

## Could the North Korean regime be described as the most deleterious to humans on the Planet?

Our society and we as human beings are so used to the idea of freedom that we do not give it a second thought. It is so natural to be free from torture, slavery, forced labour, and have freedom of opinion and expression. We enjoy a broad church of liberties and human rights with an excess of choice in western europe. We assume this freedom is experienced by most people, but that is patently untrue.

Imagine, you are reading a newspaper with a portrait of a country's leader on the front page. You accidently rip a piece of it. As a result of this action three generations of your family are sent to labour camps. Such horrifying consequences might sound fictional. Nonetheless, according to the testimony given by the North Korean defector Yeonmi Park, this would be a consequence for such action<sup>1</sup>.

According to the US State Department '2021Trafficking in Persons Report'<sup>2ii</sup>, North Korea, for the 19<sup>th</sup> year in a row, was ranked among the worst human trafficking nations, having been placed in the lowest tier. It is beyond belief that in today's world where human rights are considered to be one of the most important matters, people can suffer so severely. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea holds the title of the most mysterious, unique and brutal country in the world. Instead of focusing on the welfare of its citizens, the North Korean government directs all of its resources towards building and maintaining its image of the almighty nuclear weapons state on the international stage. What is more, the explicit support received from China hinders the response of international community to North Korean humanitarian crisis. Consequentially, it becomes much harder to collectively stand up against the regime and its numerous breaches of the UDHR<sup>3</sup>.

Before giving a detailed look at the human rights violations in North Korea, it is important to answer the question: Why should all countries be judged by liberal and democratic standards that were set by the 'authors' of the UDHR? There is

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<sup>1</sup> Yeonmi Park, Interview with Jhon B. Peterson, 'Tyranny, Slavery and Columbia U', May 31, 2021

<sup>2</sup> US State Department 2021 annual 'Trafficking Persons Report', June 2021

<sup>3</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights

no denying that all countries, whether it is North Korea or the United States, have the right to introduce their legislation. Nevertheless, there are certain limits beyond which such rulings cannot go. It is these limits that are reflected in the Declaration. No matter whether the regime is liberal or socialist, it should never put human life at risk. The UDHR is politically neutral and does not reflect any ideological or religious views of its 'creators'. No matter what our beliefs are, we are all human beings willing to be safe and free.

In 2011 The General Assembly of United Nations in its Human Rights Resolution urged the government of the DPRK to put an end to the "systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights"<sup>4iii</sup>, labour camps detentions and public executions. Pyongyang rejected the resolution, claiming that it was based on fabrications and was politically motivated to diminish the country.

To understand the significance of the problems that the UN has repeatedly mentioned, let's take a brief look at some of the human rights violations in the DPRK:

- Children's Rights: According to the Human Rights Watch<sup>5iv6v</sup> children, often as young as 11 years old, are regularly forced to work on farms, construction sites, factories and mass games<sup>7</sup>. To exemplify the harshness of such working conditions, North Korean defector Park Chang-Shik asserted that during his elementary school years, he witnessed one of his classmates die from internal bleeding, caused by exhaustion from work<sup>8vi</sup>.
- Disability Rights: As mentioned in the investigation of the UN Special Rapporteur: "those with disabilities are sent away from the capital city to be 'cured' in special 'Number 49' hospitals"<sup>9vii</sup>. Patients of such wards are often the subject of tortures and starvation<sup>10viii</sup>.
- Women's rights and forced prostitution: Kippumjo (Eng. pleasure squad) are groups of young girls, often as young as 14 years old, that

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Security Council. February 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch - international non-governmental organization, that investigates and reports Human rights abuses all over the world)

<sup>6</sup> Human rights watch, 'North Korea: economic system built on forced labour', June 13, 2021

<sup>7</sup> Mass games are a group of gymnastic performances that can involve hundreds of thousands of children

<sup>8</sup> Park Chang-Shik, interview with the PSCORE (People for Successful Corean Reunification) non-profit organisation

<sup>9</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Marzuki Darusman

<sup>10</sup> Disabled Peoples' International, 'North Korea puts disabled in camps', November 19, 2007

are recruited to sexually please Kim Jong Un and other North Korean top officials. Girls from all over the country are forcibly selected to the Kippumjo based on the special criteria set by the government<sup>11ix</sup>.

