



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

Provisional

9398th meeting

Thursday, 17 August 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

President: Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. França Danese
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Arab Emirates	Ms. Shaheen
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki

Agenda

The situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

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23-24318 (E)



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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Security Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Republic of Korea to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Ms. Elizabeth Salmón, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; and Mr. Ilhyeok Kim, civil society representative.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Türk.

Mr. Türk: This open meeting is a welcome opportunity to reflect and act on the dire situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — not least as human rights underpin peace and security, humanitarian action and development.

Human suffering on such a scale and of such magnitude engenders instability internally and has wider implications. Rarely has the Democratic People's Republic of Korea been more painfully closed to the outside world than it is today. That is the result of Government policies that were initially linked to containing the coronavirus disease pandemic but have grown even more extensive as the pandemic has waned. Information collected by my Office, including through interviews and drawn from public information issued by the Government itself, indicates the increasing repression of the rights to freedoms of expression, privacy and movement, the persistence of widespread forced labour practices and a worsening situation for economic and social rights owing to the closure of markets and other forms of income generation.

Anyone who views so-called “reactionary ideology and culture” — a term used for information received from abroad, in particular the Republic of

Korea — may now face imprisonment of 5 to 15 years. Any person found to have distributed such content faces life imprisonment or even the death penalty. A travel permit system enables the State to control all travel within the country. It imposes, without trial, prison terms of up to three months in a State labour camp for violating travel orders. Following the closure of the country's borders in response to the pandemic, border guards were explicitly ordered to use lethal force against people who approach the border without prior notice. Since the border shutdown, only a handful of people have managed to leave the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The widespread imposition of forced labour by the State has continued during the recent border closures. According to our information, State-run institutions have continued to rely on the forced mobilization of men and women, without pay, to maintain the operation of key sectors of the economy, such as construction, mining and agricultural production. The long-standing and profoundly disturbing practice of forced mobilization has extended to children, as noted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In interviews, a number of men sent to work in other countries for the purpose of generating income for the State described conditions that are tantamount to forced labour, including the imposition of extensive surveillance; physically arduous and sometimes dangerous work; minimal health and safety measures; long working hours without breaks or holidays; and inadequate remuneration, as the major share of people's wages is taken by the State.

Within the country, markets and other private means of generating income have been largely shut down and such activity is increasingly criminalized. That sharply constrains the ability of people to provide for themselves and their families. Given the limits of State-run economic institutions, many people appear to be facing extreme hunger, as well as acute shortages of medication. In March 2023, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations noted that,

“A large portion of the population suffers from low levels of food consumption and poor dietary diversity, with food security expected to remain fragile in light of persisting economic constraints and agricultural shortfalls”.

There are reports that starvation exists in parts of the country. The authorities acknowledge some of the

challenges and have indicated that they are open to international cooperation to address them. However, to date offers of humanitarian support have been largely rebuffed or have been made impossible owing to border closures. International humanitarian actors, including the United Nations country team, remain barred from the country, together with almost all other foreign nationals.

While in the past the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have endured periods of severe economic difficulty and at other times the severe repression of their rights, currently they appear to be suffering both. According to our information, people are becoming increasingly desperate as informal markets and other coping mechanisms are dismantled — while their fear of State surveillance, arrest, interrogation and detention has increased. That situation follows decades of chronic human rights violations, some of which the Government has acknowledged. Those violations have been catalogued in detail by the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which was mandated by the Human Rights Council a decade ago and the groundbreaking report of which (A/HRC/25/63) contributed to the creation of this agenda item. Recent reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, reports of my Office to the Human Rights Council and the work of the Special Rapporteur have echoed that litany of suffering.

The Government's surveillance of its citizens, both at home and abroad, has reached an intensity rarely seen in other countries. People's rights to privacy are systematically violated. Homes are subjected to random searches. Neighbours and family members are encouraged to report on each other. Punishments for even minor infractions can be severe, possibly amounting to gross violations of human rights. The exercise of the fundamental human rights to freedom of expression, thought, conscience, religion, peaceful assembly and association can be sanctioned by extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances into one of the country's political prisons or other severely disproportionate punitive measures. Thousands of enforced disappearances have been perpetrated by the State over the past 70 years, including enforced disappearances of Koreans from both north and south of the Korean Demilitarized Zone and the abduction of other foreigners, mostly Japanese nationals. I sympathize deeply with the families of those who were abducted or disappeared and who now are or would be

aged in their eighties and nineties. It is imperative that we exert all efforts to ensure some measure of justice before it is too late.

The same consideration applies to the north-south cross-border family reunion scheme, which has given hope and deeply valued connection to tens of thousands of separated families. The scheme has been cruelly stalled since 2018, owing to political tensions. For all the victims of the many violations and crimes committed over decades in and by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, accountability is essential. In the absence of any meaningful action to achieve that goal by the authorities of the State, I encourage action by other Member States or in international forums, including the International Criminal Court. Non-judicial forms of accountability must also be considered, including truth-telling, the recovery of remains and reparations programmes — which were particularly requested by victims during the consultations that my staff held in Seoul. Meanwhile, my field presence in Seoul continues to monitor and document human rights violations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and to explore pathways to accountability while preserving information that might be used for that purpose in a central repository.

It is estimated that thousands of North Koreans are currently at risk of being repatriated involuntarily to their home country, where they may be subjected to torture, arbitrary detention or other serious human rights violations. The precarious human rights situation that I have just described means that North Koreans have an undeniable, compelling need for international protection. I therefore urge all States to refrain from forcibly repatriating North Koreans, and to provide them with the required protections and humanitarian support. The persistence of severe, widespread and long-standing human rights violations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea cannot be seen in isolation from peace and security issues on the peninsula and within the wider region.

Many of the violations I have referred to stem directly from, or support, the increasing militarization of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. For example, the widespread use of forced labour, including labour in political prison camps, the forced use of schoolchildren to collect harvests, the requirement for families to undertake labour and provide a quota of goods to the Government and the confiscation of wages from overseas workers — all support the military

apparatus of the State and its ability to build weapons. The Charter of the United Nations makes it clear that human rights violations of that order are a matter of international concern. Sustainable peace can be built only by advancing human rights and its corollaries: reconciliation, inclusion and justice.

The international human rights treaties and human rights bodies provide a shared framework in which to identify challenges, address disagreements and measure progress, thereby helping to reduce tensions both within and between States. In the past, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was an active participant in a number of those mechanisms, despite its criticisms of various aspects of their work. Regrettably, in recent years it has cut itself off from those much-needed sources of dialogue and guidance.

My Office continues to encourage the Government to respond positively to my offer of technical assistance. The next universal periodic review of the country, to be conducted in November 2024, provides a window of opportunity for engagement, confidence-building and progress. I also hope that the country will reopen to the world, paving the way for other forms of interactions with the United Nations. The return of the United Nations country team to Pyongyang and the conclusion of a new partnership framework would be crucial to advancing coordinated work to address the suffering of the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In the spirit of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I urge the authorities to engage in meaningful dialogue and to reset much-needed freedoms as a foundation for enduring peace.

The President: I thank Mr. Türk for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Salmón.

Ms. Salmón: It is my honour to brief the members of the Security Council and to bring to their attention the pain of the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, whose human rights have continued to deteriorate under the current state of tensions and unprecedented isolation.

