



# Persecuting Faith

Documenting religious freedom  
violations in North Korea

VOLUME 2



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*Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea (Volume 2)*

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## Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

**This report presents evidence of serious human rights violations that have targeted individuals and communities in North Korea for their religion or belief. Our evidence is based on 456 documented cases of human rights violations involving 244 victims and 141 perpetrators. In 97% of cases, documented human rights violations were perpetrated by agents of the North Korean state.**

Our evidence demonstrates that the adherents of two religions, North Korean Shamanism and Christianity, have experienced arbitrary arrest and detention; forced labour; torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; the denial of fair trial rights; the denial of the principle of non-refoulement; the denial of the right to life; and sexual violence. Spanning the years 1987–2019, these violations were neither arbitrary nor random. They have been a part of systematic and targeted attacks directed at religious minorities.

These patterns of violations underscore the total denial of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion—often known as the right to religious freedom—in North Korea. This right, which is denied to the North Korean population, is a fundamental and universal human right that protects all people, including those who hold atheistic beliefs and those who choose not to have any religion or belief, to be free from discrimination based on a religion or belief; to espouse or change their religion or belief; and to manifest or outwardly display a religion or belief, either alone or as part of a community.

Evidence in this report builds upon previous work in 2020 and enables us to draw conclusions about the perpetrators of documented crimes, violations, and abuses. We find the denial of the right to religious freedom is made possible by the active mobilisation of every organ of the North Korean government, in particular the Ministry of People's Security, the Ministry of State Security, the Prosecutor's Office, and the Workers' Party of Korea.<sup>1</sup> In many cases, our evidence links specific human rights violations to named perpetrators and state organisations. And in certain cases, we are able to establish further links to command structures; documents that demonstrate planning, coordination, and intent in the persecution of religious communities; and high-ranking officials who may ultimately be accountable for criminal activity.

Our evidence has been preserved in preparation to support future accountability initiatives that may hold to account direct perpetrators and those who commanded, planned, or allowed serious human rights violations against religious minorities to take place. **The dataset used for this report is freely available online at our North Korean Religious Freedom Database.**



# Findings

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## ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY AND DENIAL OF FAIR TRIAL RIGHTS

In nearly all documented cases, the arrest, detention, and trial proceedings of religious adherents contained elements that rendered them arbitrary or otherwise contrary to relevant international standards set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and relevant international instruments and principles. In cases involving the Ministry of People's Security and the Ministry of State Security, we did not document any cases where public officials invoked a legal basis to justify deprivations of liberty. In cases where the deprivation of liberty resulted from the exercise of the right to religious freedom guaranteed by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and

of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief—such as the right to manifest one's religion or belief or to worship and assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes—these cases were also deemed arbitrary. Finally, the disregard for international norms relating to the right to a fair trial constituted further arbitrary deprivations of liberty.

## FORCED LABOUR

Criminal sentences involving forced labour were widely documented. These cases did not meet the criteria for exclusions listed in the Forced Labour Convention, namely that compulsory labour of detainees may be imposed in cases of emergency or for minor communal services. We documented patterns of evidence where:

- the length of forced labour exacted from detainees exceeded internationally accepted limits;

- public officials forced detainees to undertake work for private individuals;
- labour was exacted under the threat of physical violence and ill-treatment; and
- detainees who had been arbitrarily deprived of their liberty and denied fair trials were forced to perform labour.

Taken together, these cases constitute serious violations of the Forced Labour Convention and other international instruments.

#### **TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT**

The right to be free of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment was denied to persons who were arrested and detained for their religious beliefs. Public officials subjected victims to physical beatings with fists, feet, and objects; the ingestion of polluted food; positional torture; the deprivation of sleep; forced squat jumps; and verbal abuse. In many cases, the conditions of detention experienced by victims at various penal facilities amounted to inhuman and cruel treatment. In certain cases, the purpose of torture was documented as a

means to exact forced confessions. We documented cases where foreign citizens were detained in North Korea and subjected to forms of torture and ill-treatment based on their Christian adherence, including Chinese and European nationals. In cases involving both Shamanic and Christian adherents, the arbitrary deprivation of the right to life was recorded.

#### **REFOULEMENT**

Serious human rights violations perpetrated against Christian adherents in the territory of North Korea were enabled by the victims' prior refolement from China. Regardless of a person's legal or migration status in a third-country, states are prohibited from returning persons who may be at risk of harm in their country of origin. In certain cases, we documented Chinese public officials stamping the files of detained North Koreans as having associated with Christianity. In turn, we documented how this identification of Christian adherents led to forms of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment during investigations of refoled victims in North Korea.



**244**

VICTIMS

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**141**

PERPETRATORS

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**456**

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

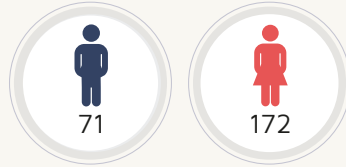
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**AGE**



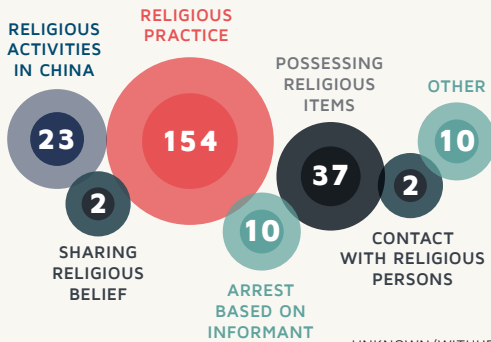
UNKNOWN/WITHHELD: 50

**GENDER**



UNKNOWN/WITHHELD: 1

**REASON FOR DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY**

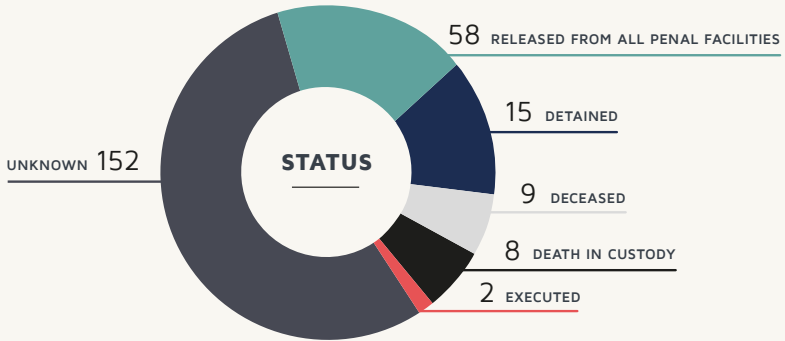


UNKNOWN/WITHHELD: 4

**RELIGIOUS OR BELIEF ASSOCIATION OF VICTIMS**



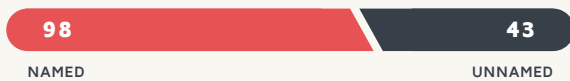
## LENGTH OF DETENTION



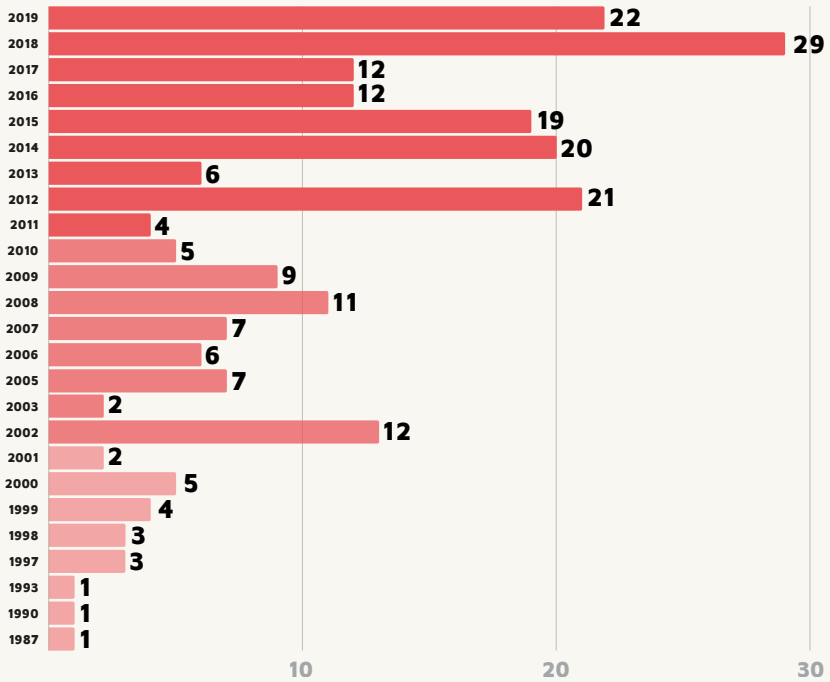
## STATE ORGANISATION RESPONSIBLE FOR VIOLATIONS



## PERPETRATORS



## DOCUMENTED VIOLATIONS BY YEAR



UNKNOWN/WITHHELD: 232

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## HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS PERPETRATED AGAINST RELIGIOUS ADHERENTS

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**207** ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY



**73** FORCED LABOUR



**53** TORTURE & CRUEL, INHUMAN  
OR DEGRADING TREATMENT



**36** DENIAL OF FAIR TRIAL



**36** DENIAL OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF



**27** REFOULEMENT



**16** DENIAL OF RIGHT TO LIFE



**2** SEXUAL VIOLENCE INCLUDING RAPE

UNKNOWN/WITHHELD: 8

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## FORMS OF TORTURE EXPERIENCED BY RELIGIOUS ADHERENTS

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BEATING WITH FISTS OR FEET

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BEATING WITH OBJECTS

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INGESTION OF POLLUTED FOOD

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POSITIONAL TORTURE

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VERBAL ABUSE

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SQUAT JUMPS

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DEPRIVATION OF SLEEP

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# Recommendations

The commission of serious human rights violations in North Korea calls for a range of international actors, including United Nations bodies, national governments, and civil society organisations, to work collectively towards accountability.