These vicious and brutal policies are only a small part of the oppression North Koreans face.

Considering the harshness of such living conditions, there is no surprise that people want to escape the hostile environment. Yet, even after escaping North Korea, the defectors' journey to freedom is not finished. Most refugees choose China as it is the least challenging way of escaping. Even so, it might be the easiest, but not the safest way of fleeing the country. Just after getting through North Korean regime, the defectors need to survive its closest ally - the Chinese Communist Party. The latest incident of repatriation of 50 North Koreans by CCP is just a further corroboration of this fact. China sent the refugees to certain death, despite the prohibition of the IHRL and the principle of non-refoulement<sup>12x</sup>. Instead of fulfilling the obligation to fight the regime, the CCP, conversely, supports its vicious policies. What is more, despite the UN international ban on trade relations with North Korea, Beijing continues to provide financial assistance directly to the DPRK. Evidently, it is this aid that allows the Pyongyang to keep the power on. Without China's assistance the regime would simply come to an end, given that the country has no production resources due to its harsh climate. This suggests, the international alliance would be more successful if only it managed to collectively 'cut the cord' for the regime.

The existing disunity of the global community deters the progress and makes it extremely hard to fight the dictatorship. Though, as it has been proven over the years, that by confronting the regime singly, countries have no chance in succeeding. To elucidate, US President Donald Trump has always been conscious of the human rights situation in the DPRK and has repeatedly demonstrated readiness to put an end to the regime's cruelty. For instance, in the UN speech, he warned Kim: "They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen."<sup>13xi</sup>. Nonetheless, after receiving continuous military threats Trump could not resist the pressure of Kim and gave in: "And then all of the sudden

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<sup>11</sup> Demick, Barbara, 'Nothing to Envy; Ordinary Lives in North Korea', Spiegel and Grau, 2009

<sup>12</sup> The principle of non-refoulement under international human rights law, Article 33 of the 1951 Convention UNHCR

<sup>13</sup> Donald Trump, 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 20, 2017

somebody's my best friend. I'm a very flexible person"<sup>14xii</sup>. Moreover, at the latest joint conference presidents of the USA and South Korea pledged North Korea to continue working together in order to solve current misunderstandings in the relationships<sup>15xiii</sup>. These examples suggest that instead of confronting Kim with an ultimatum, powerful political leaders are choosing to give in.

Perhaps the most worrisome situation remains in the Japan-DPRK relationship. Regarding the recent increase in abductions of Japanese citizens by North Korean government, Katsunobu Kato, Chief Cabinet Secretary, pledged "international community to demand the resolution of the abductions issue as a global issue"<sup>xiv16</sup>. After repeatedly failing to address the problem, the Japanese government has finally realized that the key to success is uniting with the international community. As Donald Trump once noticed about North Korea: "If the righteous many do not confront the wicked few, then evil will triumph"<sup>17xvi</sup>. The reason for the failures of US, Japan, South Korea in the fight against the dictatorship is that they do it single-handedly. Instead of succumbing to the regime and trying to come up with a compromise, political leaders should call for a collective action. Unanimously standing up against the dictatorship will give Kim no other choice but to bend under pressure.

Human suffering is the consequence of inconsistency in attempts to defeat the regime. While some politicians choose to stay oblivious and indifferent to the issue and some are repeatedly failing to address the problem single-handedly, people in North Korea continue to encounter hardship. The international community demonstrates its failure in responsibility to protect vulnerable populations. But isn't it the mission of leading countries to protect the vulnerable? Doesn't China as a member of the UN Security Council have an obligation to fight the regime and refrain from trade relationships or financial aid? Why do permanent members of the security council and other countries ignore the continuous breaches of human rights? According to the Security Council Resolution 1674, the USA, as well as China, France, Russia and the UK, took the duty to "protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against

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<sup>14</sup> Donald Trump, interview with the Wall Street Journal, January 11, 2018

<sup>15</sup> Joe Biden and Moon Jae-in, joint news conference at the White House, May 21, 2021

<sup>16</sup> Katsunobu Kato, Chief Cabinet Secretary, online U.N. symposium, June 29, 2021, Tokyo

<sup>17</sup> Donald Trump, 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 20, 2017

humanity”<sup>18xv</sup>. A similar ‘Responsibility to Protect’<sup>19xvi</sup> was countersigned by all UN members on the 2005 World Summit. As evident, political leaders all over the world collectively took the authority to protect the vulnerable, such as the people of North Korea. Yet, no countries so far have taken any substantial actions against the regime.