The prolonged border shutdown, which started in early 2020, has brought increased hardship. The informal markets in the country, known in Korean as *jangmadang*, have been significantly repressed, depriving a vast number of people of their livelihoods and preventing many from buying food. Women

have been particularly affected given their rising involvement in commercial activities. Some people are starving. Others have died due to a combination of malnutrition, diseases and lack of access to health care. Access to food, medicines and health care remains a priority concern.

This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement, signed in 1953. Yet there is currently no visible sign of peacemaking on the horizon. On the contrary, the frozen conflict is being used to justify continued militarization within the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, with devastating effects on its people. North Korea's military-first policy, known as *songun*, gives priority to the allocation of resources to the military, thereby reducing the limited resources for respecting and fulfilling the people's human rights. Militarization also promotes the systematic exploitation of the population. The leadership in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to demand that its citizens tighten their belts so that the available resources can be used to fund its nuclear and missile programmes. It strengthens gender stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women within the family and weakens their political participation. It creates the ongoing demand for forced labour across the country and for workers sent abroad. It has caused the systematic abduction of its people and other nationals, notably from the Republic of Korea and Japan, creating cycles of separated families. And it has triggered economic sanctions, with a detrimental impact on the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in particular women and children. The international community must look again at the use and impact of such tools.

My particular concern is the situation of women and girls. Women are detained in inhumane conditions and are subjected to torture and ill-treatment, forced labour and gender-based violence by State officials. Women escapees who are forcibly repatriated to the country are subjected to strip searches and invasive body searches, aimed at searching for money hidden in their body cavities and genitals. Gender-based violence against women, including domestic violence and sexual violence, is prevalent and impunity is widely accepted. Victims and survivors have no access to reporting or protection mechanisms. Third countries must refrain from forced repatriation in compliance with the principle of non-refoulement, which is customary international law and applies to individuals who are

at risk of being subjected to torture and ill-treatment, regardless of their migration status.

I strongly encourage the members of the Security Council to consider peace beyond the absence of violence or fear of violence. Peace and security must be approached in a comprehensive manner that combines stability, equality, truth and justice, guided by human rights norms. Similarly, the necessity of justice must be recognized. The members of the Security Council could discuss what the accountability mechanism for human rights violations would look like. Member States are also encouraged to support victims and civil society organizations in both their judicial and non-judicial accountability efforts.

The preparations for any possible peacemaking process need to include women as decision makers. That process needs to start now. Negotiations to end the state of conflict should include clear benchmarks on progress on human rights — for instance, a set number of country visits each year by special procedures mandate-holders, including access to detention facilities, a set number of family reunions per year and the implementation of the recommendations that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea accepted during the universal periodic review conducted by the Human Rights Council.

We cannot remain indifferent. The pain is there. Seven decades have made it evident that neither continuing the status quo nor a build-up in military activities is an adequate response to the suffering of the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, nor do they contribute to the creation of an environment for sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula.

We must refocus international efforts to take steps to end the ongoing state of conflict, and we need to do so while prioritizing the human rights of the population of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. I call on the Security Council to place the protection of human rights at the centre of a reinvigorated peace and security agenda.

The President: I thank Ms. Salmón for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ilhyeok Kim.

Mr. Ilhyeok Kim: My name is Ilhyeok Kim. I was born and raised in a small village in North Korea. Owing to my country's poverty, I was forced to do unpaid labour from a young age. When I should have been studying hard, instead I was soaked with sweat

while planting and harvesting crops. Most of that grain went to the military, and all we were left with was the worry of what we could eat that winter.

Extreme pandemic restrictions have made the lives of North Koreans harder than ever. We also face a reign of fear that isolates North Koreans and harshly punishes people just for accessing foreign information. Even when we starve, the North Korean Government has no policy to help us. The Government turns our blood and sweat into a luxurious life for the leadership and missiles that blast our hard work into the sky. We used to think that the money spent on just one missile could feed us for three months, but the Government does not care. It is concerned only with maintaining its power, developing nuclear weapons and creating propaganda to justify its actions.

Even with such hardship, North Koreans cannot express any dissatisfaction to their Government. Our people have no human rights, no freedom of expression and no rule of law. Anyone who disagrees is taken to a political prison camp, where they will do hard labour until they die or are simply shot dead. The North Korean Government has eradicated basic human rights from my homeland.

When my family left North Korea to go to South Korea, my father's sister knew we were leaving and said goodbye to us. North Korea's secret police found out and arrested, tortured and beat her for several months because she did not report our escape. My aunt ended up in a political prison camp for the supposed crime of not reporting her older brother's family. At that time, she had a five-year-old son and a three-year-old daughter. She was forced to say her last goodbye to her beloved children. I cannot understand how my aunt and two cousins could have deserved that fate.

I desperately hope that those inhumane things will stop happening in North Korea. I hope with all of my heart that the day when all North Koreans can enjoy the same freedom that we take for granted will come one day soon, just as I now have the freedom to come here and address the Council. On that day, all North Koreans will be able to travel to the rest of the world and meet the people from Japan, Malta, Mozambique, Russia, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, Albania, Brazil, China, Ecuador, France, Gabon and Ghana, and will be able to work together for world peace and a better future for humankind. On that day, the people of those countries

will come to know the true character and potential of the people of my homeland.

Nine years ago, Ambassador Oh Joon of the Republic of Korea addressed the Council and said:

“We only hope that one day in the future, when we look back on what we have done today, we will be able to say that we did the right thing for the people of North Korea” (S/PV.7353, p.21).

If we all do what we can to guarantee the rights and freedom of North Korean people, in the future we will be able to proudly say that we did the right thing. Until that day comes, I urge the Council to continue to care about the North Korean people, to continue to discuss the human rights of North Koreans and to work to overcome the North Korean Government's physical and digital self-isolation so that the people of my homeland can see, hear and feel the vast and wonderful world that lies outside their borders.

Lastly, I want to say something to the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in our language.

It means: “No tyranny lasts forever. We North Koreans also have the right to choose lives of dignity for ourselves — therefore, stop committing such crimes against our people and choose the path of humanity.”

The President: I thank Mr. Kim for his briefing.

I will now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States of America.

Let me start by thanking High Commissioner Türk and Special Rapporteur Salmón for their sobering briefings and their recommendations to the Council. The human rights violations and abuses they detailed are so horrific that they are almost unfathomable.

But today, we heard from someone who lived those horrors — and who shared his story with the world. I am inspired by Mr. Kim. I am inspired by his bravery. By speaking out, he has helped advance the dignity and the rights of people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. I thank him profusely for his presence today and hope all members of the Council heard his appeal directly to all of us.

This year, we mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes that “the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of

freedom, justice, and peace”. The vast majority of the world — and every Security Council member — has signed on to that foundational document, and the Council has repeatedly affirmed its responsibility to protect human rights, given their inherent connection to conflict and stability.

Now, the Council has not always lived up to that responsibility, but there have been recent flashes of progress. In April, for example, we unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the Taliban's restrictions on women and girls (resolution 2681 (2023)), and last December, we adopted a resolution on Myanmar that called on all parties to respect human rights (resolution 2669 (2022)). Still, the Council has been silent on a host of other human rights abuses, including abuses carried out by one of the most repressive and totalitarian States in the world: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We all just heard from all three of our briefers, who described the situation that we are faced with in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Inaction is unacceptable, which is why the United States joined Albania and Japan in requesting this long-overdue meeting. It is an undeniable matter of international peace and security — one that demands the Council's attention, especially because the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has not improved since the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea issued its landmark report (A/HRC/25/63) almost a decade ago. The commission found that the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had committed systematic, widespread, and gross human rights violations and that in many instances, the violations entailed crimes against humanity.