In turn, we recommend the following actions:

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## 1

**National governments and grant-making organisations should endow civil society, media organisations, and technology organisations with funding and technical expertise to disseminate detailed and consistent information into North Korea concerning individual accountability for international crimes and human rights violations and the international community's obligations to future justice.**

We have documented cases where the behaviour of perpetrators had been directly influenced by international pressure on North Korea's human rights record, resulting in situations where perpetrators had lessened the severity of violations in penal facilities. Information concerning individual responsibility and legal accountability for violations of human rights that is disseminated in North Korea should fall into three categories:

- Accountability for direct perpetrators, namely public officials who have directly committed a physical violation against a person or who agreed and acted upon a common plan or design regardless of whether they physically perpetrated the act;

- Accountability for secondary perpetrators, namely persons who held an executive or administrative role and had knowledge of the nature of a system of human rights violations, for example in a penal facility, and failed to prevent crimes or violations that occurred;

- Accountability for persons with superior responsibility, namely persons who may be held criminally responsible for crimes committed by subordinates where the person was in a relationship of superior-subordinate with the perpetrators, knew or had reason to know that crimes had been committed or were about to be committed and wilfully and culpably failed to prevent or punish these crimes.

Disseminating this information into North Korea has two distinct purposes. First, it may act to deter perpetrators from committing further crimes, deter those who have yet to commit crimes from doing so, and isolate bad actors. Second, it may provide encouragement to survivors and families of victims inside North Korea through public recognition of their truth and encourage more witnesses and victims to document the identities of perpetrators of crimes and facilitate the flow of this information to organisations outside of North Korea who preserve evidence.

## 2

**The paths to justice for North Korea must be varied to overcome the potential foreclosure of any one particular accountability mechanism.** In turn, opportunities for conversations between the United Nations, national governments, civil society organisations, and legal experts on the institutions, legal arguments, and types of evidence that will be required to achieve legal accountability should be created and supported. These conversations should lead to actionable recommendations, particularly given the improbability of a case being heard imminently at the International Criminal Court.

## 3

**Prioritise the gathering and preservation of linkage evidence to a criminal law standard that can lay the legal groundwork for a range of future efforts to hold perpetrators to account.** The preservation of all evidence is critical to future accountability. Yet, in the case of North Korea, it is linkage evidence that will support the creation of prosecution-ready dossiers of high-ranking perpetrators, indictments, and legal briefs that can support domestic, national, hybrid, and international justice mechanisms. This is important for a closed country like North Korea, where the responsibility of individual perpetrators can be established but not yet their biographical and identifying details. This can be achieved through various means. For example, the funding of the creation of comprehensive organisational maps of North Korean state organisations that chart chains of command or the funding of

efforts to gather and preserve vast caches of internal government documents that may serve as evidentiary materials. This provides potential for both short-term (e.g., domestic civil or criminal cases) and long-term (e.g., an ad-hoc international tribunal or hybrid court) accountability. This model would go beyond most current forms of human rights documentation and focus on laying the groundwork for a range of future legal efforts that will hold perpetrators to account for crimes against humanity and other human rights violations and abuses.

## 4

**Targeted sanctions should be imposed on individual perpetrators and state organisations who are responsible for serious human rights violations.** Sanctions that are specifically targeted at persons who are proven to be involved in serious human rights violations committed against individuals based on their religion or belief are feasible means to provide accountability for, and deter, activities that amount to serious violations of human rights. This may take place under existing state-based and European Union sanctions regimes.



# Methodology

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**Evidence presented in this report has been analysed against elements of international human rights law and relevant international norms, such as minimum standards for judicial processes, the rights of detainees, and humane conditions of detention.**

We principally relied on an international legal framework centred on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees; and respective General Comments, standards, and norms that are considered international or customary international law.<sup>2</sup> Although the North Korean government is not party to all the aforementioned covenants and treaties, it is still bound by fundamental and customary elements and interpretations of the right to religious freedom.



Korea Future investigators undertook detailed in-person interviews with survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators of religious freedom violations between November 2019 and August 2021. The use of a convenience sample in this process provided investigators with a feasible means of collecting primary data. We have concealed the identities of interviewees and, where necessary, we use pseudonyms to protect interviewees' family members who remain in North Korea. All evidence presented in this report has been sourced from primary investigations undertaken by Korea Future.

Based on our sample size, we acknowledge that our findings may not fully reflect all experiences of religious adherents in North Korea, but certain patterns in the crime base and linkage evidence indicate that experiences to the contrary would be exceptions rather than the norm. In establishing a necessary standard of proof, we employed a reasonable grounds standard in making factual determinations on individual cases. To support future accountability, we do not name any individual perpetrators in this report or in the North Korean Religious Freedom Database. This evidence, alongside other materials, has instead been analysed and preserved to be made available for use in future investigations and justice efforts.



## **S**hamanism is the most widespread religious practice in North Korea.

It is practiced in every province and claims adherents from every level of the social strata. Predating institutionalised religion on the Korean peninsula, Shamanism became an essential component of North Korea's religious landscape following the collapse of its economy in the 1990s, a period of famine and government failure known as the Arduous March. In the place of an ideological doctrine that failed to provide necessary explanations or guidance in the face of an unprecedented hardship, Shamanism rose to the forefront of social life.

Individuals visit shamans, commonly referred to as 'fortune tellers,' for diverse reasons ranging from obtaining divinations to procuring magical healing. Manifestation of Shamanic beliefs mainly takes the shape of divination rituals. Methods of divination vary among shamans but diverge into three main categories of numerology, card reading, and physiognomy.<sup>3</sup>

Numerological divination is based on a traditional East Asian divination method of predicting an individual's destiny based on the interactions between an individual's date of birth and natural elements of the universe. Most shamans learn how to conduct numerological calculations through hand copied pages of Chinese divination literature, often smuggled into North Korea along with other contraband goods. Card readers mostly work with a set of cards resembling the European tarot, interpreting the arrangement of cards to determine a person's destiny. Physiognomy, the act of discerning the personal characteristics and the destiny of individuals based on the impression their facial features convey, is regarded as the most divine form of practice. Shamans who practice physiognomy are often referred to as "the God-touched." God-touched shamans begin their practice after experiencing a trance-like state encompassing religious visions and numinous voices. North Korean Shamanic adherents consider God-touched shamans to possess superior insight into the future compared to shamans who do not enter a trance-like experience.<sup>4</sup>

## Victims

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**This report considers 277 cases of serious human rights violations perpetrated against 151 Shamanic adherents between 1987 and 2019.** Violations experienced by victims are remarkably similar, such as arbitrary deprivation of liberty, including the denial of fair trial rights; forced labour; and torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. From these patterns, we are able to draw conclusions, particularly that there is sufficient credible and structural evidence to suggest that human rights violations experienced by Shamanic adherents are enabled by a criminal justice system subject to the direction and control of the Workers' Party of Korea and facilitated by the Ministry of People's Security, among other state organisations.

**Importantly, in 86% of documented cases of serious human rights violations perpetrated against persons because of their Shamanic beliefs, the victims were women.** Findings from this report strongly suggest a gendered aspect to both the practise of Shamanism and the human rights abuses against those who practise Shamanism. This intersection between gender and religious freedom violations will be explored in future work.

**Where criminal sentences handed to Shamanic adherents were documented, 44% of victims received sentences in penal facilities of 1-12 months and 21% of 1-2 years. In 5% of cases, victims received sentences of between 6 and 10 years.** In cases where the current status of the victim was known, 82% had been released from penal facilities. This figure stands in contrast to documented Christian victims, most of whom remain in political prison camps with no prospect for release.

# Perpetrators

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The Ministry of People's Security is responsible for 90% of documented serious human rights violations perpetrated against Shamanic adherents. This amounts to 115 cases of arbitrary deprivation of liberty, 57 cases of forced labour, 31 cases of the denial of fair trial, and 21 cases of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.<sup>5</sup> Names and identifying details of 56 perpetrators in the Ministry of People's Security have been retained alongside information on perpetrators in the Ministry of State Security, Workers Party of Korea, and Prosecutor's Office.

Quote: \_\_\_\_\_

## CRIMINAL CODE 2015

"A person who engages in superstitious activities in exchange for money or goods shall be punished for less than one year at a labour training camp. A person who teaches superstitious acts to a group of people or causes severe consequences shall be punished for less than three years at a re-education camp. In cases where the foregoing act is a grave offense, the person shall be punished for between three and seven years at a re-education camp."

**We find the criminalisation and persecution of Shamanic practice to be a causal factor in serious human rights violations perpetrated by the Ministry of People’s Security.** Although the Ministry of People’s Security may be comparable to a national police force in other countries, at its core it is a state organisation subject to Workers’ Party of Korea control through the party’s assignment of management personnel, the issuance of guidance directives and policies, and the continuous ideological education and internal surveillance of all Ministry of People’s Security personnel. This is defined by and through the *Ten Principles for Establishing a Monolithic Leadership System*, North Korea’s *de facto* constitution that compels every party organ to remove thought considered a threat to the political system, including Shamanism.<sup>6</sup> In its duty to law enforcement activities according to the criminal code, the Ministry of People’s Security is also legally compelled to arrest and detain Shamanic adherents. Although there is no explicit reference to religion in the criminal code, there are articles related to “crimes of violating the order of socialist collective life,” including activities that fall under the euphemistic term “acts of superstition.”<sup>7</sup> This term encompasses religious and belief practices, and commonly refers to Shamanism.

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## Locations

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**Shamanic adherents were arrested and detained in Ministry of People's Security-run precinct offices, waiting rooms, detention centres, labour training centres, labour training camps, and re-education camps.**<sup>8</sup> During periods of investigation and pre-trial examination, detainees were not convicted of crimes and were particularly susceptible to violence and serious human rights violations, especially at facilities attached to precincts or city or county-level offices known as waiting rooms. Acting as gateways to the wider North Korean penal system, waiting rooms are locations where detainees are informed if they will be sentenced to a labour training facility or transferred to Ministry of People's Security detention centre in the region of their residence for further interrogation.

