The United Nations and Human Rights in North Korea

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Abstract

Despite the emergence of geopolitical trends that threaten global stability, the United Nations is—and will remain—indispensable for the promotion of human rights in North Korea. Domestic political changes in South Korea and the United States have set the stage for robust multilateral coordination on North Korean human rights, including at the United Nations. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in North Korea remains the focal point of relevant activity within the United Nations, as the Seoul office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights continues its work in the field. Moreover, the Security Council held a public discussion on North Korean human rights in August 2023 after a six-year hiatus, as South Korea, the United States, and other like-minded countries emphasized the connection between human rights and security issues. It will be vital to keep human rights at the forefront as North Korea reengages with the world following its COVID-19 lockdown. Finally, North Korea's fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review in November 2024 will not only enable states and civil society organizations to spotlight Pyongyang's human rights record, but also reveal opportunities for engagement going forward.

Keywords: North Korea, human rights, United Nations, South Korea, United States

Introduction

On December 10, 1948, the third session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted Resolution 217(III) with 48 member states voting in favor and 8 abstentions. This document is otherwise known as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The adoption of the UDHR marked the culmination of a nearly two-year-long process that aimed to incorporate a variety of cultural traditions and philosophical views.[1] In its Preamble, the UDHR states that the declaration is intended "to promote respect for these rights and freedoms" and "to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance."[2]

The UDHR thus marked an important step in actualizing one of the three purposes of the UN, as specified in Article 1 of the 1945 UN Charter: "to achieve international co-operation…in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."[3]

This December will mark the 76th anniversary of the UDHR. Since 1948, the rights stipulated in the UDHR have been further developed and codified in a series of international human rights treaties, beginning with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Additional human rights treaties have also been adopted on specific thematic issues, ranging from discrimination against women and torture to children's rights and the rights of persons with disabilities.

Along with the UN Charter, these treaties have formed the basis for a web of institutions that make up the contemporary international human rights regime.[4] The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) is the primary forum for discussing human rights issues within the UN. The HRC appoints independent experts as "Special Procedures" holders to report on specific thematic issues or the human rights situation of specific countries, and it also mandates investigations and fact-finding missions. Moreover, the HRC conducts the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a mechanism whereby every UN member state is subject to "a peer review of its human rights records every 4.5 years."[5] Finally, each human rights treaty has a corresponding treaty body—a committee of independent experts that assesses the compliance of each State party with the treaty in question.[6] The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) supports and coordinates all of these activities, which heavily involve the participation of transnational advocacy groups.

This extensive array of international institutions reflects an essential character of fundamental human rights, as stipulated in the UDHR. The enjoyment of these universal rights does not depend on an individual's nationality—that is, a person's association with a particular sovereign state. These rights and freedoms thus cannot be fully realized by the actions of any single UN member state. The advancement of human rights is an inherently international endeavor. While there are regional institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the UN system remains indispensable to all those who seek to promote and protect human rights.

At this political moment, there is considerable doubt and skepticism about the strength and effectiveness of the international system. In Jeffrey Feltman's words, Russia "dropped a barrel bomb on the fundamental principle of the international system" by invading Ukraine in February 2022: "respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity."[7] Even in this turbulent and uncertain political atmosphere, however, Feltman asserts that "the universality of the UN remains an asset."[8] While he does not address human rights issues in detail, this statement arguably applies to the international human rights regime as well.

Human rights concerns can and should be raised in bilateral and regional settings, but the instruments and mechanisms of the UN will always play a critical role. Addressing the human rights situation in North Korea, formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), is no exception. According to Ambassador Oh Joon, a former Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea (ROK) to the UN, "no government can afford to be indifferent to its reputation."[9] He adds that "even the most abusive governments, under certain circumstances, feel that they must take into account international public opinion."[10] Furthermore, efforts to ensure accountability for human rights violations in North Korea will be strengthened if there is broad support for such measures among UN member states.

