



Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (NKHR)

10F, gonghwadang bldg, 131 Tongil-ro, seodaemun-gu, Seoul 120-012, Korea

Tel: +82-2-723-1672, 2671 Fax: +82-2-723-1671

<http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr> e-mail: citizens.nkhr@gmail.com

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**Input for the report of the UN Special
Rapporteur on slavery to the 57th session of the UN Human Rights Council:**

**Contemporary forms of slavery as affecting currently and formerly
incarcerated people**

Situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

The Commission of Inquiry for DPRK (COI) concluded in its February 2014 report that crimes against humanity continue “because the policies, institutions, and patterns of impunity that lie at their root remain in place.¹ Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights has been investigating the DPRK state's structures enabling crimes documented by the COI. Our ongoing investigation clearly points out that the widespread and systematic attack on the North Korean population has been operationalized through institutions and individuals linked to the chain of command of the military and security forces in the DPRK (Ministry of State Security, Ministry of People's Safety, Korea People's Army and Second Economic Committee in charge of nuclear and missile weapons program), which are responsible for and profiting from commission of mass atrocities.

The DPRK has been able to strengthen its economic profit and weapons program through the utilization of crimes against humanity including enslavement, torture, sexual and gender-based crimes (SGBC), and persecution based on religion, class, gender and/or political opinion. DPRK's security and military forces can sustain themselves not only through their involvement in these crimes but the profit is enabled by international supply chain, business and military networks that are linked to DPRK's institutions or their companies - in spite of international sanctions and other efforts to inhibit financial gain by DPRK authorities. The evidence clearly suggests that these crimes have been financed by an international supply chain connected to the production sites, in particular vast network of detentions, in which crimes against humanity continue to be committed.

This system has been directly built into the DPRK's state economic system, which is

¹ Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, A/HRC/25/CRP, paragraph 1160.

an exploitative structure heavily relying on slavery, forced labor and extortion of goods for the regime's revenue. It is enforced through each Party organ and each Ministry through a system of quotas of compulsory labor and goods which can be exported to support the foreign currency earning. The foundation of this economic structure is also the vast network of detentions and large number of prisoners, whose constant supply the government creates primarily through its inherited discriminatory socio-political *songbun* system.

The Citizens' Alliance's years-long ongoing investigation into the role of the North Korean regime's top structures in export linked to large-scale human rights abuses ([*Blood Coal Export from North Korea. Pyramid Scheme of Earnings Maintaining Structures of Power*](#))², and ([*Written Statement to the U.S. Congressional Executive Commission on China. Hearing on the forced repatriation of North Korean Refugees*](#))³ has revealed how the DPRK government sustains this economic system through the quotas of goods that are fulfilled using forced labor and enslavement in detentions, in particular long-term correctional prison with forced labor (*kyohwaso*) and political prison camps (*kwalliso*) owned and operated by the Ministry of State Security (MSS/secret police), and the Ministry of Public Safety (MPS/police). Our investigation also uncovered a direct connection between North Korea's mineral extraction and export, and systemic persecution and intergenerational discrimination, based on the lowest class of the *songbun* system. The system is inherited, which means that generations of people are unable to escape the bondage of mining labor. These persons have been discriminated based on their ancestors' attributed political opinion or belief. Generations of people are born, live and die in the mining zones and experience the worst types of discrimination throughout their lifetime. These sites are some of the largest coal zinc, lead, magnesite and other mineral mines in Asia. The *songbun* system forced tens of thousands of ROK prisoners of war and their descendants, abductees from South Korea, displaced Zainichi Koreans from Japan and their descendants, and released political prisoners and their descendants, into an underclass bonded to mining with no freedom to choose an education, occupation, or residence.

Production in detentions is also based on intergenerational discrimination based on the *songbun* system, which determines which citizens will replenish the slave labor force in the infamous prison system. North Koreans deported from China, most of whom are women, are held in detention facilities that sustain themselves and provide revenue for the regime through forcing labor upon detainees. The lower the *songbun*, the more

² Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights. *Blood Coal Export from North Korea. Pyramid Scheme of Earnings Maintaining Structures of Power*, Seoul, January 2020.

³ *Written Statement provided by Joanna Hosaniak, Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights. "Hearing on the forced repatriation of North Korean Refugees from China". U.S. Congressional Commission on China, June 9, 2023.*

vulnerable a deported North Korean is to harsher work and life conditions in detention.

The hunting system for prisoners and slave labor is enforced by the MSS which, together with the MPS and Korea People's Army (KPA), sits under the current Leader Kim Jong Un in the State Affairs Commission - the top organ of the State. The law enforcement ministries have numerous subsidiaries that are corporations trading in the production obtained through slavery labor in detentions. These companies have their intermediaries operating in China, Russia and other countries to supply their produce to foreign businesses.

The MSS is the primary investigative authority dealing with persons deported from China who have crossed the border with the aim to find work or seek asylum in third countries, or as victims of trafficking. Former MSS Officers and prosecutors from North Korea reported during Citizens' Alliance's investigation that the seriousness of crimes is evaluated based on the discriminatory *songbun* classification, using biased information unverified by an independent court.