Reports indicate that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to hold more than 80,000 individuals in political prison camps, where, according to reports, they are widely subjected to arbitrary or summary executions, torture, starvation, gender-based violence, forced abortions and forced labour. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has also engaged in acts of transnational repression against its own citizens and foreign nationals. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's activities abroad have included assassination, surveillance, intimidation, abduction and forced repatriation, sometimes with the assistance of other Governments, and sometimes without the consent of other Governments, which shows the Democratic

People's Republic of Korea's lack of respect for State sovereignty.

We cannot have peace without human rights, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a case in point. Kim Jong Un's repressive, totalitarian control of society and the systemic, widespread denial of human rights and fundamental freedoms ensure the regime can expend inordinate public resources developing its unlawful weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programmes without public objection. That war machine, which stands in violation of multiple Security Council resolutions, is powered by repression and cruelty. But make no mistake: the regime neglects the well-being of people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Its food distribution policies favour the military and lead to chronic malnourishment among its citizens. Pyongyang also relies on forced labour and the exploitation of workers — domestically and overseas — to power its unlawful weapons programme.

Security Council resolution 2397 (2017) required all Member States to repatriate nationals of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea earning income in their jurisdiction no later than December 2019. Unfortunately, instead of repatriating some individuals and fulfilling their Security Council obligations, some Council members have repatriated people who have fled the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — people seeking a better life, people seeking freedom, people in need of protection, like Mr. Kim.

I recently met with 10 young defectors from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea who risked everything for freedom, and I was brought to tears as they told me about their dangerous escapes — sometimes twice, as they were returned after their first attempts. They told me about the harrowing conditions from which they fled and about what it is like to be separated from their loved ones. One defector said that he wants nothing more than to see his dad again. He told me how much it pains him not to be able to wish his dad a happy birthday. However, while the defectors I met are cut off from their country, they have never — never — stopped dreaming of a brighter future for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. They have never stopped fighting for those who still live under tyranny. We must follow the example of those young activists, like Mr. Kim. The modern world has no place for the brutality of the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and the international community and the Council must continue to speak out against that

injustice and its destabilizing impact on regional and international peace and security.

The United States has made human rights a key focus of our presidency of the Security Council this month, and we will continue to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms at home and around the world. No country has a perfect human rights record. We all have our flaws. But in open societies, people can protest — they can drive progress forward. In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — a closed, hermetically sealed country — everything is shrouded in secrecy. People are under constant surveillance, and those who speak out can be thrown in prison, or worse, even executed. Therefore, we must give voice to the voiceless, and we must take up their cause.

I suspect some in this Chamber will shrug off Mr. Kim's brave testimony or call this meeting another demonstration of United States hostility. That is deeply cynical, and it is absurd. This meeting has always had a singular objective: to fight for the rights of the people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and to fight for international peace and security.

It is unfortunate that some continue to try to protect the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea from international accountability. But courageous defectors, United Nations experts and reporters will continue to expose further abuses. They will continue to demand accountability. And the Security Council must continue to call out the Democratic People's Republic of Korea regime's human rights violations and abuses.

Let us therefore, in the words of Mr. Ilhyeok Kim, work together for world peace and for a better future for humanity.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): Let me start by thanking the United States presidency of the Security Council, and you, personally, Madam President, for organizing today's important meeting.

I thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk, for his insightful briefing. We fully concur with his assessment on the importance of this meeting and the direct link of the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with peace and stability in the Korean

peninsula and beyond. I also thank Special Rapporteur Salmón for her sober assessment. Of all United Nations rapporteurs on human rights issues, Ms. Salmón has something close to an impossible task. We commend her for her efforts and commitment to addressing the disastrous human rights situation in the most secretive and tyrannical of States, one that has turned into an information black hole.

I was deeply touched by Mr. Ilhyeok Kim's powerful account because it resonated with me personally, and, I am sure, with anyone who has lived under a brutal dictatorship. I thank him for being in the Chamber today and helping us to seriously reflect on how the international community should react in the face of the brutal misery that over 25 million North Koreans continue to experience daily, with no end in sight.

The last meeting on this issue in the Council was held six years ago (see S/PV.8130). Today's meeting is therefore long overdue and could not be timelier. We are not going back in time; we are just bringing the Council up to speed. As we heard clearly and explicitly from all our briefers, during these six long years, the situation of human rights in North Korea has not improved; rather, it has worsened. The number of people suffering from violations has increased, and the collective misery brutally imposed by a draconian, paranoid and criminal regime has expanded.

Let me briefly explain why this meeting is necessary, important, timely and useful. This meeting provides us with a moment to shed a bit of light on the darkness of a country where the regime does not tolerate pluralism, where independent media, civil society organizations, and trade unions are banned, where all basic liberties, including the freedom of expression, public assembly, association and religion are systematically denied. The North Korean regime uses fear and inflicts collective punishment to silence dissidents. It routinely sends those perceived as opponents to secretive political prison camps where they are subject to torture, starvation and forced labour.

North Korea is the bizarre place in the world where the Government decides on what people read, what people watch, even what people should think. If, God forbid, a person is caught watching a foreign movie not sanctioned by the Government or speaking to a foreigner, such "reactionary behaviour", as they call it, will be severely punished, including with death sentences.

For all those reasons, today's meeting sends a strong message of solidarity with an entire population trapped inside a country-wide prison. The message is "we will not forget you". It is an expression of sympathy and support for all those who, after having escaped the labour camps, are praying not to be repatriated to the Democratic People's Republic in compliance with the principle of non-refoulement. It is a manifestation of support for all political prisoners and all those forced to work in concentration camps. Today's meeting is for all the malnourished children who are entitled to a healthy childhood, not starvation, who need quality education, not military parades. This meeting is for all the women and girls who have been forcibly trafficked and subjected to sexual violence from high-ranking military officials in detention centres, held in inhumane conditions and deprived of food.

This meeting is also a call to a regime whose priority and obsession is and remains militarization, more weapons, more missiles and more warmongering policies. The unlawful weapons-of-mass-destruction and ballistic-missile programmes are developed — and we know it — with open disregard for Security Council decisions, and the systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations committed by the institutions and officials of the Democratic People's Republic serve the regime's unlawful activities. The regime is stealing food from the family table, denying medicine to hospitals, starving people in labour camps and abusing children, only to invest in its nuclear and ballistic-missile programmes.

All of the foregoing has been reported continuously by independent United Nations rapporteurs and in other credible reports. It was also confirmed this morning by the High Commissioner and the other briefers. Today's meeting is therefore another attempt to rally the Security Council to stand up to policies and actions that put peace and security in the Korean peninsula in serious danger. As the Special Rapporteur highlighted, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea regime must be held accountable, not shielded from responsibility, for its repeated flagrant breaches of international law and human rights. This is so because shielding the regime means opposing the people.

There is so much more to say, but I would like to conclude with a few words that, it is my wish, will, in one way or another, be heard somewhere in North Korea. It is a personal account, like the one we heard from Mr. Ilhyeok Kim.