Actions taken under the purview of the UN both reflect and influence international public opinion toward Pyongyang. It is also important to note that North Korea is a State party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.[11] This creates opportunities for the relevant treaty bodies to engage with the DPRK on human rights issues. This essay reviews major recent developments relating to human rights in North Korea at the UN and briefly assesses possibilities for addressing this issue in the future.

The Return of the Coalition of Like-Minded States

In his 2021 report, *Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea: The Role of the United Nations*, David Hawk noted that "the vicissitudes of diplomacy over the DPRK's nuclear weapons and missile programs appear to have frayed the international coalition at the UN to promote human rights in the DPRK."[12] While the European Union (EU) has consistently raised North Korean human rights issues at the UN,[13] this

was not the case for the ROK, the United States, and Japan during the series of summits surrounding the Korean Peninsula in 2018 and 2019. As a result of domestic political changes in the intervening years, however, the coalition of like-minded states on North Korean human rights is once again on a firm footing.

The Republic of Korea

There has been a significant shift in Seoul's North Korea human rights policy since President Yoon Suk-yeol entered office in May 2022. One of the Yoon administration's first steps on this issue was to appoint Dr. Lee Shin-wha, a Professor of International Relations at Korea University, as the Ambassador for International Cooperation on Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This position, created pursuant to the ROK's 2016 North Korean Human Rights Act (NKHRA), had remained vacant for five years. Since her appointment, Ambassador Lee has actively engaged in public events and private discussions in Brussels, New York City, Tokyo, Geneva, Washington, D.C., Oslo, and London.[14] She has also expanded diplomatic engagement on North Korean human rights to Latin American countries, including Mexico and Argentina.[15] Her one-year mandate expired on July 18, 2023, but it was renewed and extended until 2024.[16]

The Yoon administration has emphasized North Korean human rights in its diplomacy. Specifically, the ROK resumed its support for North Korean human rights resolutions at the UN, co-sponsoring a resolution at the 77th Session of the General Assembly in November 2022 and at the 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council in April 2023. It had been four years and five years respectively since Seoul co-sponsored the North Korean human rights resolutions at these forums.[17] Ambassador Oh notes that it is vital for the ROK to maintain a non-political, principled stance on this matter. Withdrawing support for UN resolutions out of political considerations, he argues, will "[limit Seoul's] leeway in pursuing non-political and human rights-based assistance programs in North Korea as well."[18] In another sign of a greater diplomatic emphasis on North Korean human rights, South Korea's Ambassador to the UN in Geneva raised the issue of North Korean refugees during China's UPR in January 2024.[19]

Furthermore, the Yoon administration has taken additional steps to more effectively implement the NKHRA's provisions. It publicly released the government's official report on North Korean human rights in March 2023,[20] and it also released an English version for international

distribution in July 2023.[21] Due to continued delays with launching the North Korean Human Rights Foundation, the Yoon administration formed an "advisory committee for promoting North Korean human rights" under the Ministry of Unification in March 2023.[22] Minister Kim Yeong-ho has called upon the National Assembly to do its part in launching the foundation.[23] The Yoon administration has also resuscitated the North Korean Human Rights Documentation Center under the Ministry of Justice. During the Moon administration, the Center's budget was reduced by over 80%, and it was not staffed with prosecutors.[24]

Taken together, these are positive steps for advancing North Korean human rights. Specifically, by "[taking] measures that are specifically provided in the NKHRA," Ambassador Oh observes, the ROK can respond to "possible pushback from North Korea…by explaining its obligation to implement national legislations and enforce the rule of law."[25] Maintaining greater consistency between domestic and foreign policies on North Korean human rights can help strengthen and amplify the ROK's voice on these issues on the international stage, including at the UN. Although South Korea lost its seat on the HRC,[26] it has been elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for 2024–25.[27] The Yoon administration "appears poised to maintain its focus on North Korean human rights" in the near future, despite a defeat for the ruling People Power Party in the April 2024 legislative election.[28]

