

In November, the EUDEL co-hosted with the National Human Rights Commission the 2024 International Human Rights Conference on Climate Change and Human Rights: Ensuring Justice and Action for All.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The visit of the EUSR for Human Rights to Republic of Korea on 14-15 October was the opportunity for the Delegation to organise events on the situation of human rights in Republic of Korea and DPRK, as well as to showcase the EU action on human rights in the world.

In the framework of the Digital Partnership, the EU and the Republic of Korea's work together on digital rights and the Declaration on the Future of the Internet and intend to intensify this cooperation even further in 2025.

4. EU financial engagement: Between 2017 and 2023, the EUDEL has been managing three public diplomacy projects under the EU Policy and Outreach Partnership (EUPOP) in Republic of Korea funded by the Partnership instrument for cooperation with third countries managed by FPI. These projects promoted human rights at large and societal resilience by supporting EUDEL outreach and engagement activities and of EU-Republic of Korea mutual interest. The last project supported with EUR 750,000, for the time January 2022 – January 2024, addressed anti-discrimination rights of minority groups – based on ethnic origin, sexual orientation, and disabilities. In December 2024, a new EU public and cultural diplomacy project (NDICI-Global Europe), managed by FPI staff at the EU Delegation, supported with EUR 2.99 million (December 2024 – December 2028) started.

5. Multilateral context: As a state party to seven core international human rights conventions, including the ICCPR and ICESCR, Republic of Korea is earnestly striving to implement the provisions of the relevant conventions at the national level through collaborative partnerships with various stakeholders. Furthermore, the Republic of Korea, was re-elected to the UNHRC in October 2024 for the 2025-2027 term.

Demarches in support of multilateral action: The EU and EU MS delivered several demarches in support of EU priorities ahead of the 68th session of the UN Convention on the Status of Women and the UNGA 79 Third committee.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, 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 Government maintained power through the use of arbitrary detention and imprisonment, torture, executions, enforced disappearances, and forced labour. Fundamental liberties – such as freedom of thought, conscience, religion, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of movement – continued to be systematically denied. Significant border restrictions originally imposed in response to Covid-19 remained in place, and a large

share of diplomats and international humanitarian staff were still not allowed to re-enter the country. The number of defectors in 2024 was comparable to 2023, though still much lower compared to pre-pandemic levels.

The government of the DPRK still refused to engage with the UNSR on the situation of human rights in the DPRK Elizabeth Salmon, and continued to limit engagement with other UN human rights bodies and mechanisms. Outside observers continued to express concern that border restrictions, the suppression of market activity and impediments to international humanitarian assistance, together with the long-term effects of poor economic policies, resulted in significant humanitarian issues including food security problems. The dire human rights situation was aggravated by the fact that the DPRK continued to divert its resources into illegal nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles programmes - and into military support for Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine - 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 UNHRC and the UNGA. Frequent communication took place between the EU and the OHCHR as well as like-minded international partners. The UNSR visited Brussels in November 2024 to engage with the EU institutions. In addition, the EUSR for Human Rights, Olof Skoog, travelled to Seoul in October 2024 to engage with the RoK government and civil society on DPRK human rights as well as to meet with North Korean defectors. The EUDEL in the Republic of Korea also continued to engage with the Ministry of Unification and support the work of civil society in promoting human rights in the DPRK by participating in and co-hosting local events. Using the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, the EU imposed new restrictive measures against the DPRK Minister of State Security and against a DPRK detention centre in response to serious human rights abuses related to sexual and gender-based violence. The EU also renewed earlier sanctions under the same regime against two senior DPRK officials and the DPRK Central Public Prosecutor's Office.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained limited contact with the DPRK authorities through diplomatic channels in Europe.

4. EU financial engagement: It was not possible to implement development or humanitarian assistance projects in the DPRK due to the inability of international humanitarian staff to enter the country.

5. Multilateral context: For several years, the EU has initiated country-specific resolutions on the DPRK human rights situation at the UNHRC and the UNGA. Both resolutions in 2024 were adopted by consensus and helped to maintain international attention on the situation and send strong messages of concern.

UNHRC Resolution 55/21 (April 2024) stressed the need to follow up on the recommendations from 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. It renewed the mandate of the UNSR. It also included a number of new elements, including by requesting a report to take stock of the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry from a landmark report published 10 years ago. It contained updated and stronger language on issues like the refoulement of DPRK refugees, sexual and gender-based violence, and the link with international peace and security. It also expressed continued support for the accountability mandate of the OHCHR.

UNGA Resolution 79/181 (December 2024) 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. It condemned 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 reiterated calls for cooperation with UN mechanisms. It also included important new elements on issues such as forced labour, discrimination and GBV, reunions of separated families and the return of abductees, and the right to protection of refugees and prisoners of war. It called on the DPRK to reopen its borders to facilitate access of humanitarian staff on the ground. It also requested the President of the UNGA to organize a high-level plenary meeting, featuring testimonies by civil society representatives and other experts, to address human rights abuses and violations in the DPRK.

The fourth cycle of the UPR for the DPRK was held on 7 November. The majority of UN Member States present, including 20 EU MS, expressed strong concerns about the situation of human rights in the DPRK and delivered a total of 294 recommendations.

Lao People's Democratic Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall situation of human rights and democracy did not change in 2024. Freedoms of expression and association remain strictly limited with arrests and detentions for public criticism online. In September, two Lao social media content creators in Bokeo province were arrested for posting a video mocking the state of roads in their town. Police made them attend a 're-education' class, forcing them to confess and apologise publicly on social media before being released. Environmental activist and human rights defender Houayheuung 'Muay' Xayabouly, imprisoned for online criticism of the Government's response to a 2018 dam disaster, was released in 2024 after serving her full five-year sentence. Laos slightly improved its rank in the World Press Freedom Index from 160th in 2023 to 153rd out of 180 countries in 2024. The death penalty remains on the statute books for certain crimes, but has not been applied since 1989. As regards Freedom of Religion or Belief although legally free to practise their religion, Christians have faced problems over monitoring of their activities.

While Laos is a generally tolerant society towards the LGBTI community, individuals can face challenges including stigma, discrimination and marginalisation. Laos supports action against GBV and child rights abuses, and has made efforts to increase its anti-trafficking capacity. Efforts continue to address trafficking and forced labour linked to organised crime in parts of the country. The Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Bokeo province has gained notoriety as a sanctuary for illegal activities such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and cyber fraud. Lao authorities have worked with law enforcement from Vietnam and China, leading to the arrest and deportation of thousands of scammers. Zhao Wei, a Chinese national allegedly connected to organised crime, and whose company operates a casino in the zone, received a state honour distinction in December, marking his support for the work of the police by contributing to their funding. Dispossession of local communities due to development activities by foreign and domestic investors in agriculture, mining and electricity production continues, with limited consultation and difficulties in obtaining adequate compensation.