

## Report on Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) remains one of the most repressive countries in the world and stands in stark contrast to democratic governments elsewhere in Asia. The country, one of the world's most closed and militarized societies, is a dictatorship under the absolute rule of Kim Jong Il, General Secretary of the Korean Workers' Party. An estimated 150,000 to 200,000 persons are believed to be held in detention camps in remote areas, many for political reasons. Defectors report that many prisoners have died from torture, starvation, disease, exposure, or a combination of these causes. North Korean officials reportedly prohibited live births in prison, and forced abortions were performed, particularly in detention centers holding women repatriated from China. Over the years, there have been unconfirmed reports from a few defectors alleging the testing on human subjects of a variety of chemical and biological agents up through the early 1990s. The regime controlled many aspects of citizens' lives, denying freedom of speech, religion, the press, assembly, and association. The deportation of North Koreans from China to the DPRK was a matter of particular concern to the United States. A number of repatriated North Koreans faced severe punishment upon their return, including execution in some cases. The regime also severely restricted freedom of movement and worker rights. There were widespread reports of women and girls being trafficked in China.

The North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 was enacted to raise awareness of the serious human rights situation in the country and to find durable solutions for North Korean refugees. Since enactment of the law, the United States has heightened its engagement on North Korean human rights issues. Since his appointment in 2005, Special Envoy on Human Rights in North Korea Jay Lefkowitz has urged other countries, including the Republic of Korea (ROK), Japan, and the European Union, to join the growing international campaign urging the DPRK to address and improve its human rights conditions. In April at the White House, President Bush met with a group of North Korean defectors and the family of a Japanese girl abducted by the DPRK.

During the year the U.S. Government continued to fund an international advocacy campaign focused on North Korean human rights. In March, for the first time, several North Korean defectors testified before the European Parliament about the human rights conditions in the DPRK, and in July a conference was held in Rome. In addition, the U.S. Government continued to provide funding to promote international awareness of the North Korean human rights situation and to increase the flow of independent information into North Korea.

Numerous U.S. officials worked to raise awareness of the country's human rights abuses with the international community in both bilateral and multilateral fora and before U.S. audiences. U.S. officials also urged other governments to call for concrete, verifiable, and sustained improvements in North Korean human rights as an important component of their bilateral relations with the country. Human rights remain part of the U.S. Government's comprehensive agenda with North Korea, and U.S. officials have repeatedly stated that improvements in the DPRK's human rights record would be

necessary for the country to join the international community and normalize relations with the United States. During a congressional hearing on North Korean human rights in April, Special Envoy Lefkowitz criticized the North Korean government for abducting ROK and Japanese citizens.

In November the United States cosponsored a resolution before the UN General Assembly Third Committee that condemned the country's poor human rights record, expressing "very serious concern" at "continuing reports of systemic, widespread, and grave violations of human rights." In December the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution, marking the second time such a resolution has passed. The resolution called on the DPRK to fulfill its obligations under human rights instruments to which it is a party. The resolution further urged the government to invite UN special representatives to visit the DPRK and to ensure that humanitarian organizations have free access to the country. The resolution also requested the secretary general to submit a comprehensive report on the human rights situation in the DPRK.

The United States remained deeply concerned about the plight of North Korean refugees and asylum seekers and continued to work to find durable solutions for this vulnerable population as outlined in the North Korean Human Rights Act. The United States granted asylum to nine refugees and resettled them in the United States during the year. The United States worked with governments in the region to urge protection of, and assistance to, North Korean refugees and to facilitate their permanent resettlement. The U.S. Government has consistently and at high levels urged China to adhere to its obligations as a party to the 1951 refugee convention and its 1967 protocol, including by: 1) not expelling to North Korea (refouling) North Koreans protected under those treaties and 2) undertaking to cooperate with the office of the UN high commissioner for refugees in the exercise of its functions. The United States also urged China to cease deportation of North Korean asylum seekers and allow the office of the high commissioner access to them. The United States has addressed the issue of North Korean refugees in China with the office of the high commissioner, and sought to coordinate the U.S. approach with allies who share U.S. concerns. In April the White House expressed grave concern about China's deportation of a North Korean asylum seeker who had sought refuge at a Korean school in China and urged the Chinese government not to return the asylum seekers. President Bush also raised the issue with Chinese President Hu Jintao during his visit later that month.

During the year, Secretary of State Rice again designated the DPRK a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for severe violations of religious freedom.