

ROLE SHEET

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

CONTEXT:

DPRK's history regarding women's issues and its stance on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda is marked by a complex interplay of political ideology, social norms, and economic challenges. Post-liberation from Japanese rule, DPRK implemented progressive policies for women, including the *Act and Enforcement Rules on the Equal Rights of Men and Women* in DPRK, which guaranteed women's rights in various societal domains, including equal wages and education. These policies represented a significant shift from the patriarchal system prevalent before the Japanese colonial period, and the DPRK state promoted them as a key symbol of DPRK overcoming feudalism and being much more progressive than the South.¹

However, the Korean War (1950-1953) hindered the realization of these institutional changes. Women played a crucial role during the war, not only in the rear-guard, producing military equipment and relief supplies, but also directly participating in combat roles. The aftermath of the war saw women assuming primary roles in post-war reconstruction due to the significant loss of male lives.²

In the subsequent years, the DPRK government mobilized women to actively participate in nation-building and industrial labor, especially in light industry. Despite these opportunities, the sudden societal changes posed challenges for women who were accustomed to a more traditional, patriarchal system. The government's focus on heavy industry eventually led to the devaluing of women's labor, which was mainly centered on light industry, reinforcing their discriminatory status.

Economic crises in the 1990s had a profound impact on women, forcing them to take up entrepreneurial roles in the Jangmadang (street markets) to support their families, and sometimes migrating in search of economic opportunities. This change has transformed the traditional notion of motherhood in North Korea, with women maintaining strong commitments to their families while engaging in economic activities. This shift has led to a redefinition of intimacy and family roles, as mothers navigate the challenges of geographical distance and illegal status to support their children through remittances and regular communication. This complex situation highlights the enduring impact of economic and social changes on family dynamics and the evolving roles of women in DPRK society.³

¹ KASS. (n.d.). "System of Law on Gender Equality Established in DPRK". *Korean Review*

² Kim, Sung-kyung. (2023). "North Korean Women Struggle for Survival". *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Asia*.

³ Kim, Sung-kyung. (2020). "Mobile North Korean Women and Long-Distance Motherhood: The (Re)Construction of Intimacy and the Ambivalence of Family". *Korean Studies*. (44) 97-122

IN SUPPORT OF:

As DPRK enters negotiations, there are items that they would like to discuss and are willing to push to include in the Regional Action Plan. These include:

1. Allow for regular dialogue between women's groups from DPRK and South Korea, especially educational exchanges between women in the STEM fields.
2. Lift all sanctions that negatively impact the livelihood of women, beginning with economic sanctions and sanctions on imports of essential goods.⁴ DPRK sees these sanctions as politically motivated attacks on its sovereignty.
3. Reduction of military tensions on the Korean Peninsula, such as scaling back US-South Korea military exercises, reducing troop deployments along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), or implementing arms control measures.
4. Support for increased business investment in DPRK, including for women run businesses.⁵
5. Receive apologies and reparations for victims of Japanese Imperial soldiers wartime sexual slavery ("comfort women") from Japan. Restoring the honor of the grandmothers is a deeply emotional issue for DPRK.

OPPOSED TO:

There are also items which DPRK does not want to include in the Regional Action Plan, but may be willing to compromise on if an adequate trade off is met. *Remember that you don't have to offer these right away in a negotiation.* These include:

1. Reopen the issue of Japanese nationals who disappeared off the eastern coast of Japan (aka "Kidnapped by DPRK") in the 1970s and 1980s. DPRK already apologized in 2002 and returned 5 of the 13 people.
2. Use the WPS agenda to increase U.S. presence in the region, particularly in the defense and security sectors. This is a clear act of aggression by U.S. imperialist
3. Calls from external actors to loosen oversight measures or registration requirements on international organizations working in DPRK. DPRK sees these regulations as protections for social stability.
4. Use of "universal" rights based on "international" standards as a guise for outside actors to interfere with DPRK's internal affairs.⁶ DPRK views this as a modern approach to Western imperialism.
5. Any concessions that would limit the nuclear program, which is regarded as essential for national defense.

⁴ [Korea Peace Now. \(2019\). "The Human Costs And Gendered Impact Of Sanctions On North Korea".](#)

⁵ [Lankov, Andrei. \(2022\). "How women run the small business world inside North Korea". NKNews](#)

⁶ [UNHCR \(2014\). "Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea".](#)