A bit more than three decades ago, like most of my compatriots, I was living under a regime not unlike the current one in North Korea. It was a regime so paranoid that it had crumbled upon itself, totally self-isolated and forgotten in its madness, having invested for decades in what it considered to be the best weapon of defence: bunkers. Hundreds of thousands of concrete monsters of all sizes were built and planted everywhere and used as an effective propaganda tool to convince a reclusive population — of which I was a part — that we could resist every foreign attack — an attack that never came, because no one had any intention of attacking my country. These bunkers were merely the expression of the sick thoughts of the *nomenklatura* that needed to subjugate its people with fear. When youth fomented change, in the early 1990s, when our part of the Berlin Wall fell, we discovered that the only things we were left with were our absolute misery and the bunkers.

Fast-forward 30 years and we see that, in the course of three decades, my country has developed more than it had done in the previous 300 years. This did not happen by any miracle, but simply as the result of one simple thing: we understood that we could go faster and further by investing in people, rights and freedoms, in cooperating with neighbours and in openness with the world. Those who for decades were considered our worst enemies turned out actually to be our best friends.

If ever North Korea was looking for a lesson learned, I offer the following. Weapons will never change the country, they will never feed the population, they will never bring prosperity. Instead, freedom, rule of law, education, health, investment in human capital, cooperation and trade with neighbours will shorten the path to the future — a future North Koreans deserve. They do not have to go too far; all they need to do is take a look across the demilitarized zone to the south.

That is why we, as Council members and, I hope, friends of the people of North Korea, should consider it to be our duty to raise our voices against all human rights violations, because rights or the absence thereof determine everything for people — for those whom we have all made the commitment to putting at the centre of our attention and work — and they have been proven to have a direct impact on peace and security in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and everywhere else.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Mr. Türk and Ms. Salmón for their insightful briefings. I also thank

Mr. Ilhyeok Kim, civil society representative, for sharing his truly heartbreaking first-hand account of the situation in North Korea. We appreciate the courage he has shown in being with us in the Chamber today.

Today, after nearly six years, we reconvene in the Security Council Chamber to discuss the human rights situation in North Korea, one of the most egregious in the world, and its implications for international peace and security. Over a decade ago, the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea identified the systematic, widespread and gross violations of human rights in North Korea, many of which were labelled crimes against humanity. Today, as pointed out by briefers, we see that the same troubling patterns persist. The dreadful human rights situation in North Korea remains stagnant, showing no improvements or even hints of it. Japan finds that deeply alarming and unacceptable. The briefers' insights also underscore the Commission's assertion that North Korea is unparalleled in its human rights violations in the contemporary world.

The reason for that stagnation is clear. North Korea staunchly imposes on its people the regime's pursuits, in particular its unlawful nuclear and missile developments. That alone compellingly illustrates the inextricable link between North Korea's human rights abuses and its pursuit of militaristic ambition, but it does not end there. The relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions reveal another facet of North Korea's disturbing scheme: the exploitation of its people overseas sent to foreign shores. Those individuals are trapped in a life of servitude, their efforts directly supporting North Korea's unlawful nuclear and missile programmes.

Worse still is the regime's the denial to people at home. North Korea has been diverting essential resources towards its unlawful development of nuclear weapons and missiles at the expense of the welfare of people in North Korea, while they have great unmet needs. According to the 2023 report *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*, nearly half the population is undernourished in North Korea. That is a staggering number — 12 million people. How many mouths could have been fed, how many lives uplifted, including those of the young generation, had those resources been properly channelled?

For perspective, consider that North Korea launched a record number of 70 or more missiles

last year, and it has already launched four times this year intercontinental ballistic-class missiles, most likely capable of reaching all parts of Asia, Europe, North America, Africa and even some parts of South America, in violation of multiple Security Council resolutions. North Korea has also indicated it will continue such unlawful and dangerous acts, including mass production of nuclear warheads.

The intertwining of human rights violations with international peace and security cannot be more obvious in the case of North Korea. I must stress that addressing such deep concerns is clearly central to the mission of the Security Council.

Please allow me to raise a particularly serious human rights violation by North Korea: abductions.

Many Japanese citizens, including a girl as young as 13, were kidnapped by North Korean agents. The act of international abductions infringes on a nation's sovereignty and jeopardizes the well-being and safety of its citizens, thus posing a serious risk to the international community. The abductees remain trapped, their agonies renewed each passing day, and has High Commissioner Türk noted, with every tick of the clock, aging families despair, as their dreams of reunion remain unrealized. Many have unfortunately passed away with the pain of separation as their last memory of their loved one.

But Japan is not alone. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recognizes that nationals from the Republic of Korea, China, France, Lebanon, Malaysia, Romania, Singapore and Thailand have shared that sorrow.

The urgency is palpable. I urge the international community to come together to achieve the speedy return of each and every abductee.

This year marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While strides have been made, the grave human rights landscape in North Korea and its unsettling implications for international peace and security stand out starkly.

It is imperative that North Korea heed the messages from the Council today. It is high time it embarked on tangible measures to address serious human rights violations, ceased its unlawful nuclear and missiles programmes, fully complied with all relevant resolutions and returned to dialogue.

At the same time, it falls upon the Security Council to consistently bring the situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the fore until North Korea recalibrates its stance on human rights and genuinely commits to fostering international peace and security. We must continue our work.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ms. Elizabeth Salmón, for their informative briefings. I would like to commend the courage of Ilhyeok Kim for his moving testimony. I thank him for joining us.

France fully supports the holding of this meeting, as human rights are one of the fundamental pillars of the United Nations. The Security Council must continue to address the massive and systematic violations of human rights in North Korea. Those violations undermine regional and international peace and security.

While the North Korean regime pursues its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes at an unprecedented pace, in defiance of all Security Council resolutions adopted in this Chamber, the human rights situation in North Korea remains alarming.

Despite repeated calls by the international community to respect human rights in North Korea, nothing has changed and nothing is changing. Widespread ill-treatment, arbitrary detentions and arrests, separated families: the fundamental rights and freedoms of North Koreans are systematically flouted by the regime. Nor should we forget the victims of enforced disappearance, including in South Korea and Japan.

The humanitarian situation also remains tragic. The population continues to suffer from food insecurity, alarming detention conditions and dire health conditions. Nearly 20 per cent of North Korean children suffer from stunted growth.

Despite repeated calls from the international community, the Pyongyang regime refuses to engage with the various United Nations human rights protection mechanisms.

France commends the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the work and the mission of the Special Rapporteur. Despite a lack of access to the country, they continue to document the

human rights situation and the violations committed by the regime. They must continue to be supported in their mandate, as their mission is essential.

North Korea must cease its serious violations. It must resume cooperation with the United Nations and comply with international human rights law and international humanitarian law without delay.

France calls on North Korea to resume its dialogue with the international community and facilitate the return of international humanitarian staff and diplomatic missions on its territory. It is essential that the Pyongyang regime allow United Nations staff to return to North Korea and guarantee full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout the territory, so that all necessary aid can reach its population.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the briefings by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ms. Elizabeth Salmón. I am also grateful for the testimony by Mr. Ilhyeok Kim. I recognize the presence of the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea at this meeting.