**One such facility is Hyesan City Ministry of People's Security Waiting Room.** This penal facility is documented as a location of serious human rights violations, including the denial of health; torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; the denial of the right to life; the denial of rights to juvenile prisoners; and the denial of rights of prisoners with disabilities. Multiple Shamanic practitioners were documented as being arbitrarily deprived of their liberty in this facility in November 2018. In these cases, the waiting room served not only as the setting for serious human rights violations, but as an instrument in their perpetration in that the conditions of detention amounted to inhuman and cruel treatment and presented severe risks to the health and wellbeing of detainees. Conditions of detention at this facility are consistent with other penal facilities where Shamanic adherents were detained.



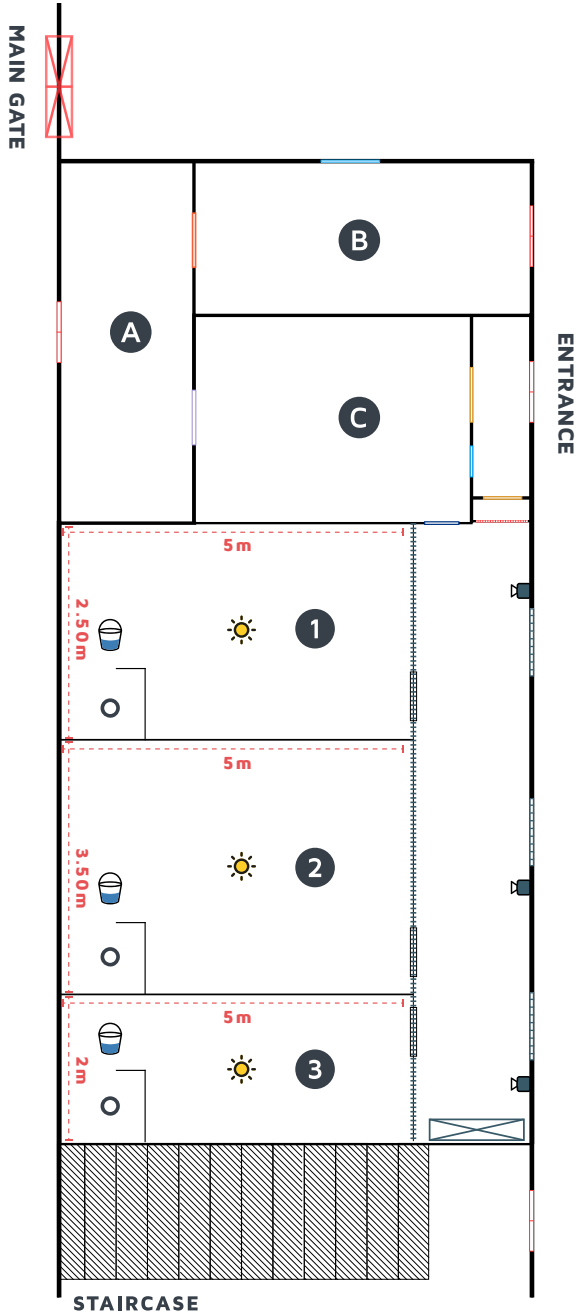
IMAGE © 2021 CNES / AIRBUS  
IMAGE © 2021 MAXAR TECHNOLOGY

PERSECUTING FAITH  
North Korean Shamanism





















Hyesan City Ministry of People's Security Waiting Room

# HYESAN CITY MPS WAITING ROOM 2019



## LEGEND

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- |   |   |
|---|---|
|  RECEPTION AREA  |  CELL 1                                |
|  ROOM FOR OFFICIALS ON DUTY/REGISTRATION                   |  CELL 2                                |
|  ROOM FOR OFFICIALS ON DUTY OF WAITING ROOM                |  CELL 3                                |
|  STEEL BAR DOOR  |  CELL BARS                             |
|  DOOR  |  COMPACT LIGHT on the ceiling          |
|  WINDOW FOR MONITORING                                     |  CCTV to monitor cells                 |
|  REGISTRATION WINDOW                                       |  COMMON LATRINE                        |
|  WOODEN DOOR   |  WATER BUCKET                        |
|  WINDOW TO RECEIVE FOOD FOR DETAINEES (no longer in use) |  SHELF FOR PERSONAL BELONGINGS/SHOES |

# PENAL FACILITIES

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- **Waiting room**

A waiting room is a detention facility where suspects accused of non-political crimes are temporarily held prior to pre-trial examination or transfer to another detention facility.

- **Holding centre**

A holding centre is a detention facility for detainees awaiting transfer to their local Ministry of People's Security detention centre or precinct. Detainees have typically been refouled from China or are suspects in non-political crimes.

- **Detention centre**

A detention centre is a detention facility for suspects undergoing pre-trial examination and for detainees who have been sentenced and are awaiting transfer to a further penal facility.

- **Labour training centre**

A labour training centre is a city or county-level detention facility for detainees sentenced with an administrative penalty of short-term labour for up to 6 months.

- **Labour training camp**

A labour training camp is a provincial and national-level detention facility for detainees sentenced for between 6-12 months.

- **Re-education camp**

A re-education camp is a detention facility for detainees convicted of non-political crimes and who have been handed a re-education sentence (*kyohwa hyeong*) of between 1-year and a life sentence. Detainees sentenced to re-education camps are deprived of their citizenship.

- **Political prison camp**

A political prison camp is a detention facility for detainees sentenced with political crimes.

- **Internment camp**

An internment camp is a detention facility for detainees charged with political crimes and who are undergoing pre-trial examination and for detainees who have been sentenced to a political prison camp and are awaiting transfer.

- **Kkotjebi relief station**

A kkotjebi relief station is a facility that in principle provides food and shelter to homeless adults and children but is also used as a detention facility for detainees when detention centres are at full capacity.



# Human Rights Violations

## ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY

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Deprivation of liberty in itself is not a violation of human rights. Under international law, however, the deprivation of liberty is considered arbitrary where there is no legal basis justifying an arrest or detention; where the deprivation of liberty results from the exercise of fundamental rights or freedoms; where there is a partial or total non-observance of the international norms relating to the right to a fair trial; or where the deprivation of liberty constitutes a violation of international law for reasons of discrimination, such as when it is based on a person's religious beliefs.<sup>10</sup> There are no circumstances where citizens may be arrested and detained based on their inner convictions and beliefs, and there are very few occasions when a person may have his or her liberty deprived for manifesting or outwardly displaying his or her religion, either alone or as part of a religious community.

**We documented 160 cases, of which 65 occurred between 2016 and 2019, where the deprivation of liberty of Shamanic adherents, inclusive of the denial of fair trial, did not have a legal basis.** Most significantly, in 133 cases victims were arrested and detained based on their exercise of rights to religious practice that are guaranteed by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In these incidents, the deprivation of liberty was

considered arbitrary and consequently constituted violations of international law.

In cases where Shamanic practitioners and their patrons were arrested, it was not evident that any legal basis justified the deprivation of liberty. For example, **Min Hyeong Guk** was followed by a Ministry of People's Security official to the residence of a shaman. During a religious practice, the official entered the property, and the victim was physically beaten after denying any involvement in the ceremony. The shaman was arrested and was later released following the payment of a bribe. Min Hyeong Guk recalled, "*[the shaman] demanded that I pay her back for the large amount of money she had to pay to be released after she was arrested. It was a horrible experience.*"

The probative value of evidence used by state agents to justify arrest and detention was deemed both unreliable and untrustworthy. In one incident, the arrest of a shaman and her patrons for religious practice was based on information passed to the Ministry of People's Security by a citizen who had become an informant. In another case, a Shamanic practitioner was sentenced to 11 years at a re-education camp in September 2018 based on a notebook obtained by a Ministry of People's Security official that was alleged to record who had patronised the shaman.



## LENGTH OF DETENTION



## REASON FOR DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY





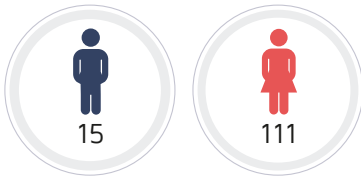
In cases where arrests of Shamanic adherents were conducted by Ministry of State Security or the Prosecutor's Office officials, these were documented as being performed by officials who did not wear uniforms and did not present arrest warrants or notice for the reasons of arrests. In one case from 2018, the victim later received a 7-year sentence in a re-education camp and has not yet been released. In all, these cases may constitute arbitrary deprivations of liberty under the criteria of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.<sup>11</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Ministry of State Security was documented as participating in the deprivation of liberty of Shamanic adherents. 'Superstitious acts' are not crimes that traditionally fall under the remit of the Ministry of State Security, but proclamation documents prohibiting the practice of superstition from 2016 were distributed by its officials, and the Ministry of State Security has been documented conducting arrests of suspects of non-political crimes, including persons engaged in Shamanic practice.

**In 33 cases, the right to a fair trial was denied to Shamanic adherents who had been charged with crimes relating to their religious practice.** The total non-observance of international norms relating to the right to a fair trial—including the denial of the right to be brought promptly before a judge; the denial of the right to trial within a reasonable time or to release; the denial of the right to an independent and impartial judiciary; the denial of the right to prepare a defence; the denial of the right to legal counsel; and a denial of the right to the presumption of innocence—created overlapping conditions of arbitrary deprivations of liberty during arrests and detention.

