



PSCORE (사)성공적인 통일을 만들어가는 사람들 PEOPLE FOR SUCCESSFUL COREAN REUNIFICATION

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DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

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Introduction of PSCORE

PSCORE is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) based in Seoul, Republic of Korea. Founded in 2006, PSCORE was granted ‘Consultative Status’ by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 2012. PSCORE has two main objectives: the first is to encourage inter-Korean cooperation by increasing international awareness on human rights issues, as well as developing professional competencies for North Korean defectors through educational support. The second is to address potential barriers to Korean reunification by offering a platform for topics such as democratization and other contemporary social issues. Though PSCORE is dedicated to the full spectrum of humanitarian issues in North Korea, this report will give special attention to the abuse and mistreatment of children, the focal point of PSCORE’s research for the past three years.

Executive Summary

In this report, PSCORE outlines its four contemporary areas of concern regarding the current development of the DPRK.

Chapter A: A review of the past UPR cycle, highlighting major issues that still exist until the present day.

Chapter B: The North Korean education system indoctrinates the students, which in turn legitimizes the DPRK’s centralized power structure. This includes restrictions to the freedom of thought, limitation of media access, as well as false representations of the discourse of the international community.

Chapter C: Child labor continues to exist as a central part of the children’s life, upheld as a part of the education system. Large-scale collection of raw materials as well as agricultural labor is deemed essential to the students’ education and their contribution to society, while also exposing the students to possible exploitation by teachers, school administration, farm managers and other relevant stakeholders.

Chapter D: In addition to the systemized mistreatment of children that occurs within school systems of the DPRK, children remain vulnerable to specific forms of violence, such as physical, mental and sexual abuse as outlined by the UNCRC. Physical disciplining and neglecting children still remains a dominant part of the daily school and domestic sphere, while insufficient provision of food and other supplies endanger those at the lower end of the social order. Young females with lower socio-economic standing are especially at risk to gender-based violence and discrimination.

A. Review of the past UPR session

1. In its response to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review during the 27th session of the 2nd UPR cycle¹, the government of the DPRK refused several recommendations or outright rejected the existence of the described phenomena.² Among those are forced abortions, ill-treatment of detainees, limitation of free movement, punishment of would-be defectors, and unequal access to healthcare and food among the population.
2. The Government of the DPRK announced that it had accepted 113 of the 268 recommendations outlined in the Second Universal Periodic Review held in May 2014. A substantial amount of the recommendations accepted by the DPRK considered economic and social rights of vulnerable groups. However, the reality for these aforementioned vulnerable groups has yet to change, and the DPRK government has failed to take any concrete legal or policy implementations.

B. Politicized Education System

3. The DPRK government is the primary source for all educational and cultural content within North Korea, which allows them to build a curriculum as they see fit. Idolization of the Kim government is an integral part of the students' curriculum from kindergarten to high school.³ Students are subjected to several hours a week of intense political indoctrination that inhibits their freedom of thought. Educating students for this sole purpose hinders the proper mental and physical development of the child. As the regime brainwashes children from an early age, it disturbs their ability to reason and perceive the world in an unbiased manner. An environment where propaganda dominates is incompatible with the values guaranteed in **Article 12(1)** of the UNCRC.⁴
4. It is unlikely for North Korean children to receive an education, a universal human right. Their beliefs, morals, and reason are shaped according to the indoctrination of the regime's propaganda, which fails to uphold the stated goals and ideals of education. The

¹ Human Rights Council (2014a), 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review', A/HRC/27/10.

² Human Rights Council (2014b) 'Addendum: Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review', A/HRC/27/10/Add.1., pp. 2-3.

³ PSCORE (2016) *Forced to Hate: North Korea's Education System*. Seoul, pp. 96-97

⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child', A/RES/44/25

Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has expressed its concerns about the extensive politicization of teaching materials⁵ which contravenes with **Article 29 (1) (d)** of the UNCRC.

