Thursday 7 April 2022

P9_TA(2022)0123

Human rights situation in North Korea, including the persecution of religious minorities

European Parliament resolution of 7 April 2022 on the human rights situation in North Korea, including the persecution of religious minorities (2022/2620(RSP))

(2022/C 434/10)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK),

— having regard to the statement of 25 March 2022 by the G7 Foreign Ministers and the High Representative of the EU on the launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,

— having regard to the resolution adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on 1 April 2022 on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,

— having regard to the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, of 25 March 2022 on the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launch,

— having regard to the statement by the Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European External Action Service of 11 January 2022 on the launch of missiles by the DPRK,

— having regard to the most recent sanctions of 22 March 2021 imposed by the EU for the serious violations of human rights in the DPRK,

— having regard to the report of 1 April 2022 of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,

— having regard to UN Security Council Resolutions 1718 (2006), 1874 (2009), 2087 (2013), 2094 (2013), 2356 (2017), 2270 (2016), 2371 (2017), 2375 (2017) and 2397 (2017), which explicitly ban nuclear tests by the DPRK,

— having regard to the UN General Assembly Resolution of 16 December 2021 on the situation of human rights of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,

— having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,

— having regard to the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief of 1981,

— having regard to the report of 7 February 2014 of the UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,

— having regard to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 1984,

— having regard to Rules 144(5) and 132(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas the DPRK remains one of the most repressive countries in the world; whereas in the DPRK, the state exerts absolute control over every aspect of its citizens' lives, maintains an absolute monopoly over information, and controls movement inside and outside the country as well as the social lives of its citizens, while maintaining fearful obedience in the population through threats of execution, imprisonment, enforced disappearances and forced hard labour in detention and prison camps;

B. whereas the DPRK has an extensive and well-structured security system which closely monitors the lives of nearly every citizen and does not allow any kind of basic freedom in the country;

C. whereas the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) investigated 'the systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights' in the DPRK and released a report on 7 February 2014; whereas the CoI concluded in its report that the gravity, scale and nature of Pyongyang's human rights violations 'reveal a State that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world';

D. whereas the human rights situation in the DPRK has not improved since the release of the 2014 CoI report; whereas the extrajudicial killings, torture, sexual violence, slavery and arbitrary detentions perpetrated by DPRK regime, including persecution on the grounds of religious belief, are ongoing and systematic; whereas according its *songbun* system, religious practitioners belong to the 'hostile' class and are considered enemies of the state, deserving 'discrimination, punishment, isolation, and even execution'; whereas documentation from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) shows that followers of Shamanism and Christianity are especially vulnerable to persecution;

E. whereas the regime is systematically targeting religious beliefs and minorities, including Shamanism, Korean Buddhism, Catholicism, Cheondoism and Protestantism; whereas examples of such systematic targeting include the execution of some non-foreign Catholic priests and Protestant leaders who did not renounce their faith being purged as 'American spies';

F. whereas in addition to the violations suffered by the general population, women and girls in North Korea are the potential target of a range of sexual and gender-based abuses, with government officials both perpetrating and failing to effectively respond to rights violations, including widespread gender discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence;

G. whereas the DPRK Government does not allow any political opposition, free and fair elections, free media, religious freedom, freedom of association, collective bargaining or freedom of movement and therefore does not respect the principle of the rule of law; whereas there have been reports of the severe repression of people involved in public and private religious activities, including arbitrary deprivation of liberty, torture, forced labour and execution; whereas *kwanliso* (political prison camps) remain operational and are fundamental to the control and repression of the population, according to the UN Special Rapporteur; whereas according to the Special Rapporteur, 'Many of these violations involve crimes against humanity being committed in the DPRK. Concrete accountability processes are urgently needed, either at the national or international level';

H. whereas the DPRK state authorities systematically deny the basic rights of prisoners and perpetrate extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances, including in the form of abductions of foreign nationals, interning what is estimated by some sources to be more than 100 000 people in an extensive penal system of detention centres, holding centres, labour training camps, political prison camps and re-education camps, among other facilities; whereas the DPRK regime routinely and systematically requires forced labour from much of its population to sustain its economy, notably people held in *kwanliso*;

I. whereas the DPRK regime has rejected all UN Human Rights Council, General Assembly and Security Council resolutions regarding the human rights situation in its territory;

J. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has been used by the DPRK to further isolate the country from the outside world, resulting in exacerbated entrenched human rights violations and a negative impact on its people's health; whereas humanitarian organisations remain unable to return to the DPRK; whereas the limited international presence inside the country and the significant fall in the number of escapees arriving in the Republic of Korea makes the documentation of human rights violations more challenging than ever; whereas the DPRK has closed its borders to all external crossings to avoid the spread of COVID-19 and has not distributed any COVID-19 vaccines to its people, claiming that the virus does not exist in the country; whereas since the start of the pandemic, North Korea has become even more isolated from the rest of the world due to its notoriously weak health infrastructure and the lack of vaccination of its population; whereas according to the latest UN Human Rights Council report published in March 2022, North Korea is more isolated than ever due to prolonged large-scale border closures and the travel restrictions between cities and regions imposed in January 2020; whereas the oppressive control of the population has further tightened;