The United States

After initially emphasizing North Korean human rights, the Trump administration did not address the issue during its summit diplomacy with North Korea.[29] For reasons unrelated to Korean Peninsula issues, the Trump administration also withdrew from the UN HRC in June 2018.[30] Less than a month into its term, the Biden administration returned to the HRC. Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that the previous U.S. withdrawal "did nothing to encourage meaningful change, but instead created a vacuum of U.S. leadership."[31] Ambassador Robert King, the former U.S. Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights, welcomed this measure as a step in the right direction. "When the United States joins cooperatively with other countries of the United Nations in pressing for progress on human rights," he noted, "this is not a hostile U.S. policy, but acceptance of international standards that most other countries of the United Nations accept."[32]

During a public dialogue hosted by HRNK at the DACOR Bacon House in Washington, D.C. on August 15, 2023, Dr. Elizabeth Salmón, the current UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, stressed the importance of U.S. leadership in advancing North Korean human rights in the international arena. The appointment in July 2023 of Julie Turner as the U.S. Special Envoy on North Korean human rights, a position that has remained vacant since 2017, is thus a welcome development.[33] As Ambassador King has observed, the Special Envoy plays an important role in raising the profile of this issue within the U.S. government and coordinating multilateral efforts to advance North Korean human rights.[34]

Bilateral and Multilateral Coordination

These shifts in the Republic of Korea and the United States have raised the profile of North Korean human rights issues in bilateral and multilateral settings. In February 2023, the U.S. Embassy in Seoul hosted a meeting with family members of South Korean citizens who are detained in North Korea, as well as family members of abduction victims. Jung Pak, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, participated in the meeting, along with Ambassador Lee Shin-wha.[35]

This issue was also referenced in the U.S.-ROK Joint Statement of April 2023, issued during President Yoon's state visit to Washington, D.C. The statement notes that the two countries "will strengthen cooperation to promote human rights in the DPRK as well as to resolve the issues of abductions, detainees, and unrepatriated prisoners of war."[36] Moreover, the two Presidents declared in their statement their commitment "to build a better future for all Korean people and support a unified Korean Peninsula that is free and at peace."[37]

There have been relevant developments in the context of greater trilateral cooperation between Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington. At their May 2022 summit, President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida "reaffirmed U.S. commitment to the immediate resolution of the [DPRK] abductions issue."[38] This was followed by a joint U.S.-Japan-ROK statement at Phnom Penh in November 2022 during the East Asia Summit, which "[reaffirmed] a shared commitment to the immediate resolution of the abductions issue." Moreover, in this statement, "Prime Minister Kishida and President Biden also express their support for the immediate release of the ROK citizens detained in the DPRK."[39]

The joint statement issued after the Camp David Summit on August 18, 2023, contains perhaps the clearest and most comprehensive language regarding U.S.-ROK-Japan cooperation on North Korean human rights. In this statement, the three countries "commit to strengthening cooperation to promote respect for human rights in the DPRK and reaffirm a shared commitment to the immediate resolution of the issues of abductees, detainees, and unrepatriated prisoners of war."[40]

This trilateral cooperation has also been on display at the UN. In March 2023, the United States hosted an Arria-formula meeting on North Korean human rights. This meeting was co-hosted by Albania, a non-permanent Security Council member state, but it was co-sponsored by the ROK and Japan.[41] The Security Council's open discussion on North Korean human rights on August 17, 2023—the first in six years—was requested by the United States, Albania, Japan, and the ROK. [42] The Permanent Representatives of Japan and the ROK both addressed the Security Council during the briefing, which opened with remarks by Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Dr. Elizabeth Salmón, the Special Rapporteur on North Korean human rights.[43]

Repercussions of the War in Ukraine

While the EU has long been at the forefront of efforts within the UN to address the human rights situation in North Korea, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has added renewed urgency for Seoul and Brussels to cooperate on Korean Peninsula issues. There has been increased military cooperation between Russia and North Korea. The United States revealed in October 2023 that North Korea had transferred munitions to Russia,[44] and the Ukrainian authorities reported that North Korean missiles had been fired against Ukraine.[45] UN officials tasked with monitoring the enforcement of sanctions against North Korea concluded in April 2024 that "debris recovered from a missile that landed in Kharkiv, Ukraine, on 2 January 2024 derives from a DPRK Hwasong-11 series missile."[46]

