Committee: Security Council 2
Topic: Addressing reports of authoritarian rule and human rights violations under the government of Kim Jong-Un in North Korea.
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Overview of the Problem

Human rights violations within the authoritarian rule of Kim Jong-Un in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have been a growing concern all around the globe (*Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 2023*). North Korea has been governed by the Kim family since its establishment in 1948, beginning with Kim Il-sung (*National Army Museum, n.d.*). The Workers' Party of Korea became the country's dominant political party following the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1948. The main international actors involved in this issue include South Korea, the United States of America, China, Russia, and the United Nations. Delegates must debate how the Security Council can protect human rights and hold those responsible accountable while preventing military escalation and maintaining regional peace and stability. North Korea's lack of transparency and restrictions on independent investigation make it difficult for international organizations to obtain reliable information about political, economic and human rights conditions within the country. Under UNSC Resolution 1718 (2006) and subsequent measures, the Security Council imposed targeted asset freezes and trade embargoes; however, these measures have primarily targeted North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes rather than directly addressing its domestic human rights violations (*United Nations Security Council, n.d.-b*). The 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry established that systematic, widespread, and gross human rights violations have been committed by DPRK institutions, including arbitrary detention, torture, forced labor, and the operation of political prison camps. Estimates of the number of detainees vary because independent access to these facilities is severely restricted (*United Nations Human Rights Council, 2014*). China and Russia maintain important political and strategic relationships with North Korea, although their interests

and approaches are not identical. Other countries, including Cuba, Belarus, Venezuela, and Iran also maintain varying degrees of diplomatic or political relations with the DPRK. South Korea and the United States emphasize human rights and regional security (*Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2026*).

Introduction

Glossary:

Communism: A political ideology that seeks a society in which the means of production are collectively owned rather than privately controlled. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.*)

Kim Family: The ruling family of North Korea, consisting of three successive leaders: Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-un (*Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.*).

Peninsula: A landform almost surrounded by water and connected to a larger landmass.

Authoritarianism: A political system in which power is concentrated in one leader or a small group, with limited political freedoms and opposition (*Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.*).

Korean War: An armed conflict between North Korea and South Korea that began on June 25, 1950 and ended with an armistice on July 27, 1953.

Abduction: deprivation of a person's liberty by force, deception, or threat (*Robertson, 2016*).

The Workers' Party of Korea: The ruling political party of North Korea, established in its present historical form through the political developments of the post-Second World War period. (*Millar, 2026*).

Imperative: something that is absolutely necessary, urgent, or of vital importance, or a grammatical form used to give an order or command.

Escalation: Rapid worsening and intensification of a problem.

The Korean Peninsula remains a significant concern for international peace and security due to North Korea's nuclear weapons development, ballistic missile programmes, and strained diplomatic relations with neighboring countries. At the same time, reports of

systematic human rights violations raise questions about the international community's responsibility to protect fundamental freedoms. The Security Council must consider how to address these concerns while respecting national sovereignty and preventing further military escalation. Diplomatic negotiations, humanitarian assistance, and international cooperation remain important tools for achieving a peaceful and sustainable resolution. This background paper will help delegates understand the historical development of North Korea's political system and human rights situation, examine the positions and interests of countries involved and explore possible responses through sanctions, diplomatic negotiations, humanitarian assistance and international cooperation.

Historical Background

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) is located in East Asia on the Asian continent, and it is the northern portion of the Korean Peninsula (*Convention on Biological Diversity, n.d.*). China and Russia share land borders with North Korea, while South Korea lies to its south, separated by the Korean Demilitarized Zone.

The Korean peninsula was under Japanese rule until Japan's defeat in August 1945. Following Japan's surrender in August 1945, two U.S. Army officers, Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel, proposed using the 38th parallel to divide the American and Soviet occupation zones. The line was intended to be temporary; however, rising tensions during the Cold War halted efforts toward reunification (*Naval History and Heritage Command, Origins of the Korean War, [2025]*). North Korea was founded as a communist state on September 9th, 1948, under Kim Il-sung's rule during the Cold War.

The Korean War started on June 25th, 1950, and lasted until July 27th, 1953. Following North Korea's invasion of South Korea, the UN Security Council adopted resolutions calling for North Korean forces to withdraw and recommending military assistance to South Korea. The United States subsequently led the UN Command's military response (*U.S. National Archives, US Enters the Korean Conflict, 2016*). China later intervened in

support of North Korea, and the Soviet Union offered assistance to the North Korean Government. The war resulted in millions of deaths among civilians and military personnel (*Defense Casualty Analysis System, n.d.*; *National Army Museum, n.d.*).

