action to address longstanding and emerging issues of concern.

The Republic of Korea facilitated a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing and two visits by the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights situation in the DPRK.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The dire human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) remained unchanged in 2018. The government continues to maintain strong control over its population, and according to reports, commits enforced relocations, uses forced labour, makes arbitrary arrests and detentions, and maintains political prison camps. Severe restrictions on basic civil and political liberties for citizens, including the absence of access to a fair trial, freedom of expression, religion, association and assembly persist. Independent media and civil society organisations and organised political opposition remain prohibited. Children continue to be used for unpaid labour and are subject to physical violence and punishment. Women face sexual harassment and abuse, including in detention, as well as trafficking and forced marriage abroad. In addition to grave human rights violations, the general living conditions remain very difficult, including chronic food insecurity, widespread malnutrition and lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Collecting verifiable information continues to be a challenge given the limited access to the DPRK. The UN's Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK continues not to be granted access to the country. While the family reunions that took place in August could be seen as a positive step, reflecting progress made on the inter-Korean track, the overall development of the diplomatic process so far has not led to any parallel improvement of the human rights and humanitarian situation in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU has a policy of Critical Engagement towards the DPRK, which combines pressure through sanctions and other measures while keeping communication and dialogue channels open. Its goals, aimed at the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation, are to support a lasting reduction of tensions on the Korean Peninsula and in the region, the upholding of the global non-proliferation regime, and the improvement of human rights in the DPRK.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU has no Delegation in the DPRK. EU Member States with diplomatic presence in the country take turn every 6 months to represent the EU locally. Due to unfavourable political circumstances, the EU last held its political dialogue with the DPRK in 2015.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2018, the EU provided assistance to the DPRK mainly in the area of food security. Some projects also support DPRK organisations in addressing the social inclusion of people with disabilities and the elderly, while others tackle disaster preparedness in rural communities. All these activities are of direct benefit to those among the most vulnerable people in the DPRK.

5. Multilateral context: In 2018, the EU and Japan jointly tabled resolutions on the situation of human rights in DPRK at the 73rd session of UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the 37th session of UN Human Rights Council (HRC) respectively.