



AI Index: ASA 24/7822/2024
18 March 2024

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ORAL STATEMENT

Item 4: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

UN Human Rights Council
55th session
26 February – 5 April 2024

Mr. President,

Amnesty International welcomes the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and her analysis of accountability efforts since the report of the Commission of Inquiry. We share the Special Rapporteur's concerns that severe restrictions on the right to freedom of expression have been further extenuated by recent legislation.

North Korea continues to maintain tight control over its population, effectively restricting the right to freedom of expression while closely monitoring almost all communication channels. Those caught engaging in 'reactionary ideology and culture', can face possible sentences ranging from imprisonment to death. A recent law specifically targets "South Korean-style" speech and imposes severe penalties, including labour or life in prison, for its use or dissemination.

In addition, parents risk public shame if their children access South Korean content, while the authorities use the threat of arrest, trial and execution, fearing that the influence of foreign content could undermine the regime. Recent reports indicate that several teenagers have been arrested for watching South Korean films, raising concerns about potential executions.

According to various reports, access to information from other countries already appears to be widespread among North Korean people, reflecting a growing desire for connectivity beyond the country's borders. Rather than criminalizing such activities, the DPRK government must immediately ensure that its people have unrestricted access to information and foster an environment of openness, transparency and accountability. Suppressing such access perpetuates a culture of fear and censorship, while deepening isolation.

Furthermore, Amnesty International shares the view of the Special Rapporteur that the ongoing multifaceted efforts by various actors are positive steps and should be encouraged and supported to ensure accountability. DPRK's neighbouring countries, civil society organisations, the international community and the UN should continue to explore victim-centred avenues for accountability at the national and international levels. The documentation of human rights violations following the COI report and OHCHR Seoul office's accountability project should receive sustained attention, support and resources from member states.

Finally, Amnesty International would like to highlight the Special Rapporteur's call for the international community to increase engagement with DPRK, including through UN human rights mechanisms, to take concrete steps to improve the human rights situation.

Thank you.