In July 1953, military representatives of the Korean People's Army, the Chinese People's Volunteers, and the United Nations Command signed an armistice agreement, establishing a ceasefire and creating the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) (South Korea did not sign the agreement). In other words, a buffer zone surrounding the border between North and South Korea was incorporated to keep opposing armies apart (*U.S. National Archives, 2021*). However, no formal peace treaty followed the ceasefire, so the two Koreas remain in a state of unresolved conflict.

Authoritarian rule and restrictions on human rights developed soon after North Korea was established as an independent country. North Korea's political ideology became increasingly associated with Juche, a concept introduced by Kim Il-sung in a 1955 speech and later developed into a central element of the country's political identity (*Kim, 1955*). This ideology was influenced by Marxism-Leninism but emphasized national self-reliance and independence in political, economic, and military affairs. Over time, it became a central part of North Korea's political system.

The regime established the Songbun system between 1957 and 1960, and then continued to develop over the following decades. It is a hereditary social classification and caste system (*Robertson, 2016*). Because the state prioritized ideological purity, the Songbun system effectively restricted basic human rights, such as the right to equality and non-discrimination, freedom of movement and residence, the right to education and employment, freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, freedom of expression, information, and association, the right to food and an adequate standard of living (*United Nations, n.d.*). The system also undermines due process and exposes families to collective punishment.

In the mid-1960s, the government conducted a residential registration project that further organized the population into 51 subcategories. These various classifications are grouped into three broad divisions: “core”, “wavering”, and “hostile” (*Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2012*). People considered politically reliable, including those with family backgrounds associated with anti-Japanese resistance, were generally classified as part of the “core” group, which occupied the highest position in North Korea’s social hierarchy (*Robertson, 2016*). They receive the best housing, live in the capital (Pyongyang), and get stable food rations. Ordinary workers and technicians are viewed as “untrustworthy” and “unreliable”, and are placed in the “wavering” class. They are closely monitored by state security agencies and have limited opportunities for advancement. Descendants of landowners, religious believers, formal political opponents, and critics of North Korea’s system often faced discrimination, restricted opportunities, relocations, and constant state surveillance. Some were also assigned to difficult labor in mines or rural areas. These individuals were classified as part of the “hostile” group.

One of the most severe reported mechanisms of state punishment for individuals accused of political disloyalty is the kwansliso system, a network of political prison camps. This network consists of political prison camps, officially known as political penal-labor colonies. These facilities are operated by the Ministry of State Security and are used to detain people accused of political offenses or considered threats to the government. A defining feature of these camps is the principle of guilt by association (yeonjwaje), which allows the government to punish individuals for the alleged political offenses of their relatives. As a result, family members could also face detention and forced labor despite not being directly accused of any political activity. This practice further strengthened the government’s control over citizens by creating an environment in which individuals could face punishment because of their family connections. (*United Nations Human Rights Council, 2014*). The existence of these camps became one of the most serious examples of systematic human rights violations in North Korea (*Robertson, 2016*).

Following Kim Il-sung's death in 1994, leadership passed to his son, Kim Jong-Il, who continued the political system established by his predecessor (*Modern Ghana, 2026*). During the 1990s, North Korea experienced a devastating famine known as the Arduous March, resulting in widespread food shortages and civilian suffering. In December 2011, Kim Jong-Il died, and his son, Kim Jong-un, assumed leadership. (*The Guardian, 2014*). Despite the change in leadership, the country's centralized political structure and restrictions on civil liberties continued, with international organizations repeatedly documenting human rights concerns under the new administration (*Robertson, 2016*).

International efforts to address North Korea's human rights situation became more prominent through the United Nations. In 2013, the UN Human Rights Council established a Commission of Inquiry to investigate reported human rights violations in the country. Its 2014 report documented systematic and widespread abuses, including arbitrary detention, torture, forced labor, and restrictions on fundamental freedoms. Its 2014 report documented systematic and widespread abuses, including arbitrary detention, torture, forced labor, and restrictions on fundamental freedoms (*United Nations Human Rights Council, 2014*). The commission called for accountability and greater international involvement. Although the investigation increased global awareness and provided an official record of violations, it did not directly result in changes to North Korea's domestic policies.

Other international measures have included United Nations General Assembly resolutions, Security Council sanctions, and diplomatic negotiations (*UN Security Council, 2006*). Since 2005, the General Assembly has repeatedly addressed human rights concerns in North Korea, while Security Council sanctions have primarily focused on the country's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Diplomatic efforts, including the 2018 inter-Korean summits, temporarily created opportunities for improved relations and reduced military tensions (*Panmunjom Declaration, 2018*). However, these initiatives have faced limitations due to political disagreements, the absence of a permanent peace agreement, and North Korea's resistance to external interference in its domestic

affairs. Consequently, despite decades of international attention and intervention, significant human rights concerns remain unresolved.