When the United Nations asked the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for its opinion on the implementation of resolution 46/17 of the Human Rights Council, the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea responded that it does not recognize the resolutions of that Council, whose resolutions it considers to be products of hostile policies. How then can it be argued that the situation of human rights in a country must come under the exclusive purview of the Human Rights Council, when that country refuses to comply with the provisions of the relevant resolutions of that body or even those of the General Assembly? With the adoption of General Assembly resolution 77/226 on 15 December 2022, the General Assembly condemned the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for diverting its resources from ensuring the welfare of its people to the development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

I am obliged to recall that the Security Council itself has responded to the issue through its resolutions 2321 (2016), 2371 (2017), 2375 (2017) and 2397 (2017), which underscore the need for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to respect and ensure the welfare and inherent dignity of its people, while also deploring the

severe hardships to which the people of that country have been subjected. Moreover, in each of those resolutions the Council condemned the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,

“for pursuing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles instead of the welfare of its people while people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have great unmet needs”.

Of course, Ecuador believes that there is no justification for anyone having nuclear weapons and that they must be entirely eliminated, especially given that in 2022 they represented global expenditures of more than \$82 billion dollars at a time of growing food insecurity and famine in the world. But the continuing deterioration of the situation of the population of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a sharp counterpoint to the arms build-up and nuclear programme, which by itself is responsible for exacerbating tensions on the Korean peninsula and in the world.

Furthermore, in the 2017 resolutions that I mentioned, the very same Council refers to the highly food-insecure situation of the population of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, including a very large number of pregnant and lactating women and children under the age of five who are at risk of malnutrition, with one quarter of the total population suffering from chronic malnutrition and 41 per cent of the population undernourished. My delegation urges the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to end its human rights violations and weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner. We also urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to resolve the issue of abductees and immediately return them, including Japanese nationals and nationals of the Republic of Korea. The conclusions that the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea reached 10 years ago remain valid today. I therefore reiterate the need for the Security Council to continue to consider them with a view to making decisions that will ensure accountability and promote peace and stability in the region and the world.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): I begin by noting the objectives for this meeting and reaffirm Ghana's support for the human rights pillar of the work of the United Nations.

We thank the briefers for their perspectives and encourage the further efforts of relevant United Nations

bodies in helping the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to completely fulfil its obligation to promote and protect the rights of its citizens. In that regard, we welcome the work of United Nations human rights mechanisms concerning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and appreciate their efforts to raise awareness on the gaps that need to be addressed in order to ensure full respect for the human rights of the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We support the work of the Special Rapporteur on the situation on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and will continue to constructively engage within the Third Committee on the situation of human rights in that country.

As we commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, we underscore the importance of respect for the entire spectrum of human rights in upholding the dignity of all persons and for the progress and stability of societies. We emphasize the need for human rights issues not to be politicized and for the same attention to be given to economic, social and cultural rights as is given to civil and political rights. That is important to sustain peace across the globe. This year also marks the seventieth anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement. The commemoration should spur us all on to foster peace and promote reconciliation. Securing the reunion of separated families is one way of building trust among the Korean people, and it could also play an important role in promoting reconciliation, peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and the region in general. We therefore encourage the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea to prioritize work on finding ways to resume reunions, online or offline.

We appeal to the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to release and return the 17 Japanese nationals officially recognized by the Government of Japan as having been abducted. We further call on the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to provide the families of all persons who have been abducted or otherwise considered as forcibly disappeared with comprehensive information on their fate and whereabouts, if they have survived, and to allow those who are still alive and their descendants to return immediately to their countries of origin and, in close cooperation with their families and nations of origin, to identify and repatriate the physical remains of those who have died.

Ghana notes the increasing challenges of gathering independent and credible information on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea since the outbreak of the coronavirus disease pandemic. We urge for a constructive engagement between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and United Nations to support efforts to ensure the human rights of its nationals and address the growing humanitarian needs.

While we are concerned by the human rights and humanitarian situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, we firmly hold the view that country-specific human rights questions should be dealt with by the relevant United Nations human rights bodies, with the narrow and limited exception being instances in which a systematic and widespread violation of human rights aggravates an ongoing conflict situation and in which a State is either incapable of addressing or unwilling to address the matter, as verified by independent sources. We therefore express reservations concerning the Council's further consideration of the matter and urge the appropriate United Nations human rights bodies and mechanisms with existing mandates to continue their efforts to gather all available information and data and report on the human rights situation of the North Korean people.

In conclusion, Ghana reiterates its support for the human rights pillar of the work of the United Nations, and encourages global respect for human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all persons without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, as called for by Article 1, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations.

Ms. Shaheen (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for his briefing. We listened closely to the briefing by Ms. Elizabeth Salmón, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We also listened to the moving briefing and call made by Mr. Ilhyeok Kim, civil society representative.

The United Arab Emirates condemns the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for continuing the development of its nuclear and ballistic capabilities, which poses a clear threat not only to neighbouring States but also to international peace and security. We call upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to

respect international law, stop its flagrant violations and comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions, including by stopping its continued launching of ballistic missiles.

The United Arab Emirates attaches great importance to international human rights law, especially the primary responsibility of States to protect and promote human rights within their territories and jurisdiction, which is a fundamental principle of the United Nations system. We are deeply concerned about United Nations reports of continued violations of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as well as sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, the abduction of foreign nationals and other violations. United Nations reports have indicated that more than 40 per cent of the population suffer from acute malnutrition and approximately 20 per cent of children suffer from stunted growth.

In that context, my country stresses the importance of strengthening cooperation frameworks between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the organs, mechanisms and committees of the United Nations concerned with human rights, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and of engaging positively and effectively with them in a way that contributes to enhancing and protecting human rights.

My country notes that humanitarian organizations provide their services on the basis of the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, and their active and non-politicized work has previously contributed to improving conditions for civilians in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We therefore hope that the relief organizations of the United Nations will soon be able to return to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to support and assist those in need. We also urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to prioritize the safety of its people and channel its limited resources to ensure food security and meet all development needs.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates stresses the importance of ending the cycle of escalation, confrontation and stalemate through constructive dialogue and quiet diplomacy, in the absence of threats and provocations. That is the best way to reduce tensions and rebuild trust with a view to achieving security and stability on the Korean peninsula. We encourage the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to cooperate with the United Nations organs and the international

community on all issues related to peace, security, non-proliferation and human rights. At the same time, we also stress the importance of the Council adopting a unified approach to dealing with threats to international peace and security, including on the Korean peninsula.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): We thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Volker Türk, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ms. Elizabeth Salmón, for their briefings. We also welcome Mr. Ilhyeok Kim's participation in today's meeting and thank him for sharing his courageous account.

Every month throughout this year, the Security Council has had to meet to address the issue of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programme — and for good reason, given the threat that those weapons pose to peace and security. At the same time, it has been almost six years since the Council formally discussed the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Today's meeting therefore comes at just the right time. We just heard about the grave and systematic violations of human rights continuing in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, some of which may even constitute crimes against humanity. We also know that by allocating its resources to costly military and nuclear programmes, the country sorely lacks the capacity to meet the needs of its population. It is a population that — let us not forget — faces increased levels of food insecurity and poverty, and whose situation was made even worse by the heightened isolation of the pandemic. The situation worsened owing to both the Government's political choices and the lack of rapid and unhindered access for humanitarian actors, which must be guaranteed.

In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, surveillance, coercion, fear and punishment are used to stifle freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. The list of human rights violations in the country is long, including torture, arbitrary detentions and the forced transfer of political prisoners to camps, which are just a few examples of those serious and systematic violations. In view of that bleak prospect, we recall that human rights are universal, indivisible and inalienable. We also recall the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's obligation to put an immediate end to all violations and its obligations under international human rights law. In particular, it has ratified the

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

While every violation of human rights requires a response, the situation of Korean women and girls is also a cause for concern. As the Special Rapporteur mentioned, there is a need for effective protection of victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as a policy on prevention. That is in the interest of every society. In addition, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is also required to adhere to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Only justice and accountability can prevent the recurrence of such violations. The fight against impunity for serious human rights violations is therefore vital. The perpetrators of human rights violations must be held accountable for their actions. We suggest that the Council examine all the options at its disposal to ensure that those violations do not continue to go unpunished.