Victims who were sent to trial entered a judicial system managed by the Ministry of People's Security and the Prosecutor's Office, involving a public prosecution process subject to the criminal code.<sup>12</sup> Trials at courts comprised a prosecutor, a judge, a defence lawyer, and lay persons selected by the People's Committee for their party loyalty. Prior to their trials, few victims were afforded the right to legal counsel and where legal representation was documented, this took the form of state-assigned criminal defence lawyers belonging to the Central Defence Attorney League, which is an organisational unit of the Workers' Party of Korea with a duty to the state and to political reporting, rather than to defending the accused. Shamanic victims who stood trial at courts and who were accused of religious practice received

## GENDER



## AGE



UNKNOWN/WITHHELD: 21

sentences of 1-6 months at city or county-level labour training centres, up to 1 year at provincial or national-level labour training camps, and between 3 and 10 years at re-education camps. Detainees who were sentenced to re-education camps were deprived of their civilian registration cards. Men's hair was shaved and women's hair was cut to the length of their ears to mark them as criminals, while Workers' Party of Korea statuses of detainees were revoked, where applicable. Detainees who were sentenced to labour training camps were able to retain their civilian registration cards.

### Cases deemed minor breaches of the criminal code did not go to trial.<sup>13</sup>

Instead, victims were sentenced by a non-judicial Regional Security Committee and handed administrative penalties of 1-6 months of forced labour that were served at city or county-level labour training centres. Regional Security Committees meet weekly or monthly to agree on sentences for Shamanic adherents. Once a sentence of forced labour had been determined, Ministry of People's Security officials visited cells and called the names of those persons who were to be transferred to labour training centres and those who were to be transferred to detention centres for further investigation. Detainees sentenced to forced labour were known to be taken by foot to a labour training



centre flanked by Ministry of People's Security officials. These cases constitute clear violations of the right to a fair trial.<sup>14</sup>

Public trials served as further extrajudicial forms of punishment for Shamanic adherents. During public trials, which are commonly held in stadiums, city or town squares, and other public locations, the hometowns and the number (*ban*) of the People's Units of the victims were announced alongside statements on their professed social and ideological wrongs. The sentences of victims were read out in front of citizens from local workplaces and People's Units, along with students from middle schools, high schools, and colleges, who were all forced to attend. That sentences for persons who engage in Shamanic practices are publicly announced implies that public trials are designed to deter citizens from engaging in religious practice, rather than to fulfil any judicial function. In a recent case from 2019, 13 Shamanic practitioners and adherents were publicly tried in front of a culture centre in Kimjongsuk County. One victim was handed a 5-year sentence at a re-education camp.

**CASE STUDY**

**[** **C**hilsong-Jo, or the Seven Stars, is an organised and underground nationwide group of Shamanic practitioners in North Korea. Reportedly comprising over 100 members, the group was formed in Chongjin City, North Hamgyong Province, and has been targeted for persecution by the North Korean state. In 2017–2018, five members of Chilsong-Jo were arrested and placed on public trial at Musan Stadium in front of a crowd of 50,000 witnesses. This is significant given the population of Musan County is approximately 200,000. The victims, three women and two men, were bound with rope during the trial and taken back into custody by the Ministry of People's Security following the trial. Reports of further cases of persecution of Chilsong-Jo include executions and life sentences. **]**

**It is noteworthy that Korea Future investigators documented 55 cases of arbitrary deprivation of liberty that took place between 2016 and 2019.**

Survivor and perpetrator testimony, in addition to internal government documents from this period, all point to the intentional targeting of Shamanic adherents for arrest and detention. In particular, Workers' Party of Korea directives that underlined the prohibition of 'superstitious practice' and called for the 'eradication' of superstitious activities were delivered to public officials and to citizens, via the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, from 2016 to 2019. These directives were repeatedly referenced by survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators as causal factors in the arrest and sentencing of Shamanic practitioners and adherents.<sup>15</sup> In certain cases, we documented how the publication of directives immediately preceded periods where Shamanic adherents and practitioners were arrested and detained.

In one case from September 2019, **Yang Keum Jung**, a shaman who had worked as an informant for the Ministry of State Security, was arrested by the Prosecutor's Office and swiftly sentenced to re-education, presumably to fulfill a quota of arrests. While in custody, Yang broke a glass lamp and slit her wrists with the glass shards. In another case, we documented how specific directives were explicitly referenced in trials to warrant harsher sentencing of Shamanic adherents.



**Directives aimed at the persecution of Shamanic practice have led to the creation of two forms of task forces.** Standing taskforces comprised public officials from the Workers' Party of Korea, Ministry of State Security, Prosecutor's Office, Ministry of People's Security, Youth League, and labourers. These taskforces were succeeded by short-term taskforces, known as *guruppas*, which were active between 2013 and 2015 and were formed periodically to investigate 'anti-socialist activities.' *Guruppas* were comprised of public officials from either the Prosecutor's Office or the Ministry of People's Security.<sup>17</sup> The continuing prevalence of Shamanic practice in North Korean society suggests that taskforces have been used as temporary forms of control and suppression.

**CASE STUDY:**

*In 2017, a Workers' Party of Korea directive, termed 'A Directive to Root Out Superstitious Acts That Damage Socialism,' prompted the creation of local task forces, known collectively as Ministry of People's Security Group 712, that are documented as being responsible for the arbitrary arrests of Shamanic adherents. A year later, in January 2018, another directive—this time an internally disseminated directive to core party workers by the Workers' Party of Korea Organisation and Guidance Department and Propaganda and Agitation Department that was authorised by Kim Jong Un—described a "political operational plan for party organisational units to carry out an intense extermination campaign to root out un-socialist phenomena throughout the entire party, nation, and populace."*

## FORCED LABOUR

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**T**he prohibition of forced labour is an established norm of customary international law and is reflected in a series of international instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.<sup>18</sup> Forced labour is most clearly defined in the Forced Labour Convention as “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily.”<sup>19</sup> An exception may be exercised for prison labour, but only under certain conditions, namely: “any work or service exacted from any person as a consequence of a conviction in a court of law, provided that the said work or service is carried out under the supervision and control of a public authority and that the said person is not hired to or placed at the disposal of private individuals, companies or associations.”<sup>20</sup>

Compulsory labour performed by detainees is excluded from the scope of the Forced Labour Convention only if a certain number of conditions are met. Most significantly for the case of forced labour in penal facilities, work can only be exacted from a detainee “as a consequence of a conviction in a court of law.”<sup>21</sup> Detainees who have been subjected to arbitrary deprivation of liberty, who are awaiting trial, who have not been sentenced, or who have been sentenced without trial cannot be forced to perform labour.

**We documented 64 cases where Shamanic adherents had been sentenced to labour-training penal facilities. In 58 cases, we established the victims had been arbitrarily deprived of their liberty. In 19 cases, we established victims had been denied a fair trial. In these cases, victims should not have been forced to perform labour.** Further human rights violations were documented, including victims being forced to perform labour for periods exceeding 60 days in a period of 12 months and where forced labour was extracted under the threat of penalties, such as physical violence. In 53 of 64 documented cases, the victims were women.

Forced labour is present in city and county-level labour training centres run by public officials of the People’s Committee and in labour training camps and re-education camps run by the Ministry of People’s Security. We documented detainees being compelled to work for diverse state-run projects, including road construction, apartment construction, and manufacturing.<sup>22</sup> In one facility alone, victims were segregated into units composed of 80-100 detainees for the farming of maize; some for the farming of radish, napá cabbage, aubergines, and potatoes; and still other units for the manufacturing of hats, wigs, and clothing.



**The Forced Labour Convention expressly prohibits compulsory labour performed by convicted detainees for private individuals, yet we documented victims being forced to perform private labour for Ministry of People's Security and People's Committee officials.**

Forced labour is prevalent in holding centres. In most cases where forced labour was documented at these facilities, victims engaged in forced labour for over 14 hours per day for 6-7 days per week. Work typically began between 05:00 and 08:00 and ended between 18:00 and 22:00. These hours were maintained for the duration of detainees' sentences. Prisoners were escorted to labour sites and were overseen either by correctional officers or fellow detainees who were placed in charge of other detainees during working hours. **Both the length of forced labour each day and the supervision of fellow detainees by persons who were not public officials are acts prohibited under the Forced Labour Convention.**

In certain holding centres, victims were assigned to remote locations outside of penal facilities to perform forced labour. In Orang County Farm, where detainees from North Hamgyong Provincial Holding Centre are sent for forced labour, one victim recalled how correctional officers drove detainees into fields to begin agricultural labour as soon as they were awoken. Other than a 1-hour lunchbreak, the victims were not provided with periods of rest. Unfinished or poor work was penalised through physical assault. Sexual violence perpetrated against detainees was also documented at Orang County Farm.

The Forced Labour Convention exempts forced labour performed by convicted detainees under two conditions. The first is in cases of emergency, which are defined as "war [...] fire, flood, famine, earthquake, violent epidemic or epizootic diseases, invasion by animal, insect or vegetable pests, and in general any circumstance that would endanger the existence or the well-being of the whole or part of the population". The second exemption is for

minor communal services that include “works connected with village cleanliness, sanitation, the maintenance of paths and tracks, of watering places, cemeteries in the immediate vicinity of the communities concerned, village night-watching, the clearance of silt in small irrigation channels and streams of purely local interest.” **We did not document any incidents of forced labour that would fall under either exclusion.**<sup>23</sup>

Where cases of compulsory labour at labour training centres, labour training camps, and re-education camps were documented, whether they complied or not with international standards, it was found that the conditions of detention contributed to other egregious human rights violations such as cruel and degrading treatment and the denial of food and sleep. In

one case, **Jung Chun Deok**, a survivor of a labour training camp told investigators, “[Officials] worked us hard without feeding us properly [...] I suffered from malnutrition and was sure I would not survive. I kept having diarrhoea, even when I only drank water, and I weighed just 35 kilograms. Today I weigh 60 kilograms, so I was like a skeleton back then. I had to wear children’s clothes as nothing else fit me.”