The Situation Today

Human Rights

- Human rights conditions in North Korea remain a major international concern. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented continuing restrictions on freedom of expression, movement, religion and access to information. Reports also describe arbitrary detention, forced labor, torture and surveillance by state authorities. In its 2025 assessment, the OHCHR concluded that the overall human rights situation had not improved since the 2014 Commission of Inquiry and had deteriorated in several areas (*Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2025*) The 2025 OHCHR assessment also highlights the continued use of forced labor, restrictions on freedom of movement, and increased state surveillance. These practices affect the daily lives of North Korean citizens by limiting their personal freedoms and exposing them to punishment for perceived disloyalty. The report emphasizes that international monitoring and accountability remain necessary to address these violations (*Office of the United Nations High COmmissioner for Human Rights, 2025*).

Food Security

- Food insecurity continues to affect vulnerable populations in North Korea. Limited agricultural resources, extreme weather conditions, economic restrictions, and unequal access to food contribute to the country's food-security challenges. The World Food Programme estimates that 10.7 million people, or more than 40% of North Korea's population, were undernourished (*WFP, 2022*). This figure is an estimate based on available data, as restricted international access makes independent assessments difficult (*World Food Programme, n.d.*). Children, pregnant women and people living in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition. Limited access to nutritious food can affect children's physical development, educational performance and overall health.

Humanitarian organizations therefore face the challenge of prioritizing vulnerable populations while ensuring that food assistance reaches civilians who need it most (*World Food Programme, n.d.*).

Military developments

- North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes continue to threaten regional stability. The country has conducted repeated missile tests despite international restrictions imposed by the Security Council. These developments have increased security concerns in South Korea and Japan and have contributed to tensions with the United States. The international community remains divided over whether additional sanctions, diplomatic negotiations or security agreements offer the most effective path toward denuclearization (*Congressional Research Service, 2026*). North Korea's continued development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles increases the risk of military confrontation in East Asia. Missile launches create security concerns for neighboring countries, particularly South Korea and Japan. These developments also complicate diplomatic negotiations because countries disagree on whether military deterrence, economic sanctions, or diplomatic engagement should receive priority (*Congressional Research Service, 2026*).

International relations

- North Korea's international relations influence the Security Council's ability to respond to the situation. China and Russia emphasize regional stability and diplomatic engagement, while the United States, United Kingdom, and France generally support stronger sanctions enforcement and international accountability. North Korea's expanding relationship with Russia has added another dimension to regional security discussions. These disagreements make it difficult to establish a unified international strategy (*United Nations Security Council, 2026*). These disagreements directly affect the Security Council's ability to adopt new measures. China and Russia can use their veto power to block substantive resolutions supported by Western countries. Consequently, delegates must consider diplomatic compromises that could achieve sufficient

international support while maintaining pressure for human rights improvements and protecting regional stability.

Humanitarian access

- International humanitarian organizations face significant obstacles when attempting to assist North Korean civilians. Restrictions of foreign personnel, limited access to communities, and difficulties monitoring aid distribution complicate humanitarian operations. The Security Council's humanitarian exemption mechanism allows eligible organizations to request authorization for activities otherwise affected by sanctions. However, ensuring that assistance reaches vulnerable populations remains a major challenge (*United Nations Security Council, n.d.*)

Key Stakeholders and Their Positions

Countries:

- North Korea: Rejects international criticism and considers external pressure a violation of its national sovereignty. Prioritizes regime security, political stability and military capabilities. Likely to oppose additional sanctions and intrusive international monitoring.
- United States: Supports complete denuclearization, enforcement of UN sanctions, and international accountability for human rights violations. In July 2024, the U.S. The Department of State reaffirmed that its policy aims to achieve peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula through complete denuclearization. The United States also supports efforts to document human rights abuses and hold those responsible accountable (*U.S. Department of State, 2024a*, *2024b.*).
- United Kingdom: Supports international accountability and stronger human rights protection, but places particular emphasis on diplomacy and negotiation. In September 2025, the UK called on North Korea to allow unrestricted access to

UN Human rights mechanisms and stated that diplomacy is the best way to improve conditions for North Korean citizens and secure regional peace (*Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 2025*).

