

Don't let security crisis overshadow human rights situation in DPR Korea – UN expert

27 October 2017 – The international security crisis over the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) must not overshadow the human rights situation of millions of ordinary citizens in the country, a United Nations human rights expert has said.

"While the current tensions divert our attention to the authorities, we should not forget that behind the Government there are [ordinary citizens](#) whose human rights need protection, more so than ever," Tomás Ojea Quintana, Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Asian country, told reporters in New York today.

Earlier this week, the Special Rapporteur appealed to the UN General Assembly's main body dealing with human rights and social and humanitarian issues ([Third Committee](#)) to ensure that human rights were not overlooked amid the unprecedented tensions over the country's nuclear and ballistic missile programme.

He said the wider sanctions on coal, iron and seafood imposed by the UN Security Council in September may have a negative impact on the population, citing reports that sanctions may have prevented cancer patients from access to chemotherapy and blocked the import of disability equipment.

In his full report to the General Assembly, the expert said DPRK citizens continued to suffer patterns of "grave violations" of their human rights, citing concerns over the situation of prisoners and abductees, access to food, corruption and freedom of information.

The expert reported on the testimonies of those who had told him of their fear of being sent to a political prison camp, as well as of those who were detained in inhumane conditions in holding centres near the border with China. He was also informed of the challenges people met to circumvent the country's system of surveillance.

The situation of family members who were forcibly separated during the Korean War, or as a result of abduction by the DPRK, was highlighted in the report as requiring urgent action to restore those family links.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.