

(English version)

Question for written answer E-002674/24
to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
César Luena (S&D)
(27 November 2024)

Subject: China's refoulement of DPRK escapees, and the situation of detainees in the DPRK

In October 2023, as part of its practices of mass repatriation, China deported hundreds of North Korean escapees who, once back in their country, were subjected to torture, ill-treatment and 'forced abortions and infanticide against repatriated mothers and their children' ⁽¹⁾.

Opinion No 37/2024 by the UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concerning one of these North Korean escapees, Kim Cheol-ok, states that such repatriation practices constitute an 'arbitrary deprivation of liberty' and urges both China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to take steps to address the issue.

1. Will the EU ask China to uphold its obligations with regard to non-refoulement of DPRK escapees, in view of the suffering they have to endure once back in the DPRK?
2. In any future interaction with the DPRK, will the EU raise the above-mentioned case together with the cases of the three South Korean missionaries detained for over 10 years, Kim Jung-wook, Kim Kook-kie and Choi Chun-gil, and call for their release?
3. Will the EU consider specifying the above-mentioned cases in the upcoming draft annual resolution on human rights in the DPRK at the UN Human Rights Council, as they did on three occasions for detainees held by the Myanmar junta? ⁽²⁾

Submitted: 27.11.2024

Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Kallas on behalf of the European Commission
(4 February 2025)

The EU has expressed its concerns about reports regarding the repatriation to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) of North Koreans detained in China and has reiterated the importance of upholding the principle of non-refoulement.

The EU has repeatedly raised this issue with China through diplomatic channels, asking China to refrain from returning North Korean refugees to the DPRK. The EU will continue to urge China to fully respect the principle of non-refoulement.

The EU has noted with concern that foreign citizens remain arbitrarily detained in the DPRK, often following trials that do not conform with international fair trial guarantees, with no information available regarding their health or the conditions of their detention.

The EU will continue to insist that the DPRK must respect its international human rights obligations, including with regard to the cases referred to in the written question.

The EU has called on the DPRK to provide citizens of other countries detained in the DPRK with protections including access to consular assistance and to release persons that have been arbitrarily detained or sentenced after an unfair trial.

The EU in principle does not enumerate individual consular cases in the annual Human Rights Council resolution on human rights in the DPRK.

The cases relating to Myanmar concerned the highest representatives of the democratically elected government, detained after an unjustified, illegal and unconstitutional military coup.

¹ <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FC.3%2F79%2FL.34&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>.

² Resolutions adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on 23 March 2018, on 22 March 2019, and on 22 June 2020.