5. Education includes a strong anti-Japanese and anti-American sentiment meant to encourage nationalism, legitimize the status of Kim Il-sung, and deify him as the figurehead of the anti-Japanese movement. Other historical figures such as Mother Kim Jong-suk, who “loved her country and hated her enemies” are to be emulated by future generations.⁶ Isolation and animosity of the outside world is what children are encouraged to idealize by the school system. It is worth noting, however, that North Korea has recently curbed its anti-American rhetoric, as apparent in its discontinuation of its “Anti-U.S. Imperialism Rally”, historically held from June 27th to July 27th in previous years.⁷ However, PSCORE theorizes that North Korea’s goodwill is most likely not permanent and is just a temporary arrangement to temper its sensitive political relationship with the United States. Therefore, the DPRK’s façade of cordiality towards the U.S. could always revert back to animosity when politically advantageous.
6. The government of the DPRK continues to hold a monopoly over the flow of information. Television and radio are fixed on state-run channels. Any exercise of freethinking that diverts from the regime’s position is actively obstructed as seen by the opposition of independent newspapers and restriction to Internet access. The indoctrination process of the very young occurs not only through the school curriculum but as well as through mass media. The absolute control over information that is exercised by the DPRK government breaches **Articles 13 and 17** of the UNCRC which states that children should have the right to access information of national as well as international origin.
7. As the DPRK restricts the access to foreign information, children are unwittingly indoctrinated with a heavily distorted view of history – including fabrications of modern Korean history and a deceitful reframing of world history. These misshapen views derive a number of negative consequences. Primarily, it contributes to sustaining the legitimacy of the regime through the deification of the leadership. In addition, schools are required to conduct sessions of self and group criticism⁸, which, in contrast to constructive reflections, fails to respect the child’s right to mental integrity. The consequences of these practices are described by defector Kim Yeon-ri who recounts: *“Every one of us had to criticize someone, so students made deals to criticize each other. But even though everything had already been discussed, if someone criticized me, I made what I originally prepared three times longer.”*⁹ Such practices result in a climate of distrust and hatred

⁵ ‘Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’, CRC/C/PRK/5

⁶ PSCORE (2016) *Forced to Hate: North Korea’s Education System*. Seoul, pp. 140-141

⁷ Josh Smith, “North Korea Scraps Anti-American Souvenirs after Summit, Tour...,” Reuters, June 20, 2018, accessed July 23, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-gifts/north-korea-scraps-anti-american-souvenirs-after-summit-tour-operators-say-idUSKBN1JG0XB>.

⁸ Free PSCORE translation, Original: 생활총화(Saeng-hwal-chong-hwa)

⁹ PSCORE (2016) *Forced to Hate: North Korea’s Education System*. Seoul, p. 174.

between classmates and do not take into account the child's human dignity.¹⁰ It also runs contrary to the aims of **Article 29 (1)** of the UNCRC. Lastly, it renders the transition to life outside of the DPRK more difficult, further complicating the process of reunification.

8. The North Korean government promotes the inclusion of militaristic elements within the school education system. Although the minimum age of enlistment in the armed forces is 16, children are exposed to militaristic influence from their high-school education. **Defector Lee Seon-ri reports** *“You first begin military training in the summer after you turn 16...They made us do the kinds of things that they do in military boot camp when we were only 16 in the Red Youth Guard.”*¹¹ This clearly violates **Article 32 (1)** of the UNCRC, which states all children should be protected from work that may be hazardous and interferes with their education.

C. Child labor

9. The DPRK facilitates child labor on a nation-wide level which is illustrated in its' state administered programs such as the 'Children's Initiative'.¹² The Children's Initiative mandates students to collect several raw materials such as scraps, rabbit hides and pickled food, to mitigate the country's financial decline as well as to contribute to the maintenance of school services. Each region of the DPRK has different guidelines as to what should be procured. All necessary annual quotas the schools and students must fulfill are dictated by the government through the Youth League Secretary.¹³ Yoon Sul-mi, a North Korean defector describes: *“Without exception, there was at least one order every month. After the students finished one assignment, they were given another one the following month.”*¹⁴ Participation is not voluntary but enforced through physical and mental penalties. Defector Kim Eun-hee reports: *“If I didn't bring the items, the teacher would constantly send other children until I couldn't bear it anymore. You had to bring the items and that was the only way.”*¹⁵
10. Agricultural Labor Support is another channel of child labor that exists to bolster the dwindling DPRK economy.¹⁶ The child's status as a student is exploited as a means of free labor, where students are obligated to perform backbreaking physical work in service of their country. Schools incorporate agricultural labor into their curriculum, rendering field work an integral part of every student's education process. As early as the age of four years old, students must work outside of their regular school hours on the field. In return, schools are compensated with money or food by the local collective farms. The schools

¹⁰ 'Convention on the Rights of the Child', A/RES/44/25

¹¹ PSCORE (2016) *Forced to Hate: North Korea's Education System*. Seoul, p. 52. *Additionally, all names including the present one are aliases.

¹²Free PSCORE translation, Original: 꼬마계획(Kko-ma-gye-hoek)

¹³Free PSCORE translation, Original: 청년동맹 (Cheong-nyeon-dong-maeng)

¹⁴ PSCORE (2018) *Unending Toil: Child Labor within North Korea*. Seoul, p. 81

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 288

¹⁶Free PSCORE translation, Original: 농촌동원 (Nong-chon-dong-won)

use this incurred profit to maintain the regular school services.¹⁷ Agricultural Labor Support is a blatant oversight **Article 32** of the UNCRC, which holds the state responsible to protect the child from any form of economic exploitation.

