

[The UN Human Rights Council's Panel on North Korea and the Way Forward](#)

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In the first dedicated panel discussion on a country situation, experts including the Hon Michael Kirby and Marzuki Darusman, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the country, discussed issues of enforced disappearances, executions, abductions and arbitrary detention in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.



A panel discussion on North Korea's human rights record was held on Monday, 21 September at the UN Human Rights Council. The Council heard the testimony of Mr Koichiro Iizuka, the son of a Japanese abductee. He spoke of the agony of having his young single mother taken from his 3-year-old sister and then being told during the Japan-Korea summit meeting in 2002 that North Korean authorities acknowledged abducting her but she had subsequently died in a traffic accident. The panel also spoke of horrific practices, such as executions for watching South Korean soap operas or life and abuse in North Korean political prison camps, and horrific accounts.

This was the first country specific panel discussion under the Council's agenda item 4 on 'Human rights situations that require the Council's attention'. Furthermore, building on the UN Commission of Inquiry on North Korea's innovative and victim-oriented approach, this discussion was strongly focused on victims' experiences and giving voice to a truth that is obliterated by North Korea's system of information control and isolation. The panel featured experienced civil society representatives who shed light on a system of abuse which has been ongoing for decades.

Michael Kirby underlined that 'methodology is crucial in human rights work' and listening to victims' voices should represent the main pillar. He noted that events such as the panel help to 'make human rights real' by allowing government representatives, victims and civil society to interact around an important agenda.

The significance of this panel discussion lies in the reality of a country where the usual avenues to address human rights are not available. In North Korea there is no civil society and there is no independent press. In fact freedom of expression is non-existent. In this context, events like the panel create an important space to communicate expressions of concern by the international community to the North Korean authorities.

Governments repeatedly asked what next steps and strategies should be adopted by the international community in order to address the human rights situation in North Korea. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges is to find creative ways to pressure North Korea to revisit its system of abuse. States should

seriously consider the response of panelists, who called for greater accountability of the North Korean government and continued exposure of the cruelty the crimes committed. Decades and generations of abuse are unlikely to be brought to justice without international mobilisation. The Special Rapporteur of North Korea called for a collective 'intellectual effort' by the international community to put in place an accountability process. It is high time the UN starts mapping particular perpetrators to crimes and thinking about what mechanisms could be used to bring them to justice. The forthcoming General Assembly resolution on North Korea will provide the next opportunity to do so.

Livia Cosenza collaborates with the newly established NGO North Korea Accountability Project. NK AP was created to assist key actors in shaping a pathway to justice to end crimes against humanity in North Korea, to promote and ensure follow up to the recommendations of the UN Commission of Inquiry relating to accountability and to assist victims, survivors and advocates working on North Korea to articulate their demands for justice in the United Nations and other relevant fora.

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