**Shin Nam Ki**, another survivor of a labour training camp, recalled that “forced labour was even more arduous than re-education. At least in re-education camps, the workload is light” and that a fellow detainee who had received a 6-month sentence for religious practice had developed tuberculosis and died shortly after her release. Pending her release, **Park Na Jung** was forced to pay Ministry of People’s Security officials from Hoeryong City either 180 kilograms of corn or 200,000 North Korean Won, noting “[they] would refuse to release you if you did not hand over the money or the food”. Another victim, **Song Na Jin**, noted that labour training camps demand bribes because they do not receive sufficient institutional support to pay the wages of employees or meet their budgets.



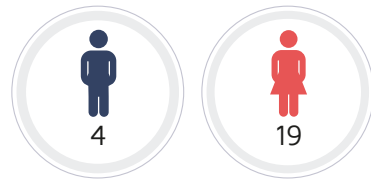
## TORTURE AND CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

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The right to be free of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment cannot be infringed under any circumstances. The prohibition of torture, in all its forms, is reflected in a series of international agreements and customary international law by which North Korea is bound.<sup>24</sup> The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment defines torture as “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.”<sup>25</sup>

### GENDER

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**In 23 cases, we documented forms of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment being perpetrated by agents of the Ministry of People’s Security and Ministry of State Security against Shamanic adherents.** Evidence demonstrates that victims were subjected to physical beatings with fists, feet, and objects; to the ingestion of polluted food; to positional torture; and to verbal abuse. In addition, the broader experience of detention was one where cruel and inhuman treatment was enabled by poor conditions of detention that incited further harm, including overcrowded cells.

**T**he act of beating a person can constitute torture under international law, particularly where it is inflicted to obtain a confession. In 13 cases, we documented victims being beaten by the fists and feet of perpetrators. Acts of torture to force detainees to provide confessions were frequently documented. **Park Sung Hwa** was arrested by the Ministry of People's Security on suspicion of engaging in religious practices. He was physically beaten during his pre-trial examination and forced to write pages of self-criticism that described his alleged ideological faults. In another case, a shaman was arrested, beaten, and forced to write a confession and identify details about her patrons."



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## FORMS OF TORTURE EXPERIENCED

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BEATING WITH FISTS OR FEET

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BEATING WITH OBJECTS

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INGESTION OF POLLUTED FOOD

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POSITIONAL TORTURE

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VERBAL ABUSE

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**B**oth Shamanic and Christian adherents who had not been convicted of crimes were systematically beaten by correctional officers upon their arrival at penal facilities following their arrests. In a case from 2014, a shaman, **Kwon Eun Som**, was arrested and detained in Hyesan City Prosecutor's Office. Kwon was repeatedly physically beaten by a prosecutor whose family member had reported Kwon's religious practice. Kwon fell after being kicked in the knee by the prosecutor who then continually kicked Kwon until she lost consciousness and was dragged to a nearby Ministry of People's Security detention centre. We documented a case from 2017 where a shaman, **Lee Min Park**, was arrested by Hyesan City Ministry of State Security officials and was detained and severely physically beaten for fifteen consecutive days, requiring the victim to seek medical treatment. And in another case a victim's head was rammed against the bars of a cell door before her face was beaten by the perpetrator's fists.

**For Shamanic adherents, physical beatings continued beyond pre-trial phases to the penal facilities where these victims served their sentences.** At Chongori re-education camp, one victim, **Kim Jin Pyeong**, explained, "when word spread that a Shamanic practitioner [in the facility] was [conducting a religious practice], they were beaten. The officers kicked them and punched them [...] The officials did not treat [them] as people [...] They would hit us with whatever they had in their hands, even with farming tools if they happened to be in their hands".

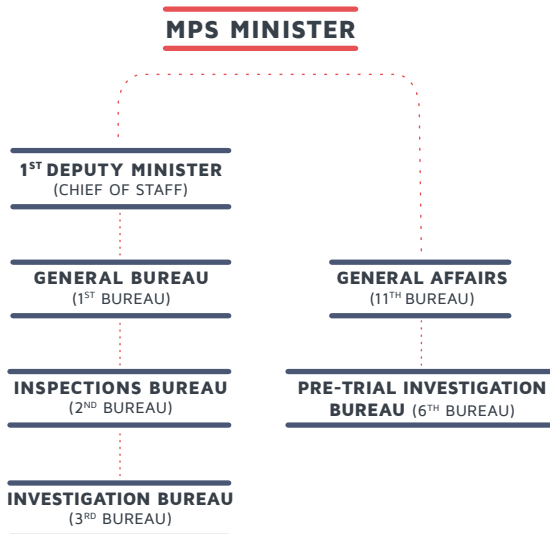
**In many cases, the conditions of detention experienced by victims at various penal facilities amounted to inhuman and cruel treatment.** In one example, which was consistent with conditions experienced by detainees in other penal facilities, **Cho So Hyun** explained how she was given “less than a fistful of boiled corn” each day that was “polluted and too dirty to eat. It had mouse droppings, corn husks, and rotten kernels mixed into it. Everyone in the cell had diarrhoea after eating the corn, but they kept on feeding it to us.” The victim also described how detainees were prevented from maintaining personal hygiene: “[We] lacked clothes, toilet paper, and toothbrushes. I gave half of my corn to another detainee just to share her toothbrush. I also exchanged some toilet paper for corn [...] There were so many lice in our clothes that we could not even sleep at night. [Correctional officers] gave us a set amount of time to catch lice. Another person and I caught over 100 lice in five minutes.” However, the victim recalled, “People still told fortunes in the cell, there was another shaman in my cell, and she used to tell the detainees’ fortunes during break hours.”

**We documented three cases where Shamanic adherents were arbitrarily deprived of their right to life.** In one case, **Park Joo Ho**, a former Korean People’s Army official, described to Korea Future investigators how his unit had arrested a child who was considered a God-touched shaman. The child was transferred to the battalion’s Ministry of State Security officials who executed the child. The interviewee explained, “To be honest, we do not kill people by firing squad anymore. We usually strike people in the head with a hammer we bring in a little bag. I have witnessed it countless times. No one cared if we buried victims in shallow graves or even floated corpses down the river.”



Linkage  
Evidence

This section provides evidence that connects documented human rights violations perpetrated by agents of the Ministry of People's Security to an organisational chain of superiors who may ultimately be held criminally responsible for crimes committed by their subordinates where they were in a relationship of superior-subordinate with the perpetrators, knew or had reason to know that crimes and serious human rights violations had been or were about to be committed and, despite that knowledge, wilfully and culpably failed to prevent or punish these crimes. Documenting this form of linkage evidence is critical to support future efforts to end impunity for human rights violations in North Korea.



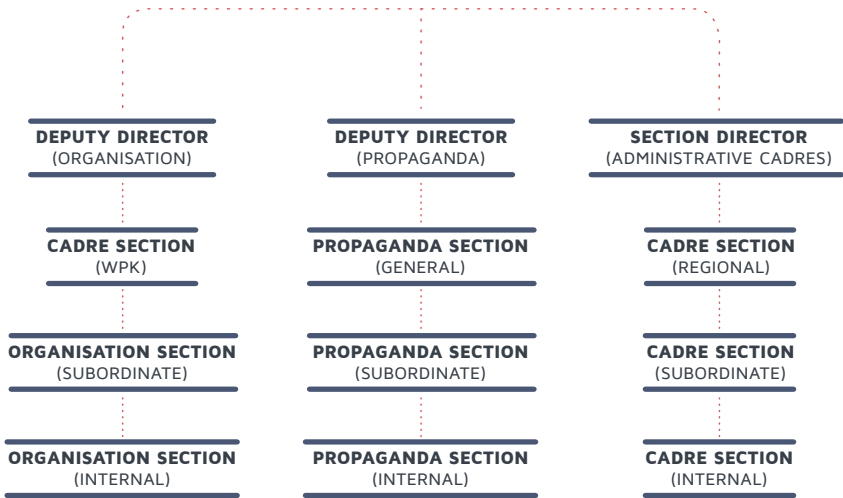
The Minister of People's Security is charged with the administrative operation of the Ministry of People's Security. Sections that report directly to the Minister include the General Affairs Bureau and Pre-Trial Investigation Bureau. The General Affairs Bureau maintains classified documents and issues travel and weapons permits and identification cards for Ministry of People's Security personnel. The Pre-Trial Investigation Bureau interrogates suspects, conducts further investigations on cases referred by the Investigation Bureau, and resolves the status of cases. Additionally, it oversees the Re-education Camp Management Bureau, which in turn manages re-education camps nationwide.

The First Deputy Minister, who serves as the Ministry of People's Security Chief of Staff, is the second highest office for Ministry of People's Security administrative entities. Sections that report directly to the First Deputy Minister include the General Bureau, Inspections Bureau, and Investigation Bureau.

The General Bureau produces implementation plans for Ministry of People's Security administrative operations based on directives issued by the Workers' Party of Korea and ensures these are disseminated throughout the Ministry of People's Security. The Inspections Bureau uncovers and investigates public order, economic, and anti-socialist crimes, including Shamanic practice. The Investigation Bureau identifies criminals and gathers evidence related to serious crimes such as murder and arson. Deputy Ministers and the bureaus subordinate to them are not shown in this chart.

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**MPS POLITICAL DIRECTOR**





The Ministry of People's Security Political Directorate is an entity of the Workers' Party of Korea that guides and controls the Ministry of People's Security administrative entities. Regional Ministry of People's Security branches at the provincial, city, or county levels follow the structure of administrative and political operations existing at the headquarters level.

The Organisation Section contains subsections that are responsible for assigning or removing management level Ministry of People's Security cadre, issuing guidance, and assessing ideological alignment of administrative operations at each Ministry of People's Security office nationwide. The Propaganda Section is responsible for

the ideological education of Ministry of People's Security personnel, working through each Ministry of People's Security office and operating additional facilities such as publishing houses and study centres. The Cadre Section performs a human resources function for Ministry of People's Security personnel nationwide. It keeps records of political and administrative reporting to support the decision-making of the Organisation Section.