In response, the EU and its member states issued a joint statement on January 9, 2024 condemning the transfer and use of North Korea's ballistic missiles.[47] Just two weeks later, a senior South Korean diplomat visited Brussels "and proposed collaboration in blocking funding for North Korea's nuclear and missile development."[48] Media reports in April 2024 suggested that the EU was considering sanctions against "ships delivering North Korean military equipment to Russia." [49] These efforts could reinforce cooperation on addressing North Korean human rights,

particularly on issues that directly relate to Pyongyang's sources of revenue.

An investigation by the Outlaw Ocean Project published in February 2024, for instance, found that North Korean overseas workers have processed seafood at Chinese factories that export to the United States and Europe.[50] It has also been reported that North Korea has sent workers to the Donbas region in Ukraine for "post-war reconstruction work."[51] The official dispatch of workers overseas is an important source of foreign currency for Pyongyang, and testimony by former workers indicates that "working conditions at overseas worksites constitute forced, slave labor."[52]

Developments within the UN Human Rights System

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK remains the focal point of North Korean human rights activity within the UN human rights system. Dr. Elizabeth Salmón, the first woman to be appointed to the position, visited Seoul in August 2022 shortly after she began her term. During the visit, she met with North Korean escapees, civil society organizations, and ROK officials.[53] In her first report to the General Assembly in October 2022, she emphasized the need to take a victim-centered approach while pursuing a "two-track" approach of seeking accountability and exploring opportunities for dialogue and engagement with the DPRK.[54] Her subsequent report to the HRC in April 2023 focused on the situation of women and girls in North Korea, particularly in the context of the North Korean regime's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.[55] In her statement to the HRC in April 2024, Salmón stressed the need to pursue accountability for human rights violations in North Korea through all possible avenues, including "individual prosecutions, reparations, truth-seeking, and institutional reforms."[56]

Special Rapporteur Salmón has worked closely with other key actors and institutions. She has participated in events alongside ROK Ambassador Lee Shin-wha in New York,[57] Tokyo,[58] and Geneva.[59] In March 2024, Salmón, Ambassador Lee, and Ambassador Turner spoke together at an event on the sidelines of the UN HRC in Geneva.[60] Moreover, Salmón has reached out to other special rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, to discuss coordinated efforts to raise North Korean human rights.[61] She has also met

with representatives of Central and South American UN member states in an effort to expand the coalition of like-minded states on North Korean human rights.[62]

In addition to the Special Rapporteur, different elements of the UN human rights system have continued their efforts to address North Korean human rights. The Seoul field office of the OHCHR published in March 2023 a report on enforced disappearances and abductions by North Korea.[63] To follow up on this report, the Seoul office hosted an international conference on enforced disappearances on August 30, 2023, examining "comparative examples from other countries and regions."[64] In December 2023, the Seoul office engaged in outreach to Japanese civil society groups and "organized consultations and interviews with 24 victims" in Japan regarding abductions and enforced disappearances.[65]

There have also been relevant engagements involving treaty bodies and special mandate holders. During its review of China in May 2023, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women raised questions about the situation of female North Korean refugees in China and the status of children who are born to these women. This followed multiple submissions by South Korea-based NGOs to the Committee.[66] Moreover, in April 2024, HRNK and the Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights made written submissions to the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Tomoya Obokata, addressing the issue of forced labor in North Korea.[67]

North Korean Human Rights at the UN Security Council

As noted above, the HRC is the primary forum for addressing North Korean human rights within the UN system. The Commission on Human Rights, the HRC's predecessor, first adopted a resolution expressing concern about the human rights situation in North Korea in April 2003.[68] The following year, it created the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, which has been extended to the present day.[69] The HRC also authorized a one-year Commission of Inquiry (COI) in 2013 to "investigate systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights" in North Korea,[70] and the OHCHR's Seoul office was established pursuant to the COI's recommendations.[71] Moreover, the HRC's April 2024 resolution on North Korea called on the OHCHR to provide an updated assessment of the human rights situation since 2014.[72]