11. The government forcibly mobilizes students to farms in remote areas to contribute to construction projects and month-long agricultural assignment. These mandatory, state-led assignments do not entail only strenuous physical labor, but also psychological burden on the students and their families. Mostly the students themselves cover the cost for transport and food. This work included active and passive participation such as: collections of raw material, assistance at building-sites, and railways construction. Defector Koo Dong-su recalls: “*We plucked the grass surrounding the railways, spread rocks, and carried rocks around the crossties*”.¹⁸ These forms of state-mandated labor are not communicated as work, but as the children’s contribution to the nation’s well being. Defector Kim Sae-joon states: “*I think physical labor takes up about 40% of education, and physical labor of students is explained to the public as a rightful activity. It most definitely interfered with our education*”.¹⁹ The political exploitation of the school education system clearly violates the children’s rights on education outlined in **Article 47** of the constitution of the DPRK.²⁰ An educational system that is contingent on manual labor is one that levies study costs in the form of hard manual work. It exploits its’ position as an essential service to minimize labor costs at the expense of its’ students. A student’s time and ability to study should not be compromised by physical labor or the consequences of resisting the practice.

D. Child abuse

12. Physical violence remains a constant element of the North Korean education system. Teachers abuse their position of power to physically discipline their students. Distinctive instances of peer pressure among the students as an alternative means to maintain order within the class environment have also been reported; further invoking distrust and lack of empathy among students. Defector Kim Jin-joo recounts, “*As the mutual criticism sessions continue, it was really offensive when I got criticized. It was always like this, so the members of the organizations couldn’t get along well*”.²¹
13. Further instances of active and passive physical violence are also observable within domiciles, orphanages, and relief shelters.²² Constant sleep and food deprivation caused by weak infrastructure put children under constant physical strain and the potential risk of mental trauma. **Article 20 (2)** of the UNCRC holds the government of the DPRK responsible for not ensuring a suitable living condition and caring environment, which is why those facilities require constant supervision by and through state authorities.

¹⁷ PSCORE (2018) *Unending Toil: Child Labor within North Korea*. Seoul, pp. 23-29

¹⁸ PSCORE (2018) *Unending Toil: Child Labor within North Korea*. Seoul, pp.137

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 184

²⁰ Supreme People’s Assembly: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (2016) *Constitution of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (2016), Article 47*

²¹ PSCORE (2016) *Forced to Hate: North Korea’s Education System*. Seoul, p. 173.

²² Free PSCORE translation, Original: 구호소(Gu-ho-so)

14. Gender based violence in physical and verbal forms pose an explicit threat for adolescent females on the lower extremity of the North Korean socio-economic system. The main perpetrators are members of the military and school staff who claim positions of power. This exploitation of power is a result of a flawed and un-transparent government structure. Furthermore, existing support channels for the victim are maintained by the local school system itself, which in return attempts to minimize any negative attention to it. The victim understands that in the process of reporting the crime, they will experience additional suffering as a reliable institution for justice and due process fails to function. The DPRK fails to abide by **Article 19** of the UNCRC to fulfill the responsibility of creating a sufficient support mechanism for victims of sexual violence.

E. Recommendations

Based on the previously outlined cases, PSCORE articulates the following recommendations:

15. The immediate de-politicization of the curriculum, which includes any hostile depiction of other nationalities and phenotypes, historical distortion, idolization of a totalitarian political order in the general public discourse within the context of education and its employed media. Those changes should be orientated towards the education objectives outlines by the UNESCO ‘Recommendations concerning Education for International Understanding’, which advocates for co-operation and peace and education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.²³
16. All North Korean citizens should be granted immediate access to global media, such as newspapers, radio, television and the Internet without being punished.
17. The DPRK government must act proactively to prevent forms of teaching practices that aim to humiliate the student, such as teachers bullying students for not fulfilling the mandated quota of crops, must cease. A possible solution could be to establish an independent, third party institution dedicated to combating child abuse, which ensures participation from organizations and countries part of the UN.
18. All school assigned tasks, which promotes child labor (defined by international law), must be discontinued immediately. Furthermore, the DPRK government should be prompted to install mechanisms that prevent the exploitation of students as a labor force through key actors such as teachers and other parts of the administrative structure of schools.

²³UNESCO (1974), ‘Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Paris, in *Records of the General Conference*. Paris.