Thursday 7 April 2022

K. whereas the people of the DPRK have been exposed to decades of underdevelopment, with poor healthcare and high levels of maternal and child malnutrition, in a context of political and economic isolation and food and fuel shortages; whereas chronic food insecurity remains widespread and has likely worsened with the significant reduction of trade following the closure of the country's borders; whereas segments of the population, especially vulnerable populations, may be facing hunger and starvation;

L. whereas the European Union is a defender and promoter of human rights and democracy in the world; whereas the EU-DPRK political dialogues last took place in June 2015; whereas the Chinese Government views most North Korean refugees as illegal economic migrants and repatriates some of them if discovered, without regard to their risk of persecution on return; whereas North Koreans in Russia face repatriation to their country of origin, as the Russian police have a history of arresting North Koreans at Pyongyang's request; whereas this practice stands in direct violation of China's and Russia's obligations under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and its 1967 Protocol; whereas many North Korean escapees go through tremendous hardships in China and its neighbouring countries, with no official identity or legal status, and are extremely vulnerable to human trafficking, kidnapping and sexual exploitation;

M. whereas the DPRK has continued to pursue its nuclear capabilities and ballistic missiles programme, as recently demonstrated by the increase in missile testing at the beginning of 2022; whereas the EU has imposed sanctions on 57 listed individuals and nine listed entities for contributing to the DPRK's programmes related to nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities or to other weapons of mass destruction, or for evading sanctions; whereas the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and their means of delivery represents a threat to international peace and security; whereas the DPRK withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2003, has been conducting nuclear tests since 2006 and officially declared in 2009 that it had developed a nuclear weapon, which means that the threat of the advancement of its nuclear capabilities has clearly amplified; whereas on 20 April 2018, the DPRK announced that it would immediately suspend nuclear and missile testing and shut down the Punggye-ri site that had been used for six earlier nuclear tests; whereas the Council of the European Union condemned the DPRK's launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile on 24 March 2022 as a breach of the suspension of intercontinental ballistic missile launches promised by the DPRK and a violation of UN sanctions; whereas on 22 March 2022, the EU imposed asset freezes and a travel ban under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime on two individuals and one entity in the DPRK;

N. whereas the outgoing President of the Republic of Korea Moon Jae-in has proposed an 'end-of-war' declaration to the DPRK to declare a formal end to the Korean War that ended in 1953 without a peace treaty;

O. whereas G7 Foreign Ministers and the High Representative of the EU have jointly stated that the dire humanitarian situation in the DPRK is the result of the DPRK's diversion of the DPRK's resources into weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programmes rather than into the welfare of its people;

1. Reiterates its strong condemnation of the decades-long state repression exercised in a systematic manner by the present and past Supreme Leaders and administration of the DPRK; calls on Kim Jong-un to stop the policy of extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions and other sexual violence, persecution on political, religious, racial and gender grounds, the forcible transfer of populations, the enforced disappearance of persons, the inhumane act of knowingly causing prolonged starvation and the institutionalised impunity for the perpetrators of these acts; urges the DPRK authorities to cease their ongoing crimes against humanity, including through the system of *kwanliso*, and to undertake a process of reform whereby all human rights are respected and protected; stresses the need to dismantle the *kwanliso*; calls for the publication of detailed information on these camps and for independent international monitoring bodies to be given the opportunity to visit them;

2. Strongly condemns the systematic and large-scale use of the death penalty in the DPRK; calls on the Government of the DPRK to declare a moratorium on all executions, with a view to abolishing the death penalty in the near future; calls on the DPRK to put an end to extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, to release political prisoners and to allow its citizens to travel freely, both within and outside the country; calls on the DPRK to allow free expression and press freedom

for the national and international media, and to allow its citizens uncensored access to the internet; asks the DPRK to stop charging defectors from the nation with 'treachery' or requesting that defectors to China be returned to the DPRK;

3. Encourages the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Russian Federation, in accordance with their obligations as States parties to the UN Refugee Convention, not to deny North Korean refugees who cross the border into China and Russia their right to seek asylum or to forcibly return them to North Korea, but to protect their fundamental human rights; reiterates its call on the countries which are recipients of refugees from the DPRK to respect the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol and to imperatively refrain from cooperating in any form with the DPRK administration on the extradition or repatriation of North Korean citizens;