Facing no significant contradiction from the outside has made Kim realize his invincibility. The consequence is the rising number of nuclear threats from the North Korean leader. As evidence, at the 2020 party leaders’ meeting, Kim Jong Un announced the ending to the suspension of nuclear tests. Notably, Kim left a door open, stating that “the start of testing depends on the US attitude”<sup>20xvii</sup>. After that the North Korean leader went on to threaten other countries, asserting that “the world will witness a new strategic weapon”<sup>21xix</sup>. These constant threats suggest that without being ‘punished’, Kim’s attempts to bully the rest of the world will only increase.

Given such behaviour, it is extremely important to start taking actions against the institution that threatens the world before it expands further. In the past, the international community has already dealt with the repulsive dictatorship. England, desperate to avoid a new war, was ready to negotiate Nazi’s expansion plans. Given such powers Hitler saw it as a sign to act. Only after Nazi fired rockets at England in 1941, meanwhile planning to do the same with US, (working on the ‘V2’) did the world finally realize the severity of the threat. The collective action against Hitler was taken just on time. Nonetheless, millions of lost lives and the damage that was done were already irreversible. As we all know history likes to repeat itself. Just like the world realised that Nazi had to be stopped, same should happen with the North Korean leader and his nuclear powers. The Nazi dictatorship is one of many examples of how neglect can lead to devastating consequences for humanity. Society cannot fail again!

To summarize, one can agree that it is the nuclear powers that keep political leaders from taking any actions against the dictatorship. Yet, it is important to

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<sup>18</sup> Security Council, Resolution 1674, Adopted by the Security Council at its 5430th meeting, 28 April 2006

<sup>19</sup> “If any state is “manifestly failing” in its protection responsibilities (including crimes against humanity), then states should take collective action to protect the population”, Pillar three, Implementing the responsibility to protect, Report of the Secretary-General, Distr. January 12, 2009

<sup>20</sup> Kim Jong Un, Korean Central Agency (KCNA), Four-day gathering of the Party leaders in Pyongyang, January 1, 2020

understand that if leading countries unite, their powers will significantly prevail. Therefore, Kim would be denied the opportunity to pressure and threaten others with his military powers. An equally significant aspect is that the mission to fight the regime cannot solely be put on the UN. There is no denying that United Nations has both great resources and the obligation to fight the ‘breaches of peace or acts of aggression’<sup>21xviii</sup>. Nonetheless, in the face of such murderous dictatorship UN alone simply lacks the powers to fight it. It takes both - politicians and United Nations.

Above all, North Korea represents one of the biggest challenges for humanity. Its homicidal regime and continuous threats to the global community cannot go on unpunished. It is useless for one country to fight with it alone. The key to success is uniting. The regime can only be defeated by collective actions. As for society, the best we can do to help the international community is raise awareness of the problem. North Koreans cannot speak for themselves, but we can. Moreover, one can help by starting fundraising and rescue teams<sup>xix</sup>, supporting North Korean human rights movements. Such committed and influential communities like Exeter College and the University of Oxford can contribute to the fight against the dictatorship. Together we can change the narrative and put an end to the repulsive dictatorship!

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<sup>21</sup> United Nations Charter, Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression

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<sup>iv</sup> Human Rights Watch - international non-governmental organization, that investigates and reports Human rights abuses all over the world)

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<sup>xi</sup> Donald Trump, 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 20, 2017

<sup>xii</sup> Donald Trump, interview with the Wall Street Journal, January 11, 2018

<sup>xiii</sup> Joe Biden and Moon Jae-in, joint news conference at the White House, May 21, 2021

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<sup>xv</sup> Security Council, Resolution 1674, Adopted by the Security Council at its 5430th meeting, 28 April 2006

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<sup>xviii</sup> United Nations Charter, Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression

<sup>xix</sup> <https://www.libertyinnorthkorea.org/rescue-teams>

(You can start a rescue team as a part of NGO Liberty in North Korea organisation)