

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/09/un-finds-torture-forced-labor-still-rampant-north-korean-prisons>

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UN Human Rights Council Should Press for Accountability

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Last week, the United Nations published a [new report](#) concluding that the [North Korean government](#) continues to commit rights violations that may amount to crimes against humanity.

The report, by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, found that North Korea currently engages in torture, wrongful imprisonment, and forced hard labor under exceptionally harsh conditions against anyone held in its short-term detention facilities system and its long-term hard labor prison camps for ordinary crimes, *orkyohwaso* widespread and systematic abuses that could amount to crimes against humanity. The UN report documents starvation, severe beatings, the prolonged use of stress positions, and psychological abuse. It also details the denial of medical care, sanitation, and hygiene products, all of which make for severe mental and physical suffering.

These findings go beyond the landmark 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) report that, for the first time, put the UN spotlight on North Korea's systematized, horrific rights violations. The COI report documented crimes committed before 2012 and were focused on crimes against humanity against certain groups the North Korean government considered serious criminals or enemies of the state (those held in political prison camps, ordinary prison camps, those forcibly returned from China, religious or subversive groups, and abductees).

Abuses and Due Process Violations in Pretrial Detention in North Korea

Download the full report in English

These findings are consistent with Human Rights Watch's own research on [pre-trial detention and interrogation facilities \(*kuryujang*\)](#) in North Korea.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet urged the international community to prioritize justice and to take immediate steps to prevent further infliction of serious human rights violations against the people of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea.

To do so, the UN Human Rights Council should continue to provide adequate resources to the UN Human Rights Office, including its Seoul office, to work on North Korea. When the council meets later this month, member states should work to adopt a strong resolution on North Korea, extending the mandate of its staff working on accountability, which [ends in March 2021](#), and provide access to the Seoul office to specialized experts on financial accountability.

The resolution should also strengthen the Seoul office's existing mandate to collect, consolidate, preserve, and analyze evidence of the most serious international crimes and violations of international law, as well as to facilitate and expedite fair and independent criminal proceedings in accordance with international law.

As the UN report underlines, there is no statute of limitations for crimes against humanity.

Clarification: Additional material was added to compare the findings of the new OHCHR report with the 2014 COI report.

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