In the past decade, however, there have also been efforts to raise North Korean human rights issues at the Security Council. The COI specifically

mentioned the Security Council in its final report. To pursue accountability for crimes against humanity, the COI recommended that "the Security Council…refer the situation in [North Korea] to the International Criminal Court" (ICC), and "adopt targeted sanctions against those who appear to be most responsible for crimes against humanity."[73] The COI also raised "the possibility of the Secretary-General referring the situation to the Security Council" to help ensure that the UN "effectively takes into account, and addresses, human rights concerns" in all engagements with North Korea.[74]

This can be understood as part of a broader movement to delineate the role of the Security Council in responding to serious human rights violations. In the 1990s, mass atrocities in Rwanda and the Balkans prompted "a serious debate on how to react to gross and systematic violations of human rights."[75] At the 2005 World Summit, UN member states affirmed "the responsibility to protect," declaring that "each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity."[76] They also stated that the Security Council could potentially respond to mass atrocities in accordance with the UN Charter, including through Chapter VII measures, "should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations."[77] There have been additional efforts to incorporate human rights concerns in the work of the Security Council since then, including a 2013 proposal by France for the five permanent members to "voluntarily and collectively commit to refraining from using the veto where a mass atrocity has been ascertained."[78]

A 2006 report by DLA Piper and HRNK called on the Security Council to address the human rights situation in North Korea, explicitly referring to the outcome of the 2005 World Summit.[79] After the 2014 COI report, the Security Council formally addressed the human rights situation in North Korea. Specifically, it has held five public discussions of human rights issues in North Korea "as a threat to peace and security in Asia."[80] As noted above, the most recent discussion in August 2023 featured remarks by the Special Rapporteur for North Korean human rights and the High Commissioner for Human Rights. These discussions were possible because only "nine members of the Security Council must agree to place an issue on the council's agenda,"[81] as specified in Article 27.2 of the UN Charter.[82]

There has been no action, however, on ICC referral or the imposition of targeted sanctions expressly based on human rights grounds. China and Russia have opposed the consideration of North Korean human rights issues at the Council, as their representatives reiterated during the August 2023 meeting.[83] This sharply contrasts with the position taken by the ROK, the United States, Japan, and other like-minded member states. A joint statement issued by these countries following the same meeting affirmed that North Korea's "human rights violations and abuses demand the Council's attention," and that human rights issues "are inextricably linked with the DPRK's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile advancements."[84]

Previous Security Council resolutions on North Korea have focused on constraining the material and financial resources that Pyongyang needs to advance its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles capabilities. Nevertheless, in some instances, the Security Council has adopted measures that address areas with significant human rights implications. For example, Resolution 2375 froze the assets of the Korean Workers' Party Organization & Guidance Department (OGD) and the Propaganda & Agitation Department (PAD).[85] The list of individuals designated by the Security Council includes current and former officials in these departments, including Jo Yong-won (OGD Director) and Choe Hwi (PAD First Vice Director). [86] Analysts have identified these two departments as playing a central role in perpetrating human rights violations against the North Korean population.[87]

Two other issue areas should be noted in this regard. The first is North Korea's overseas workers. Resolution 2375 "[prohibited] Member States from work authorizations to [North Korean] nationals,"[88] and Resolution 2397 "called for the repatriation of all [North Koreans] earning income abroad…within 24 months."[89] As noted above, testimonies by former workers indicate that conditions at overseas work sites are tantamount to forced labor. There have been recent reports that North Korean workers in China engaged in collective action against their supervisors in early 2024, with alleged outbreaks of violence in some instances.[90] The second is North Korea's coal and mineral exports, which were restricted under Resolution 2270.[91] Reports by civil society organizations have highlighted the centrality of forced labor in North Korea's mining sector, including forced labor in North Korea's political prison camps (*kwan-li-so*).[92]

Looking Forward: Priorities & Considerations

As North Korea begins to reengage with the international community following a prolonged COVID-19 lockdown, it is vital to maintain a focus on human rights issues. The international community, including relevant UN entities and agencies, should pursue every opportunity to protect and promote the human rights of the North Korean people.