4. Condemns the severe restrictions on the freedoms of movement, expression, information, peaceful assembly and association, as well as discrimination based on the *songbun* system, which classifies people on the basis of state-assigned social class and birth, and also includes consideration of political opinions and religion; is deeply concerned about the systematic violations of freedom of religion and belief affecting Shamanism and Christianity as well as other religions in North Korea; denounces the arbitrary arrests, long-term detention, torture, ill-treatment, sexual violence against and killings of religious people; urges the DPRK authorities to cease all violence against religious minorities and to grant them the right of freedom of religion and belief, the right of association and the right of freedom of expression; stresses the need to hold the perpetrators of these violent acts to account, including the Ministry of People's Social Security and the Ministry of State Security which are instrumental in the persecution of religious communities;

5. Urges the DPRK Government to stop its state-sponsored forced labour programme under which foreign countries have benefited from tens of thousands of North Korean labourers under precarious conditions, generating hard currency to help maintain the regime; underlines that, in this case, the responsibility to protect labour rights extends to hosting states which should ensure the protection of labour and human rights standards;

6. Expresses its particular concern about the conditions of detention across the penal system, including the denial of healthcare, torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment, the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, forced labour, rape and other forms of sexual violence, the denial of the right to life and to a fair trial and violations of the rights of vulnerable detainees, including women, persons with disabilities and juveniles; calls on the DPRK authorities to ensure that independent human rights monitors have access to its penal system and to cooperate with them with a view to working with relevant international actors to reform its penal and judicial systems;

7. Condemns the instrumentalisation of the pandemic, which led to further restrictions being imposed and to the severe, unnecessary and extreme measures the North Korean Government put in place ostensibly to protect against COVID-19, which further restrict the inherently suppressed rights to food and health, and the rights to freedom of movement and freedom of expression and information; commends the work of the 1718 Sanctions Committee, which swiftly approved all COVID-19 related sanction exemption requests for humanitarian assistance for the DPRK; calls on the DPRK to work with international organisations, including the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) initiative, to ensure the timely delivery and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to its people;

8. Expresses its particular concern about the severity of the food situation the country is facing and its impact on the economic, social and cultural rights of the population; calls on the DPRK authorities to ensure access for all citizens to food and humanitarian assistance on the basis of need, in accordance with humanitarian principles;

9. Stresses the importance of securing accountability for past and ongoing crimes against humanity; strongly urges the DPRK to fully comply with all legal obligations deriving from the relevant UN Security Council resolutions; calls on all UN members to take action to implement in full the existing UN Security Council sanctions; calls for efforts to be made to refer the situation in the DPRK to the International Criminal Court or to create an ad hoc tribunal or comparable mechanism in

order to determine the criminal responsibility of government officials, including the highest authorities; insists on the need for the Council to adopt severe additional human rights sanctions under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, targeting the individuals identified as responsible for those violations; takes note of the opinion of the UN Special Rapporteur to ensure that the sanctions against the country do not have a detrimental impact on the rights to food, health, water and sanitation, housing and development, as well as to prevent any negative impact on humanitarian assistance, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic;

10. Strongly condemns the launch by the DPRK of an ICBM on 24 March 2022 as an unnecessary and dangerous provocation, which is a violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions and a serious threat to international and regional peace and security; calls on the DPRK to abandon its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner;

11. Calls on the DPRK to continue to engage constructively with international interlocutors with a view to promoting concrete improvements in the human rights situation on the ground, including through dialogues, official visits to the country and more people-to-people contacts;

12. Continues to support a peaceful resolution to the conflict on the Korean Peninsula, which should involve denuclearisation together with improvements to the human rights situation in the DPRK; calls on the European External Action Service and the EU Member States to support the UN structures and civil society organisations to ensure accountability for the crimes committed, by means of the continued collection of evidence and the documentation of past and present human rights violations in the country, with a view to ending impunity for the serious abuses of the DPRK;

13. Welcomes the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK; regrets the fact that the Seoul field office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) remains understaffed, and urges members of the UN and the OHCHR to support the mechanism and ensure that it is provided with all necessary staff and resources;

14. Recommends advancing towards reconciliation and establishing an appropriate process of redress; calls on the affected states to issue an 'End-of-War Declaration' to put an end to the unresolved military conflict;

15. Welcomes the EU's sanctions regime, as well as the EU's expressed readiness to support any meaningful diplomatic processes; encourages the EU and the Member States to develop a strategy complementing the EU's sanctions regime, in line with the EU's Global strategy, and taking into account the resumption of the political dialogue with North Korea when the time is ripe, with a view to integrating human rights, denuclearisation and peace initiatives into its engagement with the DPRK;

16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the Government and Parliament of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Government and Parliament of the Republic of Korea, the Government and Parliament of the People's Republic of China, the Government and Parliament of the United States, the Government and Parliament of the Russian Federation, the Government and Parliament of Japan, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the UN Secretary-General.