- France: Supports strict implementation of UN sanctions and complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization. France also emphasizes sanctions monitoring, maritime surveillance, and cooperation with European partners to prevent sanction evasion (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2026).
- China: Prioritizes regional stability, border security, and the prevention of conflict or regime collapse. Opposes measures that could destabilize North Korea and generally favours diplomatic engagement.
- Russia: Prioritizes strategic cooperation with North Korea and opposes sanctions it considers ineffective or destabilizing. Its relationship with Pyongyang complicates international efforts to establish a unified response.
- Japan: Is concerned about North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes, regional security, and the unresolved abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea. (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2026*)
- South Korea: Seeks regional stability, reduced military tensions and opportunities for peaceful engagement with North Korea. Its policies must also address the immediate security threat posed by North Korean military capabilities.

International Organizations:

- United Nations: Addresses threats to international peace and security while promoting human rights and humanitarian assistance.
- Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR): Documents human rights violations and supports accountability efforts.
- World Food Programme (WFP): Focuses on food insecurity and assistance to vulnerable populations.
- UNICEF: Works to protect children's rights and improve access to healthcare, nutrition, and education.

Non-Profit Organizations

- Human Rights Watch: Investigates and reports human rights violations and advocates for international accountability (*Human Rights Watch, 2026*).

- Amnesty International: Documents restrictions on freedom, arbitrary detention, torture, and other abuses (*Amnesty International, 2025*).
- Liberty in North Korea (LiNK): Supports North Korean refugees and raises awareness of their experiences.

Businesses

- International shipping and trading companies: Face restrictions and compliance requirements related to sanctions and prohibited trade.
- Financial institutions: Must monitor transactions to prevent violations of international sanctions (*Financial Action Task Force, 2025*)
- Technology and cryptocurrency companies: Face risks associated with cyberattacks and illicit financial activities attributed to North Korean actors.

Affected Populations and Civil Society

- North Korean citizens: Face restrictions on freedom of expression and movement, limited access to information, and reported food insecurity.
- North Korean refugees and defectors: Risk detention, mistreatment, and difficulties obtaining protection or resettlement (*United Nations General Assembly, 2024*)
- Families of abducted individuals: Seek information about missing relatives and accountability.
- People in neighboring countries: Face concerns about regional military tensions and the potential consequences of conflict.

These competing priorities require delegates to identify areas of cooperation while recognizing the political and strategic disagreements that could prevent the adoption of a Security Council resolution.

Past Attempts and Existing Frameworks

The Security Council introduced sanctions against North Korea following its first nuclear test in 2006. Resolution 1718 established restrictions on weapons-related trade, asset freezes, and travel bans targeting designated individuals. Resolution 1874, adopted in 2009, expanded these measures and strengthened provisions concerning cargo

inspections and prohibited transfers. Later resolutions, including 2087 and 2094 in 2013, introduced additional restrictions in response to North Korean missile and nuclear activities. In 2016 and 2017, the Security Council adopted additional measures through Resolutions 2270, 2321, 2371, 2375, and 2397. These measures expanded restrictions on North Korean exports, financial activities, petroleum supplies, and overseas employment. Their purpose was to limit resources and technology connected to North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. However, enforcement difficulties and disagreements among Security Council members have limited the effectiveness of international pressure (*United Nations Security Council, 2006*, *2009*, *2013a*, *2013b*, *2016a*, *2016b*, *2017a*, *2017b*, *2017c*). Beyond sanctions, the United Nations has made direct efforts to address human rights violations in North Korea. In 2013, the Human Rights Council established a Commission of Inquiry, whose 2014 report documented systematic human rights abuses and recommended international accountability measures. The General Assembly has also adopted repeated resolutions addressing these violations and possible referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court. However, these efforts have not resulted in significant changes to North Korea's domestic policies (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2014; United Nations General Assembly, 2014). Despite decades of international restrictions, North Korea continues to develop its nuclear and missile capabilities. This raises questions about whether sanctions alone are sufficient to achieve international objectives. Delegates should examine whether a combination of targeted restrictions, diplomatic negotiations, humanitarian assistance, and independent monitoring would produce more effective results.

Challenges or Complications

- Political disagreements: China and Russia differ from Western countries in strategic interests, complicating international cooperation.
- Humanitarian consequences: Economic sanctions and trade restrictions can create obstacles to delivering civilian assistance to North Korean citizens.
- Limited international access: International organizations have limited access to independently verify living conditions inside North Korea.