Since 2005, a Surveillance Bureau has operated under the Organisation Section. This bureau is responsible for conducting internal surveillance of Ministry of People's Security personnel. Various other sections and bureaus are not shown in this chart.



**A**lthough the northern half of the Korean peninsula has a long history of Christianity, beginning with the introduction of the religion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has become the most severely persecuted religious tradition within North Korea. Over seven decades of active persecution of Christian adherents has rendered many characteristic elements of Christianity to be potentially life-threatening, from group devotions, proselytisation, and sacraments to religious objects such as the Bible or crucifixes. The small number of North Korean Christians who obtain such materials have readily destroyed them in order to avoid detection by both informants and law enforcement officials. Under such circumstances, religious practices of North Korean Christians largely consist of private prayers, proselytisation to immediate family members, and attendance of religious ceremonies outside of North Korean territory, mainly in China after the adherents illegally cross the border.

Aside from the very few North Korean Christians who have inherited their faith from family members who practiced Christianity prior to the founding of the current regime in 1948, most were inducted into the religion from Christian missionaries during temporary residencies in China. Christian adherents who received religious education while still living in North Korea typically have direct family members who have been previously baptised or received rudimentary religious education in China. Proselytisation efforts directed towards individuals who are not members of immediate family are extremely rare. Considering that both the Ministry of People's Security and the Ministry of State Security maintain covert informant networks that actively gather information and report on religious activities, attempting to induct non-family members, however deep a personal connection with the potential convert, remains an extremely risky endeavour.

## Victims

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**This report considers 167 cases of serious human rights violations perpetrated against 91 Christian adherents between 1997 and 2018.**

Violations experienced by victims display strong similarities, including arbitrary deprivation of liberty, inclusive of the denial of fair trial rights; refoulement; and torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. From these patterns, we can draw conclusions. Specifically, we can conclude there is sufficient credible evidence that human rights violations perpetrated by state organisations subject to Workers' Party of Korea control have committed systematic attacks that are neither arbitrary nor random and have been purposely directed at the destruction of Christian communities. These findings are supported by testimonies, internal government documents, and statements from former high-ranking officials gathered during a separate investigation conducted by Korea Future.

**Indefinite life sentences were handed to Christian adherents for crimes of religious practice in 18 cases.** However, in 67% of cases, the length of sentences handed to victims could not be identified, reflecting the level of secrecy with which the state deals with incidents of Christianity. In 11 cases, victims are believed to still be held in detention in North Korea. Victims were generally aged between 20 and 59, yet it is noteworthy that the youngest victim was a 2-year-old child.

# Perpetrators

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**The Ministry of State Security is responsible for 90% of documented human rights violations perpetrated against Christian adherents. This amounts to 71 cases of arbitrary deprivation of liberty; 25 cases of refolement; 28 cases of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; 12 cases of the denial of right to life; and cases of forced labour, the denial of fair trial rights, and sexual violence.<sup>26</sup>**

Names and identifying details of 18 perpetrators in the Ministry of State Security were retained alongside information on perpetrators in Border Security Command, the Korean People's Army, and the Ministry of People's Security.

The Ministry of State Security maintains branches throughout the country that proactively gather information on perceived threats to North Korea's political system, with a focus on those of a domestic origin. In turn, it is the Ministry of State Security that is purposely concerned with the identification and arrest of citizens who adhere to Christianity, except in the military sphere, where Military Security Command performs the same functions.<sup>27</sup> As an intelligence agency, the Ministry of State Security carries out many of its operations in secret. It maintains its own penal facilities, prosecution department, and court system, including North Korea's political prison camps which are maintained by the Ministry of State Security Farm Management Bureau.

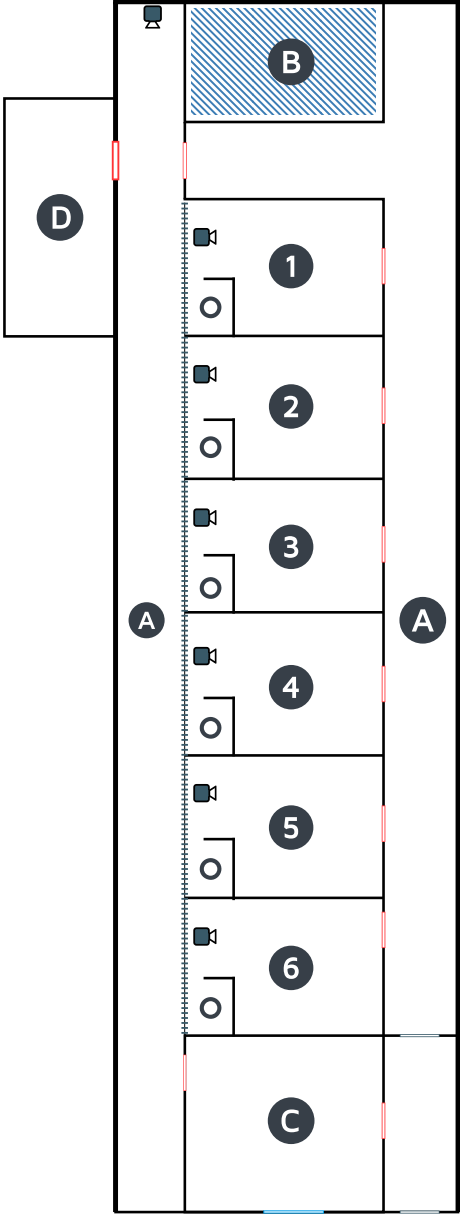
## Locations

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**Christian adherents were documented as being detained in Ministry of State Security-run holding centres, detention centres, internment camps, and political prison camps.** During periods of investigation and pre-trial examination for detainees who had not been refouled, they were not convicted of a crime and were acutely vulnerable to serious human rights violations in city or county-level Ministry of State Security detention centres where they were interrogated to determine their involvement in Christian activities. Where evidence suggested a detainee had actively participated in religious activities, particularly in the cases of victims who had been refouled, they were transferred to provincial or national-level Ministry of State Security detention centres or internment camps. There, victims underwent further interrogation and experienced additional human rights violations before being sentenced to a political prison camp or to a sentence of death.

**Internment camps play a significant role in the denial of fundamental rights and freedoms to Christian adherents.** One such facility is Ryanggang Provincial Ministry of State Security Internment Camp, located on the outskirts of Hyesan City. This facility is documented as a location of serious human rights violations committed against Christian adherents in 2019. Internment camps play a particularly significant role in the persecution of North Korea's Christian community in that they serve both as locations of pre-trial examination and as locations where victims are held following *in camera* trials and prior to their transferral to political prison camps where they serve life sentences.

**RYANGGANG PROVINCIAL MSS INTERNMENT CAMP 2019**



**LEGEND**

- (A)** HALLWAY
- (B)** WATER TANK
- (C)** OFFICE FOR CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS
- (D)** OUTDOOR EXERCISE AREA
- (1)** CELL 1
- (2)** CELL 2
- (3)** CELL 3
- (4)** CELL 4
- (5)** CELL 5
- (6)** CELL 6
- ||||||| CELL BARS
- DOOR
- == STEEL DOOR
- WINDOW FOR INQUIRIES
- 📹 CCTV to monitor cells
- COMMON LATRINE

An aerial satellite image showing a rural landscape with a mix of green fields, brown plowed earth, and clusters of buildings. A red rectangular box highlights a specific cluster of buildings in the center of the image. The surrounding area includes roads, rivers, and dense vegetation.

Ryanggang Provincial MSS Internment Camp



## ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY

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**W**e documented 72 cases where the deprivation of liberty of Christian adherents, inclusive of the denial of fair trial, did not have a legal basis. In 88% of cases, Ministry of State Security officials were responsible for the arbitrary deprivation of liberty. Significantly, in 56 cases it was established that victims were arrested and detained based on their exercise of rights to manifest their religious beliefs through the possession of religious items, the sharing of religious beliefs, and religious practice—all of which are guaranteed by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In these incidents, the deprivation of liberty may be considered arbitrary and as violations of international law.



## LENGTH OF DETENTION



## REASON FOR DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY



UNKNOWN/WITHHELD: 1

**In cases where Christian adherents were arrested, it was not evident that any legal basis justified the deprivation of liberty.** Ministry of State Security officers operate in secret, in the manner of an intelligence agency, and its officers do not wear a uniform in public, making it unclear to victims with which entity or institution those making the arrests are associated. We documented multiple cases where persons were arrested for being in possession of a Bible. In one case, a victim was arrested at night so that there were few witnesses to the event. The interviewee noted that “people were unsure which state organisation had arrested the man.” In other incidents, we documented cases involving children under the age of 18 who were also arrested for being in possession of Bibles. A failure of authorities to invoke a legal basis for arrests, such as the presentation of an arrest warrant, was commonplace. In one case, a victim was detained for over 2 months without justification for his arrest.

#### **[ CASE STUDY**

**A** *n entire family of five people living in Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province, was arrested in 2009 based on the family members’ religious practice and possession of the Bible. The arrests took place at night and every member of the household, which amounted to three generations of the same family, including a 2-year-old, were handed life sentences in a political prison camp. ]*

**D**uring pre-trial examinations, detainees were denied the presumption of innocence and were forbidden from enjoying their right to religious freedom. Rather, victims who were suspected of adherence to Christianity were presumed to be guilty and pre-trial examiners attempted to establish this alleged fact. Where it could be established that detainees had been associated with Christianity, their crime was considered to be ‘political,’ and they were transferred from city or county-level detention centers to provincial or national-level detention centers or internment camps run by the Ministry of State Security.