Finally, in order to respond to human rights challenges, we need credible information. That is why we appreciate the efforts of all those, including civil society, who are conducting research on this issue. We also call on the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to grant access to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur.

The grave human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea threatens stability and peace in the region and beyond. Therefore, the Council cannot forget the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and must work for positive and lasting change for the Korean people. Switzerland encourages Member States to continue to engage with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on the issue of human rights, and we call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to enter into dialogue and cooperate with international mechanisms.

Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique): Mozambique would like to pay tribute to Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, not just for his important contribution to this topic but also for his tireless work in the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. We thank Ms. Elizabeth Salmón, Special Rapporteur on the situation on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Mr. Ilhyeok Kim, member of civil society, for their

briefings. We acknowledge the presence at this meeting of the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea.

Since its inception, our Organization inscribed in the Charter of the United Nations in very clear terms our collective faith in fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women. That is why we believe that the protection of human rights is of the utmost importance for international peace and security. Moreover, the mandate of the Human Rights Council includes to "[c]ontribute, through dialogue and cooperation, towards the prevention of human rights violations and respond promptly to human rights emergencies" (see General Assembly resolution 60/251, para. 5(f)). Therefore, on the eve of celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Mozambique reiterates the need for full compliance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and all the United Nations instruments related to the protection and promotion of human rights. They can play a major role in creating a peaceful environment on the Korean peninsula.

In that connection, the situation on the Korean peninsula deserves our attention. We need to take constructive measures aimed at ending the current tensions and all activities that undermine peace and stability in the region. It is also imperative to build bridges through dialogue, foster mutual trust and relaunch peace talks between the two neighbouring countries and in the region as a whole. Mozambique supports all efforts by the members of the Council, as well as by all other Member States, to promote and maintain international peace and security, ease the persisting tensions on the Korean peninsula and initiate a constructive and trustful dialogue leading to lasting peace and stability.

In conclusion, all efforts by the members of the Council should be focused on promoting dialogue and building trust between all the parties through diplomatic efforts and initiatives for dialogue, to promote peace and security in the region with a view to ending the tensions on the Korean peninsula.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I thank Mr. Volker Türk and Ms. Elizabeth Salmón for their comprehensive briefings. I also thank Mr. Ilhyeok Kim for his testimony.

Brazil's position has consistently been that debates on human rights issues should take place in the appropriate forums. Those discussions are most effective

when they avoid accusations of selectivity and seek to implement rights for all. Brazil defended the creation in 2006 of a constructive, universal, non-selective and non-politicized forum for human rights in Geneva. For that reason, we are an active participant in the Human Rights Council, as well as in other bodies dedicated to that vitally important matter. While recognizing that rule 2 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure provides that the President shall call a meeting of the Security Council at the request of any member of the Council, it is our duty to remind members that the subject of the meeting must come under the mandate of the Council.

Brazil remains concerned about the persistent reports of systematic violations of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and has participated in discussions on the subject in the appropriate United Nations bodies. Brazil has also supported resolutions concerning the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea both in the Human Rights Council and in the Third Committee of the General Assembly. We have been equally vocal in drawing attention to the grave humanitarian situation facing the country's civilian population. We continue to be troubled by findings of the Panel of Experts of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006) that conclude that the sanctions regime in itself has had unintended effects on the humanitarian situation. We must do more to mitigate them.

We therefore reiterate our call for a sustained process of engagement with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Only through dialogue can the many issues in the file begin to be addressed, including the human rights situation in all its dimensions. Isolation does not help the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, nor does it bring us closer to our goal of a Korean peninsula that is peaceful, stable and free of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China opposes the Council's consideration of the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Our position is crystal clear. According to the Charter of the United Nations, the primary responsibility of the Council is the maintenance of international peace and security, not addressing human rights issues. The human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea does not pose a threat to international peace and security. At present, the international situation is

fraught with change and turmoil and with crises and challenges of all kinds. The world we live in is facing rising instability and uncertainty. The Council should focus on fulfilling its responsibility under the Charter, striving to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes, resolve geopolitical confrontations and deal with the major and urgent issues that threaten international peace and security.

The situation on the Korean peninsula has remained tense and confrontations have intensified for some time now. All the parties should exercise calm and restraint, make greater efforts to achieve peace and stability and refrain from provocative and escalatory words and deeds. At this complex and sensitive time, the Council should play a constructive role in resuming dialogue and easing tensions. Pushing it to consider the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will not help to ease the situation but will rather escalate it. It is irresponsible, unconstructive and an abuse of the Council's power. If the countries concerned are genuinely concerned about the regional peace and stability and the welfare of the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, they should take concrete action and make concrete proposals to promote mutual trust and resume talks. They should support adjusting provisions regarding the sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, especially in the area of people's livelihoods, and immediately lift the unilateral coercive measures that have led to a deterioration of the human rights situation in the country.

The question of the Korean peninsula has continued to this day as a remnant of the Cold War. It is essentially a political and security issue. The hype created in the Security Council regarding the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is an attempt to divert attention, shirk responsibility and exert pressure. It will not help to resolve the issue and will only do more harm. What the countries concerned should really do is demonstrate political will and take practical action to respond to the reasonable concerns of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, making efforts to create conditions conducive to a resumption of talks.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that China remains committed to the maintenance of peace and stability, the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and the settlement of disputes through dialogue and consultations. We stand ready to continue playing a

constructive role in promoting a political solution to the question of the Korean peninsula and in realizing long-lasting peace and stability in North-East Asia.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I thank High Commissioner Türk and Special Rapporteur Salmón for their valuable contributions. I also thank Mr. Ilhyeok Kim for his powerful and courageous testimony.

Malta recognizes the inextricable link between human rights and advancing international peace and security. We commend the work of human rights bodies and mechanisms such as the Human Rights Council that continue to highlight the long list of human rights violations occurring within the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, despite the complete lack of cooperation by State authorities.

It is almost 10 years since the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea exposed systematic, widespread and grave violations amounting to crimes against humanity. The violations have continued and are intrinsically linked to the threats posed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to international peace and security. We call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to adhere to its international obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions. It must completely, verifiably and irreversibly abandon its nuclear and ballistic-missile programmes and return to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. We urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

Civilians in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continue to live in a climate of Government-induced fear. As we have heard today from our briefers, the humanitarian situation in the country remains dire, with severe levels of food insecurity and large segments of the population enduring chronic malnutrition. Children are especially impacted by the situation. The North Korean authorities must allow international humanitarian organizations to bring rapid and unhindered assistance to the most vulnerable groups, including prisoners.

We deplore reports of the regime using food as a method of State control, with the diversion of resources to military objectives, including the numerous ballistic missile launches witnessed in the past year. The systematic restrictions of the freedoms of thought and expression and of movement are deeply troubling.

Arbitrary arrests, detentions and forced disappearances, which also affect the extended families of those accused of being "traitors", continue through the regime's vast use of detention centres and prisons.