Goods “Made in China” using forced labor of detainees

Citizens' Alliance has been investigating the connection between the detention facilities in the DPRK and the international supply chain since 2017. Because every detention in North Korea serves as a major production site, there is a direct link between the free, forced labor and cheap export of highly popular commodities. In particular, victims who served sentences in *Kyohwaso* frequently reported the existence of working units for the production of wigs, eyelashes and sports clothes produced for export to China. Women reported an increase in the punishment for border crossing, to a five-year sentence in *kyohwaso* prisons. This reflects reported legislative amendments to North Korean Criminal Code in 2009 and should be viewed and further analyzed through the lenses of the quota system of production in detentions which forms a vicious cycle of hunting for free forced labor. Women have always been, and continue to be, the primary victims of this cycle. In this way, the MSS is providing constant supply of slave labor force.

These detentions have a high demand for women's labor, in particular of young women, as eyelashes and hair products have been reported to be a labor-intensive production requiring good eyesight. This is why women deported from China have become an easy target to supply forced labor in these detentions. There are consistent testimonies that various goods produced in the North Korean detention facilities are created using raw materials from China, and the finished products are labeled “Made in China” to be distributed to the international market. One of the witnesses who served as the leader of the sewing unit during her detention learnt from an MPS officer, who was her direct supervisor monitoring textile production, that the raw textile materials are imported from China, and the produced clothes are exported back to China. According to

the witnesses, fake eyelashes and wigs are assembled by detainees in *Kyohwaso* and sent to China in possible violation of international sanctions.

Beginning in 2017, North Korea has substantially increased its exports of certain goods such as fake eyelashes. In 2023, North Korea's exports of fake eyelashes, beards and wigs to China accounted for 57.1% of North Korea's total yearly exports, soaring up 13.4 times from the previous year, according to data from China's General Administration of Customs. In total, North Korea exported 1,680 tons of false eyelashes, beards, and wigs to China last year, worth around \$167 million.⁴

This information needs to be viewed through the prism of recent developments, such as large number of deportations of North Koreans from China, which resumed last year after opening of the borders by North Korea post-pandemic, as well as reported expansion of prisons, which were preparing in advance to accommodate large influx of prisoners and labor force as reported by the media.⁵ Similarly, in line with our investigation, another media outlet, Daily NK has recently reported that according to the officer in charge of the production in *kyohwaso* prisons, the Ministry of People's Safety Corrections Bureau sends export production plans for artificial eyelashes, wigs, and beards to production units within the correctional camps (*kyohwaso*). The production plan quota has tripled in the last year and that 90 percent of the artificial eyelashes exported to China are products of forced labor in *kyohwaso* prisons, while the remaining 10 percent are produced through civilian processing.⁶

Recommendations

The issue of slavery and other crimes against humanity in the supply chain of DPRK that contribute to its trade, sponsor its military investments, and further human rights abuses by enriching the North Korean criminal state have never been investigated by the UN Commission of Inquiry for DPRK (COI), nor by the UN Sanctions Committee monitoring North Korean trade, nor were they raised during the previous annual human rights discussions on the DPRK (North Korea) at the UN Security Council. The UN's stark lack of understanding and recognition of North Korea's economic dependence on human rights

⁴ Jangho CHOI, Yoojeong Choi, *North Korea's 2023 Trade with China: Analysis and Forecasts. World Economic Brief, Vol. 14 No.09*. Korean Institute for International Economic Policy. 2024.

⁵ North Korea Renovated Major Concentration Camp During the Pandemic, March 1, 2024
<https://www.nknews.org/pro/north-korea-renovated-major-concentration-camp-during-pandemic-imagery-shows/>

⁶ Fake eyelashes sold in China are produced using forced prisoners labor. February 13, 2024
<https://www.dailynk.com/20240213-1/>

crimes and forced labor that underwrite the military and nuclear programs limits the effectiveness of its actions to date, as well as any progress on accountability in the DPRK and promotion of peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Much of the evidence suggests that the same military and security forces responsible for crimes against humanity are also contributing to the production or proliferation of weapons by North Korea, which destabilize various regions in the world. As such, it should be brought to the international stage for discussion. Therefore, we strongly urge that the UN Security Council holds a briefing dedicated to the situation in the DPRK, with a primary focus on the connection between its military and security forces, their international supply chain connected to the mining and light industries and crimes against humanity attached to them. Given that many of these crimes are committed against women in detention and the profits derived from production are used to fund the expansion of security and military forces, this topic is also particularly relevant within the Women, Peace, and Security framework, which is one of the UN Security Council's top agendas.

It is crucial to establish monitoring system regarding raw materials and other products for export originating from detentions and political prison camps in the DPRK operated by Ministry of State Security, Ministry of People's Safety and their international trade companies. This system is strengthened and sustained by a transnational trade network with China and Russia. China imports products such as coal, wigs, and eyelashes made with forced labor in North Korea, while a renewed military partnership between North Korea and Russia in 2023 signaled expansion of the production facilities, driving the regime to further prioritize military spending over human rights concerns. These linkages must be investigated by the international community and further restrictions must be placed on such trade, especially that these goods are reaching international markets.

This submission is public.