The level of secrecy with which the North Korean state deals with incidents of Christianity obscures the processes applied to sentencing for Christian adherents. Where sentences were imposed, the final judgements were rendered by a court *in camera* and with no apparent impartial judicial oversight. Consequently, little evidence exists to confirm or deny the right to a fair trial. This should not suggest that Christian adherents were afforded fair trial rights. The active concealment of a criminal justice system involving a prosecution process managed by the Ministry of State Security that engages branch personnel and provincial and national-level public officials suggests the disregard for fair trial rights. It is noteworthy that details of sentencing come from former public officials or those associated with public officials involved in the relevant cases or the associates of the victims, reflecting the level of secrecy with which the state deals with incidents of Christianity that arise domestically.

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The Ministry of State Security Farm Management Bureau is tasked with maintaining North Korea's political prison camps, which are referred to as regional management facilities. It does not engage in investigations or sentencing and is responsible solely for running the camps that hold prisoners—including Christian adherents—who have been sentenced by internal Ministry of State Security courts. Former public officials verified that Christian adherents entered Total Control Zones in political prison camps that hold persons sentenced to life imprisonment. These detainees have no prospect for release and must engage in forced labour. Other detainees enter the Revolutionary Zone, where they undergo years of political re-education. These detainees do not serve life sentences, but their adherence to North Korea's political ideology is assessed prior to their release. The roles of political prison camps will be examined further in our ongoing project, the North Korean Prison Database.

**CASE STUDY**

**[** Few underground churches are known to exist in North Korea, yet even their presumed existence prompts Ministry of State Security-run investigations to last years and involve multiple branches. In one recent case, an individual had formed an underground church with a family to meet for communal prayer. Each of the founding members had been refouled from China and their church was supported by donations from persons outside of North Korea who also provided notebooks so that the church's small congregation could copy passages from the Bible. The exact size of the congregation is unclear, but by 2019 there were 16 members. Most were women and all had been introduced to Christianity in China. **]**

## REFOULEMENT

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**T**he principle of non-refoulement prohibits states from repatriating an individual from their territory where there are grounds for believing that the individual would be at risk of harm upon their repatriation. The principle of non-refoulement is considered absolute, meaning that its prohibition applies to persons regardless of their legal or migration status.<sup>28</sup>

**We documented 25 cases where Christian adherents were refouled from China.** Based on credible and corroborating accounts, the arrest, detention, and refoulement of Christian adherents is premised on an active monitoring of places of worship and persons deemed to be religious in Chinese territory. Once victims were arrested, we documented cases in which they experienced interrogation in Chinese penal facilities where their religious activities were recorded on file. Files marked with a particular stamp indicated to North Korean officials that refouled victims had engaged in Christian activities in China. Further, we documented how during refoulement detainees without the stamp on their files would be placed on a truck bound for the Ministry of People's Security while those with the stamp on their files would be placed on a truck bound for the Ministry of State Security.<sup>29</sup> These stamps increased the chances that Christian victims would experience forms of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment during their investigations in North Korea.

### CASE STUDY

**[K**im Gap Ji, a Christian adherent, was refouled to North Korea. Kim had been arrested in China alongside a pastor who was travelling to pioneer a church in Shandong Province. Following Kim's refoulement, he was investigated for nearly 5 months and experienced forms of torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. Kim was acutely aware that if he revealed his religious beliefs, he would be sentenced to a political prison camp. He did not reveal his religious adherence, and was eventually charged with illegal border crossing and sentenced to 3 years in Chongori re-education camp. After his release, Kim proselytised until 2017. He escaped North Korea after learning that a person he had preached to was an informant for the Ministry of State Security. ]

## TORTURE AND CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

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**In 28 cases, we documented forms of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment being perpetrated by agents of the Ministry of State Security and Ministry of People's Security against Christian adherents.** Evidence demonstrates that victims were subjected to physical beatings with objects, fists, and feet; to the ingestion of polluted food; to positional torture; to sleep deprivation; and to forced squat jumps. Furthermore, the broader experience of detention was one where cruel and inhuman treatment was enabled by poor conditions of detention that incited further harm, including overcrowded cells.

**In 18 cases, we documented victims being beaten with objects and the fists and feet of perpetrators.** **Ko Sun Hee**, who was detained at Onsong County Ministry of State Security Detention Centre, observed how correctional officers would make detainees suspected of studying the Bible stick their heads between the steel bars of a cell door. The officers would then strike the detainees' heads until "blood spurted upwards." In another case, a young woman had been arrested while in possession of a Bible, prompting officials from Ministry of State Security Central Command to beat her with a wooden stick until a superior intervened after hearing the victim screaming. In some cases, the physical beatings of victims were so severe that it contributed to their premature deaths. One victim who was a member of an underground church was beaten so severely in 2019 while in detention that they later died from their injuries.



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## FORMS OF TORTURE EXPERIENCED

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BEATING WITH FISTS OR FEET

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BEATING WITH OBJECTS

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INGESTION OF POLLUTED FOOD

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POSITIONAL TORTURE

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SQUAT JUMPS

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DEPRIVATION OF SLEEP

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Where victims were found to be manifesting their religious beliefs, typically through the act of prayer, in penal facilities, the victims were physically beaten with fists, feet, or objects such as *o-seung-o-gak-ja* (5 x 5 cm angled wooden clubs). One witness who spent 2 months in a cell with Christian adherents recalled, “[The Christian detainees] would pray in the corner of the cell that was hidden from the CCTV camera [...] They would escape a beating if their prayers went undetected by the correctional officers, but they would be beaten if they were caught. On one occasion when they were caught praying, they were beaten every morning for 20 consecutive days.”

**In certain circumstances, the purposes of physical beatings were documented as means to exact forced confessions.**

In one case, a witness recalled, “anyone who tells you that they did not inform on others after being arrested is lying. My [Christian] associates were all arrested and they all confessed. Four who were arrested for their associations with Christianity were detained in the Sin-iju Ministry of State Security Detention Centre. They had promised not to confess that they attended a church, but Ministry of State Security officers beat detainees during interrogations and people will always try to avoid the beatings.”

In another case, **Nam Tae Hee** shared a cell with a Christian adherent in a detention centre in Pyongyang that was operated by Ministry of State Security Central Command. Nam recalled how a named prosecutor and correctional officers would physically assault detainees in the cell, “[They] made us sit with our heads bowed to the ground and they hit us from behind with a log. This happened frequently. After they made us dress and re-enter our cell, they called us over and beat us with their fists and steel rods [...] They told us that we were not people, that we were less than beasts. They made us walk with our heads bowed, holding hands, when we were sent out for exercise. [...] The [Christian adherent] who had worked in a church suffered all the same abuses as I did.”

**Positional torture, where victims were forced to remain seated in a cross-legged position for up to 10 hours each day, was common and may constitute torture under international law.<sup>30</sup>** Lee Kang In explained, “when we were in a fixed position, we had to sit on the floor in two rows with our legs crossed, so that the correctional officers could keep an eye on us using the CCTV camera. We were 0.7 meters apart from the person to our side, and 1 meter apart from the person sitting behind us [...] They force you to sit and prohibit you from either talking or moving, so it is impossible to pray within the cells. [...] The Ministry of State Security officials would kill you if they knew that you had religious affiliations. If you tell them that you went to a church and believed in Jesus, they would not stop at just beating you.”

**We documented cases where foreign citizens were detained in North Korea and subjected to forms of torture and ill-treatment based on their Christian adherence.** In one case, Jo Hyeon Woo, a former detainee of On-song County Ministry of State Security Detention Centre witnessed North Korean correctional officers physically beating and subjecting a Han Chinese victim to degrading treatment. The witness recalled that, in spite of his torture, the Han Chinese victim, who had either crossed into North Korean territory or had been abducted from China, persistently professed his faith to correctional officers. In another case, a

former public official recounted how a European woman carrying a Bible, who entered North Korea through a named location, was arrested and temporarily detained by the Ministry of State Security at a penal facility where the witness was stationed. “Two female officers from Ministry of State Security held her under custody and another female Ministry of State Security officer kept an eye on me. When questioned why she had crossed into North Korea, the victim told the Ministry of State Security officials, through an interpreter, that she had come to spread the gospel in North Korea, the only place in the world where the gospel has not yet reached. She prayed every night, every morning, and whenever she was pacing around the room. She kept a cross on her person.”<sup>31</sup> In these cases, we note that the persecution of religious belief applies to all persons in North Korean territory, not just to North Korean citizens.

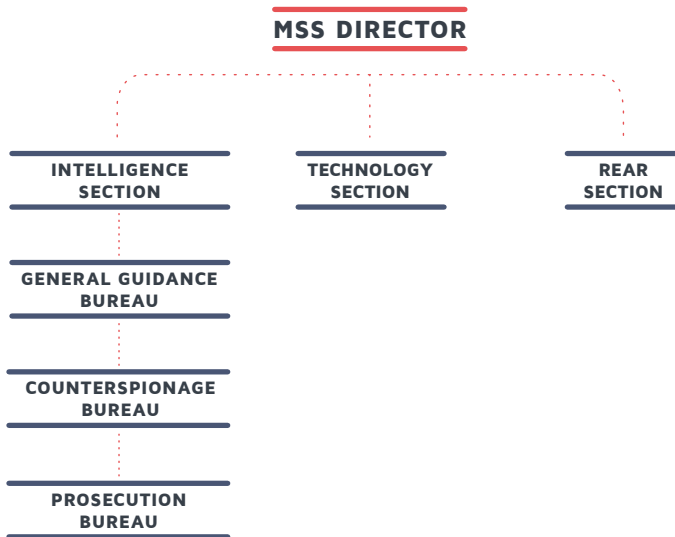
**We documented 12 cases where Christian adherents were arbitrarily deprived of their right to life.** In these cases, evidence was chiefly obtained from or through former security officials. Witnesses recalled that detainees who had been sentenced to death or a political prison camp for crimes involving Christian adherence received relatively ‘improved’ treatment in the forms of the quality and quantity of food and the absence of torture from Ministry of State Security officials compared to detainees who had not been sentenced.