An urgent and ongoing priority is the forcible repatriation of North Korean refugees who are detained in China. On August 30, 2023, the Chairs of the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China requested a meeting with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the High Commissioner for Refugees to discuss the issue.[93] There were also calls for the UN Secretary-General to intervene.[94] Despite efforts by governments and civil society organizations to raise the pressure on Beijing, China is reported to have returned 600 escapees to North Korea in October 2023 and an additional 200 in April 2024.[95] Observers have raised concerns about whether the ROK can maintain a strong public stance against the forcible repatriation of North Korean refugees, given Seoul's efforts to manage relations with Beijing ahead of the ROK-China-Japan trilateral summit.[96]

It will also be critical for UN agencies that operate in North Korea to prioritize human rights considerations when they resume on-the-ground activities in North Korea.[97] Remarks delivered by UN High Commissioner Volker Türk to the Security Council in August 2023 indicated that UN personnel had not returned to Pyongyang.[98] In March 2024, the Secretary-General named Joe Colombano of Italy as the new UN resident coordinator for the DPRK, but it was reported that he had not yet entered North Korea.[99] When UN agencies are able to resume on-site activities in North Korea, it will be necessary to gather data on how the pandemic—as well as Pyongyang's response to the pandemic—has affected the food situation and the health of the North Korean population.

Moreover, the next UPR of North Korea will take place in November 2024.[100] North Korea's response during its previous UPR cycle in 2019 provided insight into how it is approaching human rights issues within the UN system.[101] Similarly, how North Korea engages in its fourth UPR cycle will reveal the extent of its willingness to engage on human rights, and what areas there may be to pursue engagement. Civil society organizations have highlighted a range of issues in their submissions for North Korea's upcoming UPR, including sexual and gender-based violence in detention facilities, restrictions on freedom of expression, and

enforced disappearances. As noted by one North Korean human rights activist, the information contained in these reports will help inform other UN member states, which can ask detailed questions to North Korea's representatives during the UPR.[102]

It will also be vital to maintain the profile of North Korean human rights at the Security Council. The presence of both Japan and the ROK as non-permanent members will help maintain momentum in this regard.[103] To be sure, the actions taken by the Security Council to date are a far cry from the steps proposed by the COI in 2014. There have also been persistent questions about the enforcement of Security Council sanctions, which has taken on even greater urgency following Russia's veto in March 2024 of a motion to extend the mandate of the Panel of Experts.[104] Nevertheless, to the extent that UN sanctions impact issue areas with substantial human rights implications, the continued implementation of these sanctions will also help move the needle on human rights concerns. As noted by Special Rapporteur Salmón in her report to the UN General Assembly in 2022, there should be a "two-track approach that seeks both engagement and accountability" when it comes to North Korean human rights.[105]

Conclusion

It is no coincidence that the foundational document for human rights emerged from the UN. The effective promotion and advancement of universal human rights would not be possible without the UN, which is unique in its universality. Addressing the human rights situation in North Korea is no exception. The UN human rights system, including the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, remains the focal point of international efforts to address the human rights situation in North Korea. Greater coordination on human rights concerns among Seoul, Washington, Tokyo, Brussels, and other like-minded states will help maintain diplomatic momentum on these issues at the UN, including at the Security Council. In particular, North Korea's fourth UPR cycle in November 2024 will provide a vital opportunity to highlight human rights issues before the international community.

All those who seek to protect and promote the human rights of the North Korean people would do well to remember the words of former COI Chair Michael Kirby, who stated in January 2024 that "if we look at…the history of the Charter of the [UN] and the history of the [UDHR], we can see that progress is capable of achievement."[106] Accordingly, he adds, "we

must never lose our faith and our determination to secure progress for the human rights of the people of North Korea."[107]

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