

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# NORTH KOREA: PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE WITH THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA – HRC61

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's conclusions and recommendations, presented to the Human Rights Council on 13 March 2026, are a powerful enumeration of the commitments the DPRK made through participation in the UPR. They highlight the potential for concrete action across a wide range of human rights issues and note the potential for assistance and cooperation by international actors – should the State agree to extend such invitations and use the human rights tools at its disposal.

In both the third (2019) and fourth (2024) UPR cycles, the DPRK accepted recommendations on freedom of expression including access to information. Amnesty International research documents the stark gap between those commitments and reality.

This February, Amnesty International published findings from 25 in-depth interviews with North Korean escapees. Their testimonies describe a society gripped by fear. North Korean authorities have long treated access to foreign information as “criminal”. Interviewees, all of whom left North Korea in or before 2020, described public executions of people accused of watching or distributing South Korean media, attended by tens of thousands of people; they recounted how schoolchildren were compelled to watch executions as part of their “ideological education”.

Those with financial means or official connections can escape prosecution for consuming foreign media. Those without face detention, labour camps or even execution.

The 2020 Anti-Reactionary Thought and Culture Act, which defines South Korean content as “rotten ideology that paralyzes the people's revolutionary sense” was implemented between the third and fourth UPR cycles, in direct contradiction to the DPRK's commitments. It intensifies already severe restrictions and mandates between five and fifteen years of forced labour for watching South Korean content prescribing heavy sentences including the death penalty for distribution of such content.

Amnesty International calls on the DPRK to end arbitrary detention and repeal all laws criminalizing access to information in violation of international human rights law, including the 2020 Act. The DPRK must abolish the death penalty for all offences and, as a first step, establish an official moratorium on all executions, including public executions. And the authorities must facilitate independent, unfettered access to the country by UN human rights experts.

It has now been more than a decade since the Commission of Inquiry released its findings. Despite opportunities to progress through UPR implementation over that period, the DPRK has remained closed to international scrutiny, including by OHCHR and the UN Special Procedures. Through herculean efforts, however, individuals continue to escape the country and share their stories; civil society continues to collect and corroborate those testimonies and document violations under international human rights law. It is imperative that UN agencies, experts and bodies and UN member states be insistent that the spotlight remains on these issues and that they be innovative in finding ways to support human rights progress while also calling for enhanced scrutiny and accountability.

## BACKGROUND

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea presented her report to the 61st session of the Human Rights Council on 13 March 2026.