- National sovereignty and jurisdiction: The Security Council must balance respect for national sovereignty with its responsibility to address threats to international peace and security and serious human rights concerns.
- Sanctions evasion: North Korea has used ship-to-ship transfers at sea to evade international sanctions. These operations involve transferring prohibited goods, particularly petroleum, between vessels to conceal their origin and destination. Such methods make it harder for authorities to track restricted trade and enforce sanctions. As a result, North Korea can continue obtaining resources that support activities restricted by the Security Council, weakening the effectiveness of international pressure (*Financial Action Task Force, 2025.*).
- Security Council vetoes: Disagreements among the five permanent members can prevent the adoption of substantive resolutions, limiting the Council's ability to respond collectively. (*United Nations, n.d.*)
- Risk of military escalation: Additional military pressure or poorly coordinated diplomatic measures could increase tensions and create risks of miscalculation on the Korean Peninsula.

The Committee's Roles and Powers

Under Article 24 of the United Nations Charter, the Security Council has primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Article 25 requires UN Member States to accept and carry out Security Council decisions. Under Article 27, substantive decisions require at least nine affirmative votes and no negative vote from any permanent member. This voting procedure gives the five permanent members the power to veto substantive resolutions (*United Nations, 1945*).

The Security Council may recommend peaceful solutions under Chapter VI of the UN Charter. Under Chapter VII, it can determine whether a situation constitutes a threat to international peace and security and adopt measures to address it. These measures include non-military sanctions under Article 41 and, if necessary, military action under Article 42 when non-military measures are inadequate (*United Nations, 1945*). In

addressing the situation in North Korea, delegates could propose targeted sanctions against individuals responsible for serious human rights violations, request regular reports from international monitoring bodies, and strengthen humanitarian exemption procedures. They could also recommend cooperation with the OHCHR to document abuses and improve international access to reliable information. These measures would allow the Security Council to address human rights concerns without relying exclusively on military pressure or broad economic restrictions.

Delegates will draft a Security Council resolution addressing human rights violations and security concerns in North Korea. The committee would work alongside other United Nations bodies to monitor human rights violations, coordinate humanitarian assistance, and ensure that proposed measures are properly implemented. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) would document human rights abuses by collecting testimonies and evidence from victims and witnesses, while the Human Rights Council and its Special Rapporteur on North Korea would monitor the situation and provide reports on human rights conditions. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) would help coordinate food, medical supplies, and other humanitarian assistance to civilians. Additionally, the 1718 Sanctions Committee would supervise sanctions enforcement and review humanitarian exemption requests to prevent sanctions from blocking essential aid. Finally, the Security Council would cooperate with neighboring countries and regional organizations to encourage diplomatic negotiations, promote regional stability, and review progress through regular reports from these UN bodies. All proposals must remain within the Security Council's mandate and consider the legal, political, and humanitarian consequences of implementation.

Guiding Questions for Debate

1. How can the Security Council improve the enforcement of existing sanctions without worsening humanitarian conditions for North Korean civilians?
2. Should the international community prioritize denuclearization or human rights improvements when negotiating with North Korea?

3. What mechanisms could ensure that the humanitarian assistance reaches vulnerable North Korean citizens without being diverted by the government?
4. To what extent should national sovereignty protect governments from international intervention when systematic human rights violations are reported?
5. Should the Security Council impose targeted sanctions against individuals responsible for human rights violations in North Korea, even if China or Russia oppose them? How could delegates build sufficient support to overcome political disagreements, and what alternative measures could they pursue if a permanent member uses its veto to block the proposal?
6. How can the United Nations encourage North Korea to cooperate with independent human rights investigations?
7. What diplomatic concessions should the international community consider in exchange for measurable improvements in North Korea's human rights situation?
8. How should the Security Council address disagreements between China, Russia, and Western countries regarding sanctions and diplomatic pressure?
9. What responsibilities do neighbouring countries have toward North Korean refugees, particularly when individuals face the risk of forced repatriation?
10. How can the Security Council prevent nuclear escalation while maintaining international pressure for human rights accountability?

Conclusion and Call to Action

North Korea's human rights situation presents a significant challenge to international cooperation and regional security. Despite decades of diplomatic efforts and international restrictions, serious human rights concerns remain unresolved, while tensions on the Korean Peninsula continue to threaten regional stability. Delegates must examine the limitations of previous international measures and consider practical solutions that protect civilians, encourage diplomatic engagement, and reduce the risk of military escalation.

The objective of this committee is to develop a resolution that establishes measurable improvements in human rights protection and humanitarian assistance. Possible outcomes include improving access for independent humanitarian organizations, strengthening the monitoring of aid distribution, documenting human rights violations, and encouraging cooperation with international human rights mechanisms. Delegates must demonstrate diplomatic judgement, defend their national interests and negotiate practical solutions that protect civilians while preventing military escalation. Their proposals should reflect the Security Council's responsibility to maintain international peace and security.

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