the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and others.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2023 the human rights and democracy situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) remained dire. There were no indications that the DPRK engaged in constructive action to address the findings of the International Commission of Inquiry's conclusions in 2014 that *"systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, its institutions and officials. In many instances, the violations of human rights found by the commission constitute crimes against humanity".* The DPRK maintains significant border restrictions (implemented since 2020), and most diplomats and international humanitarian staff remains absent from the country.

Nonetheless, the number of defectors has increased three fold compared to the two previous years, though still much lower compared to pre-pandemic levels. The government continued to refuse to engage with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK and to limit engagement with other UN human rights bodies and mechanisms. Outside observers continued to express concern that tight border restrictions, a clamp-down on market activity and the continued suspension of international humanitarian projects, together with the long-term effects of poor economic policies, resulted in significant problems of food insecurity. The dire human rights situation was aggravated by the fact that the DPRK continues to divert its resources into illegal nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles programmes away from the welfare of its own people.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU addressed all areas of concern through resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. Frequent communication took place between the EU and the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as well as like-minded international partners. This included a side-event in the margins of the UN General Assembly co-organised by the EU and the RoK, involving inter alia the UN Special Rapporteur for DPRK human rights and senior EU, RoK and US officials. The EU Delegation in the Republic of Korea also continued to support the work of civil societies in promoting human rights in the DPRK by participating in and co-hosting local events. The EU renewed sanctions against two senior DPRK officials and the DPRK Central Public Prosecutor's Office under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained limited contact with the DPRK authorities through diplomatic channels in Europe, including on issues related to human rights.

4. EU financial engagement: It was not possible to implement humanitarian assistance and food security projects in the DPRK in the context of the absence of international staff from the country.

5. Multilateral context: For several years, the EU has initiated country-specific resolutions on the human rights situation in the DPRK at the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. Both resolutions were adopted by consensus and helped to maintain international attention on the situation and send strong messages of concern. The Human Rights Council Resolution focuses, *inter alia*, on the work of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and the Council itself, whereas the United Nations General Assembly Resolution focuses, *inter* alia, on the work of the Security Council.

Human Rights Council Resolution 52/28 stressed the importance of following up on the recommendations contained in the report of the Commission of Inquiry. It expressed deep concern over the systematic, widespread, and gross human rights violations and over the exacerbation of the humanitarian situation in the country. Underlining the need for accountability and to ensure that the crimes do not remain unpunished, the resolution welcomed various efforts, such as steps taken by the OHCHR including through its field-based structure in Seoul. It renewed the mandate of the Seoul Office and was intended to strengthen its capacity.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 78/218 expressed deep concern regarding the grave human rights situation in the DPRK, the pervasive culture of impunity, and the lack of accountability for human rights violations and abuses in the DPRK. It condemned in the strongest terms the long-standing and ongoing systematic, widespread and gross violations of human rights and expressed its very serious concern about numerous human rights violations of both political and civil and social, economic, and cultural rights. It included renewed calls for cooperation with UN mechanisms and included several references to the disproportionate impact of human rights violations on women and girls through gender inequality and gender-based violence as well as violations of their economic, social and cultural rights. It also introduced new language on the link between the human rights situation and broader peace and security. It highlighted the importance of the activities of OHCHR, including through its field-based structure in Seoul with regard to victims and survivors, and with regard to accountability.

Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The situation of human rights and democracy remained largely unchanged in 2023. Some new individual cases of concern were raised with the Lao authorities. Despite a commitment to gradual improvement in human rights, there are continuing deficiencies in implementation of key international human rights norms and instruments. Based on the 2020 Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a National Action Plan was adopted in June 2022 and published in January 2023. It includes a commitment to accept the visit of a UN Special Rapporteur before the 2025 UPR. Freedom of expression is controlled, and media and cinema are subject to censorship. Concerns expressed by citizens in social media have led to recent official calls for further restrictions on expression, including on the internet.

Laos ranked 160th out of 180 countries in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters without Borders, compared with its 161st position in 2022. The legislative