Discrimination against women and girls as a result of widespread gender stereotypes and normative deficits prevents the achievement of gender equality. Their low-level market activities have made them targets of regime control. As Special Rapporteur Salmón noted, the North Korean authorities subject women in detention to inhumane conditions, including torture, forced labour, sexual violence and deprivation of food. We concur with her recommendation to address the patriarchal root causes of gender-based violence, promote women's awareness of their rights and engage men as part of the solution to ending violence against women. Furthermore, reports concerning forced child labour are disturbing, despite the claims by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea denying such practices, which constitute a grave violation of children's rights.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has also abducted foreign nationals outside its borders, many of whom remain unaccounted for. Malta calls on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to provide full information about all persons who have been kidnapped and unlawfully detained and to immediately release all abductees. We stress that the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea must be held accountable for its abhorrent practices against its own people, including the trafficking of women and girls and the exploitation of children. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea must meaningfully cooperate with United Nations human rights bodies and initiate a dialogue with the Special Rapporteur and special procedure thematic mandate holders and invite them to carry out official country visits.

We further call on States to fully implement their obligations under the sanctions regime and refrain from engaging in, or assisting with, any sanctions violations. The use of revenue generated by North Korean workers overseas to fund the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's illegal weapons programme also constitutes human exploitation. We call on States to repatriate all nationals of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea earning income in their jurisdiction, in full accordance with international law. In conclusion, I would like to remind the Council of our shared objective: peace on and the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Human rights are not optional, nor are they an isolated

concern. They are the foundation upon which a stable and peaceful Korean peninsula must be built.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Today, we once again witness a brazen attempt by the Western countries on the Security Council and the United States presidency to use the Council to advance their own self-serving, politicized agenda. This meeting is in no way linked to developments on the ground and was not initially included in the draft programme of work proposed by the United States presidency at the beginning of the month. It is clear that, having understood how provocative that idea was, our United States colleagues tried to avoid the well-founded criticisms of Security Council members. The fact that the provocation was clearly planned in advance is indicated by the fact that Albania, the United States and Japan circulated among Council members a concept note that they had concocted, calling for Council members to focus discussions on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the context of international peace and security.

I would like to underscore that based on long-standing practice, such concept notes are circulated by the presidency of the Security Council only in relation to the signature events that it is organizing, in which case the presidency genuinely has the opportunity to determine the subject and format of the discussion. We therefore wonder, Madam President, whether today's meeting is another signature event of your presidency and if so, why was it not properly announced at the beginning of the month? If not, on what basis do the United States, Albania and Japan arrogate to themselves the right to steer discussions at the Security Council? Such actions are nothing more than a gross violation of established practice in the Council's work.

The steps taken are unjustified, serve purely propaganda-related purposes and contravene the mandate of the Security Council. As is well known, human rights issues are not part of that mandate. Those issues are discussed in the relevant forums, primarily at the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee of the General Assembly. Any attempt by the sponsors of today's meeting to link human rights with threats to international peace and security is absolutely artificial. Moreover, attempts to introduce into the Security Council's work issues that do not fall within its mandate divide its attention, politicize the discussion and thereby undermine the Council's overall authority. It is clear that convening today's meeting is nothing more than a

cynical and hypocritical attempt by the United States and its allies to advance their own political agenda, step up pressure on Pyongyang, and divert attention from the reckless escalatory actions of Washington and its allies in the region. They are the ones that are creating a real threat to international peace and security.

There is no need to describe in detail yet again what we are talking about. Everyone is well aware that the United States of America, Japan and the Republic of Korea, as part of their so-called extended deterrence policy, are continuing to build up their military activity in the region. One of the main trends is the increasingly large-scale nature of the exercises they are carrying out and their increased military cooperation. Recently, the world also witnessed the appearance of a United States nuclear submarine off the Korean peninsula and United States-South Korea air drills involving United States fighter jets and strategic bombers. Nor should we forget the plans to redeploy part of NATO's military infrastructure to the region. We have also heard dangerous warnings about the plans of Japan and the Republic of Korea to bolster nuclear cooperation with the United States, going as far as the possible deployment on their territories of American nuclear weapons and the development of their own arsenals.

Russia has consistently opposed any military activity that would jeopardize the security of the Korean peninsula and the countries of North-East Asia. Dangerous actions and statements directly oppose the goal of easing tensions around the peninsula and finding ways to resolve the situation by political and diplomatic means, as set out in the relevant Security Council resolutions. That is against the backdrop of the clearly expressed position of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the lengthy history of the issue, which clearly indicates that there is no way to resolve the problems that exist, other than through dialogue and constructive interaction, taking into account the legitimate concerns and rights of all the States involved, including of course the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Recent events further confirm that refraining from provocative acts and returning to the negotiating table represent the only possible way to resolve any problems. In that connection, I would like to draw attention once again to the Russian-Chinese plan of action on the comprehensive settlement of the situation on the Korean peninsula, which provides for concrete steps in various areas.

This meeting is an instance of blatant hypocrisy on the part of the United States of America and its allies, which even as they speak about human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continue to consistently oppress the North Korean people with inhumane unilateral sanctions. Today, we have not heard anything from United Nations representatives or our Western colleagues about how people are suffering as a result of those measures. That further indicates the futility of today's discussion, the only aim of which is to cater to Western double standards with respect to both the work of the Security Council and human rights.

We are convinced that the Council and the United Nations in general should not indulge the policy of the United States and its allies of using human rights as a pretext to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign States. Those actions are the ones that represent the main threat to peace and security, something that dozens of States in various regions of the world have been able to see for themselves. No amount of manoeuvring by Washington and its allies is going to fool anyone here.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank High Commissioner Türk and Special Rapporteur Salmón for their briefings. I also, like others, pay tribute to Mr. Kim for his powerful testimony, and I welcome the presence of the representative of the Republic of Korea at this meeting.

The United Kingdom remains deeply concerned about the appalling human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It is clear that human rights violations remain widespread, systematic and completely lacking in accountability. I therefore also thank Albania, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the United States for bringing this issue back to the Security Council for the first time since 2017.

Human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and international peace and security are inextricably linked. The authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea divert resources from peoples' basic economic needs towards their illegal nuclear- and ballistic-weapons programmes. These illegal weapons are financed through forced labour, with workers sent overseas, often under modern slavery conditions. I urge all States Members of the United Nations, especially the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, to fully implement resolution 2397 (2017), including on overseas workers, and end this exploitation.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to reject United Nations resolutions on the situation of human rights in North Korea. It refuses to cooperate with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights or with the United Nations Special Rapporteur. The regime fails to acknowledge the 2014 report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (A/HRC/25/63) that concluded that wide-ranging human rights violations taking place in the country may amount to crimes against humanity.

The United Kingdom also recognizes the suffering of other nationals who have been abducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and we call for their return. Forced repatriations, State-sponsored abductions and enforced disappearances demand action. We remind all States Members of the United Nations to respect the principle of non-refoulement and not forcibly return those who have escaped the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to face threats to their safety and human rights.

The human rights situation has not improved while the Council has remained silent. We urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to prioritize the well-being of its citizens over the development of its illegal weapons programmes. We remind the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that its restrictive coronavirus disease measures must be proportionate and not used as a tool to further constrain the freedom of its citizens or to restrict the ability of the international community to engage with authorities in Pyongyang. We urge them to engage in a genuine and positive spirit with the United Nations Special Rapporteur to bring about permanent change and improvements for the people of North Korea.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ms. Elisabeth Salmón, for their respective briefings. I listened carefully to Mr. Ilhyeok Kim's briefing. We welcome the participation of the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea at today's meeting.

