state has a limited presence in many parts of the country leading to a lack of education, employment, security and justice. The UK provides development assistance to the DRC to help it overcome these difficulties, while actively lobbying the government of the DRC to address human rights issues, including impunity for perpetrators.

On 4 July, the DRC government made the welcome announcement of a “zero tolerance” policy against



Displaced people attempting to escape fighting between the Congolese army and the FDLR in February