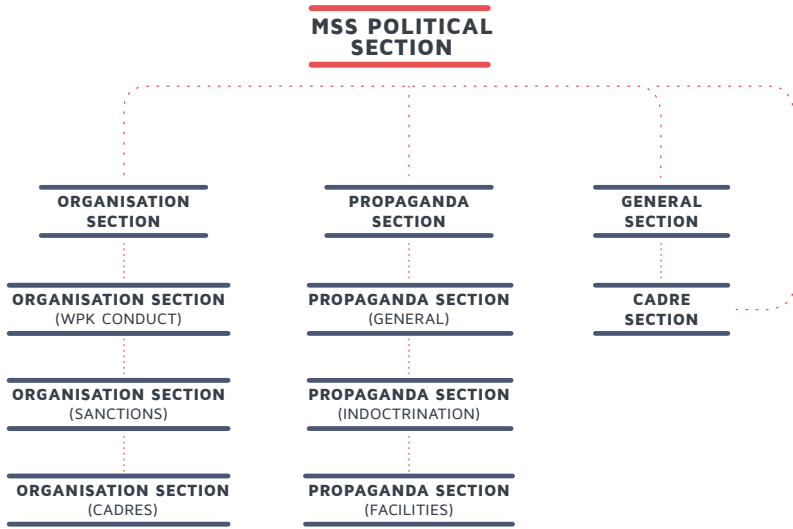


Linkage  
Evidence

The Minister of State Security is charged with the administrative operation of the Ministry of State Security. Bureaus of the Ministry fall under either the intelligence, technology, or rear sectors. The intelligence sector contains bureaus that carry out the core work of the Ministry of State Security. The Farm Management Bureau, responsible for the management of Political Prison Camps nationwide, falls under this section. Bureaus in the other two sectors that perform enabling functions, such as deployment of surveillance technology and logistics, are not shown in this chart.

The General Guidance Bureau consolidates the status of work in the Ministry of State Security bureaus and branches. It attaches supervisors for each headquarters bureau and provincial branch. The Counterespionage Bureau is responsible for uncovering and investigating cases of espionage, sedition, or treason. Adherents of Christianity are uncovered and investigated by this bureau. The Prosecution Bureau manages the prosecution process for cases involving espionage, sedition, or treason. Adherents of Christianity are prosecuted and sentenced by this bureau. Various other sections and bureaus are not shown in this chart.





The Ministry of State Security Political Directorate enables Workers’ Party of Korea guidance and control over the administrative work of the Ministry of State Security. The Ministry of State Security is kept under close supervision by the Organisation and Guidance Department. Organisation and Guidance Department Section 8 is responsible for Ministry of State Security guidance and control, while Organisation and Guidance Department Surveillance Section 2 monitors and investigates alignment.

The Organisation Section contains sub-sections that are responsible for issuing and revoking the party membership of Ministry of State Security personnel, providing guidance, and assessing ideological alignment of personnel and operations. It has the authority to hand down re-education sentences to Ministry of State Security personnel.

The Propaganda Section is responsible for the ideological education of Ministry of State Security personnel. Additionally, it monitors the management of study centres and ideological monuments. The Cadre Section performs a human resources function for recruitment, training, and promotion of Ministry of State Security personnel. It supports the Organisation Section. The General Section manages all classified documents of the Ministry of State Security.

As is the case with the Ministry of People’s Security, regional Ministry of State Security branches at the provincial, city, and county levels follow the structure of administrative and political operations seen at the headquarters level. Various sections and bureaus are not shown in this chart.

<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of People's Security has had several changes of name, including in recent years. In May 2020, it was re-named the Ministry of Social Security. To avoid confusion, this report continues to refer to it as the Ministry of People's Security, which is conventionally the name most used.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>; United Nations. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>; United Nations. "International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights." Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>; United Nations. "Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief." Accessed September 24, 2021. [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocitycrimes/Doc.12\\_declaration%20elimination%20intolerance%20and%20discrimination.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocitycrimes/Doc.12_declaration%20elimination%20intolerance%20and%20discrimination.pdf); United Nations. "Convention on the Rights of the Child." Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>; United Nations. "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women." Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>; United Nations. "Convention relating to the Status of Refugees." Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/StatusOfRefugees.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> Many North Koreans who were interviewed deemed numerology and card reading methods of divination to be marks of inferior Shamanic insights, mainly because the practice can be learned through literature and mentorship.

<sup>4</sup> One reason interviewees perceived God-touched shamans to be superior diviners was a perception that such shamans were compelled to tell fortunes in order to avoid physical consequences that arise from ignoring a desire to reveal a true knowledge of the future. In turn, interviewees perceived the payment of shamans who were not God-touched as a marker of inferiority, despite the fact that its practitioners receive no institutional funding or donations from adherents abroad and depend on compensation from divination rituals to support their practise. Significantly, the majority of documented shamans were middle-aged women who possessed no other means of financially supporting their families. Although a few famous shamans were said to have become wealthy and even gained a degree of political influence through their associations with powerful patrons, most shamans were not wealthy and often hid their practise from law enforcement officials in fear of being persecuted.

<sup>5</sup> Perpetrators were associated with the Ministry of State Security in 11 cases, the Workers' Party of Korea in 3 cases, and the Prosecutor's Office in 1 case.

<sup>6</sup> Collection of Current Acts and Regulations of North Korea," National Intelligence Service (South Korea). Accessed September 24, 2021. [https://www.nis.go.kr:4016/resources/down/2020\\_north\\_law\\_01.pdf](https://www.nis.go.kr:4016/resources/down/2020_north_law_01.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Shamanic adherents were also detained in Ministry of State Security detention centres.

<sup>9</sup> Detainees can also be held in holding centres and labour training centres.

<sup>10</sup> "Revised Fact Sheet No. 26," The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, accessed September 07, 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Detention/FactSheet26en.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> It was documented that Shamanic adherents who stood trial were regarded as 'serious offenders' by the North Ko-

rean criminal justice system or persons of which examples were to be made to discourage the practice of Shamanism during periods where directives had been issued by Kim Jong Un. Shamanic adherents, whether they were shamans themselves or merely patrons, faced further non-judicial punishments, such as job loss, public diatribes, or disadvantages within their professional and political careers.

<sup>13</sup> In certain cases, the use of bribes was documented as subverting the criminal justice system. One former legal official noted that it was rare for Shamanic adherents to be sentenced to re-education camps until 2013 and that bribes were common, given the importance of bribery to the Ministry of People's Security as an unofficial source of income. It was noted that lengthier sentences are now more commonplace, including life sentences and even executions, yet so are bribes. One victim was arrested by the Ministry of People's Security in 2017 for participating in Shamanic practice. Part of a group of five persons who were arrested, the victim stated: "I managed to walk free by bribing a personal connection of mine. The authorities processed my case as someone simply being interested in fortune telling and I lied accordingly. The others, however, did not escape unscathed. The shaman stood trial and the other four in our group were sent to forced labour centres."

<sup>14</sup> United Nations. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> It is noteworthy that public officials were documented as engaging shamans. Despite this, the very same officials arbitrarily deprived Shamanic adherents of their liberty when directives on superstitious acts were issued or even in cases where a Shamanic adherent had personally offended a public official or gained public attention or influence. In one case, a shaman whose followers included party officials, prosecutors, and directors from the People's Committee was arrested and sentenced to a re-education camp in 2014 after providing an unfavourable reading.

<sup>16</sup> The victim was transferred to the custody of the Ministry of People's Security and hospitalised.

<sup>17</sup> Under Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, the Central Party Committee is documented as issuing directives to the Ministry of People's Security. In turn, Ministry of People's Security officials called People's Unit heads to local precincts for questioning about Shamanic practitioners in their neighbourhoods. Typically, the heads of People's Units provided information on adherents willingly. Shamanic practitioners who had been identified through this process were then arrested and interrogated by the Ministry of People's Security.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> ; United Nations. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> International Labour Organisation. "Forced Labour Convention." Accessed September 24, 2001. [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C029](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C029)

<sup>20</sup> North Korea is not a member of the International Labour Organisation and is not eligible to ratify the Forced Labour Convention.

<sup>21</sup> By using the term "in a court of law," the Forced Labour Convention implicitly states that compulsory labour imposed by administrative or other non-judicial authorities is incompatible with the Convention.

<sup>22</sup> For example, in Hoeryong City Labour Training Camp, certain detainees were taken from the facility in teams to work on road construction sites, in mines, and on apartment construction sites.

<sup>23</sup> The prevalence of unlawful forced labour across North Korea's penal system suggests its centrality not just to notions of punishment, but also to the national economy.

<sup>24</sup> For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations. "Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment." Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CAT.aspx>

<sup>26</sup> Other perpetrators included public officials from China's Ministry of Public Security and North Korea's Ministry of People's Security and Border Security Command.

<sup>27</sup> The Ministry of State Security is not only responsible for monitoring the ideological tendencies of North Koreans in North Korea, but also for overseas postings of dispatched workers. In one case, a victim was arrested in a named location in Russia after engaging in the construction of a church that had not been sanctioned by the North Korean state.

<sup>28</sup> Non-refoulement is protected under international law and customary law, while the prohibition of refoulement is detailed in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

<sup>29</sup> The process differs by region in North Korea. We have documented cases where refouled victims were taken directly to Ministry of State Security facilities where they underwent pre-trial examination before they were charged with political or non-political crimes and sent to other detention centres in accordance with the nature of their charges.

<sup>30</sup> United Nations. "Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Israel." Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRICAqhKb7yhsmEKqNhdzbr4k-qou1ZPE79BvBJe97SSM1KP2v4ng3Dhx74ohsby7x4AEgvGhwtvav7rPvZmtwpoBldkyK%2bM9cNY7svWLLYmp6PB4chW80>

<sup>31</sup> This case was independently corroborated by two witnesses.