I would like to highlight two concerns that seem essential to us. The first is that my country is committed to the unconditional respect of human rights wherever they are threatened, and that all situations in

which human beings are deprived of their fundamental rights, including economic rights, must be the subject of sustained attention. We condemn any impediment to human rights and reject any attempt to politicize human rights issues or to treat them in a lopsided manner, because human rights are universal, indivisible and inalienable. Accordingly, my country's position is unambiguous with respect to the fact that human rights situations, including those concerning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, must be addressed within the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee, which are the competent forums par excellence within the United Nations system for examining human rights violations.

The second concern is the need to resolve the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's military situation through diplomatic channels. For several months now, we have been noting with concern a hardening and radicalization of positions, reflected in an unprecedented escalation of military deterrence, marked by the increased frequency of missile launches on a scale that raises fears of the irreparable, including nuclear risk. This climate of high tension is a threat not only to the Korean peninsula as a whole, but also to international peace and security. On every occasion, my country has clearly expressed its opposition to missile diplomacy and the outrageous rhetoric supporting it. We reiterate our call once again for all parties to give priority to dialogue and negotiation on the basis of international law, with a view to ending the threat to the Korean peninsula.

The President: The representative of Japan has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I wish to respond to the reference by a Council member to the Japan's security policy in relation to nuclear weapons. I want to make the following point crystal clear: the Three Non-Nuclear Principles of not possessing, not producing and not permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons continues to be our basic policy.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Joonkook Hwang (Republic of Korea): I would like to begin by thanking the United States presidency of the Security Council for convening today's important meeting, as well as the Council members who supported the meeting. My gratitude also goes to United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker

Türk, and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ms. Elisabeth Salmón, Ms. Elizabeth Salmón, for their excellent briefings, and to the special briefer, Mr. Mr. Ilhyeok Kim, for his courage in sharing his precious and personal account.

Earlier this year, 61 States Members of the United Nations and the European Union— double the number from last year — sent a letter requesting that the Security Council remain seized of the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in pursuit of a public Security Council meeting (S/2023/157). On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Korean people, I am grateful to see that this request was granted today, after waiting for more than five years.

As a fellow Korean, I am aware of the immensity of the critical task before me: to inform the world of the grim reality facing 25 million North Korean people by delivering a statement only several minutes long. Today we are not addressing human rights violations in any conflict or war zones, as we often do at the Security Council. We are instead addressing human rights violations in one of the most tightly controlled Member States in the world, where systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations amounting to crimes against humanity take place. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is an example of a perfectly functioning totalitarian system that controls the physical, mental and intellectual activities of its entire population on a daily basis. The landmark report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, released in 2014, stated that:

“[t]he gravity, scale and nature of these violations reveal a State that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world.” (*A/HRC/25/63, para. 80*).

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's human rights violations are in clear contravention of the universal values enshrined in the United Nations Charter and constitute a threat to international peace and security.

The report of the commission of inquiry clearly recommended that the Security Council refer the Democratic People's Republic of Korea human rights situation to the International Criminal Court. It also recommended that the Council adopt targeted sanctions

against those who appear to be most responsible for crimes against humanity.

Regrettably since its last meeting on this subject (see S/PV.8130), in 2017, the Security Council has not been able to convene publicly to address human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, while the situation remains desperate and with no signs of improvement. In addition, severe economic hardship and associated chronic food shortages have been exacerbated by the self-imposed isolation of the regime of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea during the pandemic and a new market-distorting policy it adopted last year banning private transactions of grain.

At the same time, over the past year and a half, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has been engaging in an unprecedented escalation of its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) provocations, including the launches of 12 intercontinental ballistic missiles. Instead of addressing its critical food shortages, the regime of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has continually squandered its scarce resources on a dangerous show of force and advancement of its WMD technology.

The human rights abuses of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are not only a problem of the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, but also a critical national security issue for the Republic of Korea. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's reckless pursuit of a nuclear arsenal and its totalitarian control of its own people has the same root cause: the desire to justify and perpetuate the rule of its bizarre dynastic regime.

As highlighted at today's meeting, the human rights and WMD issues of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are intertwined in very real ways. Focusing on WMDs at the expense of its own people's well-being by diverting resources is possible only in a country where all political dissent is crushed. Moreover, domestic and overseas forced labour under heavy surveillance has served as one of the major sources of funds for the regime's unlawful weapons programme.

Therefore, by failing to address the human rights situation, we cannot hope to resolve the nuclear issue either. We should take a holistic approach towards the issues of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the Security Council and clearly demonstrate that justice must prevail.

There are still roughly 100,000 people detained in political prison camps enduring a life of acute misery with only the remotest chance of being released alive. The regime also operates a long-standing system that punishes citizens for offences allegedly committed by members of their family.

Furthermore, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea regime is a perpetrator of human rights violations beyond its territory. In her report to the Human Rights Council this year, Special Rapporteur Ms. Salmón detailed the Japanese cases of 12 abductees and the Korean cases of abductions and enforced disappearances: up to 100,000 Korean civilian abductees during the Korean War, 516 Korean post-war abductees and roughly 500 surviving prisoners of war held in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea since 1953.

Yet another astonishing recent development is the adoption of a series of highly oppressive laws, including the so-called Law on Rejecting Reactionary Ideology and Culture, in 2020; the Youth Education Guarantee Law, in 2021; and the Pyongyang Cultural Language Protection Law, in 2023. As a result, simply watching or sharing South Korean television dramas or movies is now punishable by death in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Those horrendous living conditions have continually forced the North Korean people to flee across the border, mainly to China, despite draconian measures such as orders to shoot to kill on sight. It is both horrifying and heartbreaking to witness North Korean escapees risking everything, including their lives, on their long arduous road to freedom.

We are deeply concerned about the issue of defectors from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea detained in third countries. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights continues to document serious human rights violations when a third country has repatriated them to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, including torture and other cruel, degrading treatment. In that regard, we would like to remind Member States that the principle of non-refoulement should be observed.

Against that backdrop, we cannot simply turn a blind eye to that reality by insisting that discussing the situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the Security Council risks politicizing human rights. In fact, it is the regime of the Democratic People's

Republic of Korea that uses human rights abuses as a critical means of governance to achieve its political goals. What it does to the outside world is a natural extension of what it does inside. The Security Council's neglect could put international peace and security at further risk.

The Republic of Korea remains the country most affected by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's human rights violations and its violent attacks, including presidential assassination attempts, while being within direct range as a military target. However, we never forget that people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are our brothers and sisters.

Bearing that in mind, my Government released its first-ever public report on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea this year. The Republic of Korea, during its upcoming term on the Security Council, will continue to make every effort to improve the situation — related to both human rights

and non-proliferation — in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea by building upon the momentum gained at today's meeting.

In conclusion, I would like to share my reflections from a recent encounter with 10 young North Korean defectors, all of whom shared their own extraordinary stories, like that of the briefer today. We should all contemplate the lives of the North Korean young people, who are growing up in a society with rampant brainwashing and indoctrination, completely disconnected with no outside information.

What the international community, including my country, ought to do is to figure out how we can give the hope of freedom and human dignity to that young, future generation and take action to that end. After all, our sisters and brothers in North Korea should live the lives they deserve, just like all of us.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.