

I. Background

1. The present report was prepared by Free to Move (F2M) for the 4th universal periodic review (UPR) of the DPRK. F2M recommends the following based on the testimonies of its members (defectors who escaped the DPRK and settled in Japan) regarding their past experiences in the DPRK and the situation of their families and relatives still residing in the DPRK.ⁱ

II. Implementation of international human rights obligations

Civil and political rights: right to movement

2. In the 3rd cycle of the UPR, the DPRK accepted the recommendation to “guarantee freedom of all DPRK residents to travel within the DPRK and abroad”(A/HRC/42/10/Add.1 - Para. 9a: 126.135).

Rights of Japanese spouses to return to their home country

3. A total of 93,340 Korean residents in Japan had been repatriated to the DPRK, accompanied by 7,000 Japanese spouses, over the period of 1959-1984. The DPRK had prohibited these Koreans and their Japanese spouses from visiting or returning to Japan.ⁱⁱ Among them, the number of repatriated Korean residents in Japan, their Japanese spouses, and their direct descendants who were able to return to Japan stands at only 200 or so.

Recommendations:

4. F2M recommends the DPRK to ensure that the Japanese nationals residing in the DPRK are permitted to return to their home country and to make a humanitarian decision in consideration of the fact that the Japanese nationals residing in the DPRK have been parted from their families in Japan for more than five decades; and take measures to arrange the reunion of the direct descendants of the repatriated Korean residents in Japan with their relatives in Japan. The international community will sincerely welcome any humanitarian steps taken by the DPRK government concerning this matter.

Freedom of movement within the DPRK

5. The people of the DPRK currently have no right to relocate or travel at will. Permits are required for all domestic travels (inter-provincial, inter-city, inter-county, etc.).

6. The types of permits include: 1) the special permit to visit the capital city of Pyongyang; 2) the permit to visit areas near the southern inter-Korean border; 3) the permit to visit areas near the northern DPRK-China border; and 4) the permit to visit other areas.

Control of movement by the government: Permit issuance, whether for official duties or personal purposes, requires approval in 3-5 stages. Approval of police and the Ministry of State Security must be gained in the final stage for all permits.

7. Each permit issued is given a unique identification number, which is accessible via computers at all guard posts and offices of railway boarding inspection across the DPRK. The

permit holder has to undergo permit checks at a total of 10 guard posts to enter Pyongyang and 3 checkpoints (run by the Ministry of State Security, respective county, and police) to access any border area. In addition, checkpoints are installed along the borders of every province, city, and county.

8. Current status: Despite such tight controls and surveillance, many people continue to travel for personal purposes including business. In principle, permits are not issued for private business. Merchants and business operators bribe government-run corporations, obtain permits for official duties from them, and travel around the DPRK to sell goods. In order to avoid risks related to receiving bribes on site at the time of permit issuance, public officials prefer to join hands with brokers who collect bribes from groups of traders and deliver them secretly. Many young women traders take the train without permits as they can travel under the protection of the rail police in exchange for sex. Bribery is essential for those traveling with permits for official duties as well to ensure the prevention of any unexpected interference.ⁱⁱⁱ

9. Ill effects of movement restriction: In the DPRK, traveling requires advance permit issuance without exception. However, delays in permit issuance often prevent people from attending important events such as funerals, resulting in the infringement of basic human rights. Movement restriction also leads to the infringement of rights to better educational services, better jobs, social mobility, better healthcare services, etc. It also incurs an unbalanced distribution of supplies and thereby further aggravates the economies of underserved areas.

Recommendations:

10. F2M recommends that the DPRK normalize its administrative system through the computerization of local district(*dong*) offices under the People's Committee in charge of travel permit issuance and the exclusion of police and the Ministry of State Security from the issuance process. Leeway given to such public officials with authorities has ended up encouraging bribes. The implementation of a properly functioning administrative system will help eliminate bribery, improve the quality of everyday life for the public, and ultimately promote the trust of the international community.

11. F2M recommends that the DPRK streamline the travel permit system and set permit issuance fees to a reasonable level. The current system needs to be reviewed across the board as bribes are prevalent in every step involved, from gaining approval for permit issuance to undergoing permit checks at guard posts and boarding the train. This not only incurs visible social costs but also promotes distrust of the government. It is strongly recommended that the DPRK reorganize the permit types into the permit for official duties (valid for 3 years), permit for commercial purpose (valid for 2 years), and permit for other general use (valid for 1 year) and allow the issuance of multiple permits for individual travelers to cater to different needs. It is also necessary to raise wages of those involved in surveillance tasks to a reasonable level and to collect permit issuance fees as state revenue to ensure transparency in administration and control efficiency, as evidenced in many countries.

12. F2M recommends that the DPRK expand the extent of travel without permits. Allowing permit-free travel within the border of each province for provincial residents will serve as an effective starting point to promote the protection of basic human rights infringed upon by the

existing travel permit system. It will also provide greater opportunities for the North Korean people to engage in commercial activities, select better jobs, explore better educational services, and access better healthcare services.

13. F2M recommends that the DPRK gradually allow permit-free travel for all areas within the DPRK in the long term except for some designated areas (e.g., areas located within 30km from the DMZ and areas located within 10km from the DPRK-China border).

ⁱRepresentative examples of human rights violations are included as endnotes.

ⁱⁱThe number of Japanese nationals residing in the DPRK cited in the present document is based on the data officially recognized by the Japanese government. The number of Korean residents in Japan cited in the present document is based on the data of the Red Cross, Japanese government, and General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (DPRK's de facto representative in Japan).

ⁱⁱⁱ**Testimony by a Japanese female defector who had accompanied her Korean husband repatriating to DPRK in 1960**(in her 80s; originally resided in Hyesan, Ryanggang Province; and defected in 2003): "I moved to the DPRK with my Korean husband and newborn baby, along with my husband's family, in 1960. I did not want to go but had no choice as I could not leave my husband. Besides, a staff member of the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan reassured me by saying that Japanese spouses would be allowed to freely travel to Japan after 3 years. However, traveling, whether within the DPRK or abroad, was strictly restricted. Throughout the four decades of my stay there, I never once crossed the borders of the province I lived in or visited Pyongyang. I was finally able to return to Japan after 40 years by risking my life and crossing the national border. Both my parents had already passed away when I came back. Words cannot express what it felt like to be forcefully severed from my loved ones. There were many Japanese spouses in Hyesan, Ryanggang Province, who yearned for home and passed their days in tears like me. None of us were allowed to travel to our home country."

Testimony by a male defector (in his 50s; originally resided in Wonsan, Kangwon Province; and defected in 2010): "I used to live in Wonsan, Kangwon Province, and fled with my family by crossing the China-DPRK border. I bribed the public officials of the local district (*dong*) office to obtain travel permits, saying that we were attending a family event. We took the train headed to a border town, scattered across different carriages as a precaution. As I expected, a rail police officer approached me and asked why I was traveling and if I was traveling with my family. I told him that I was traveling alone, and he said, "Then, I won't have to worry about you fleeing." I slipped a one-hundred-dollar bill into his hat. It was more than enough to feed his family for 2 months. I could safely arrive at the final destination and escape the DPRK."

Testimony by a female defector(in her 60s; originally resided in Songchon, North Pyongan Province; and defected in 2014): "I worked as a trader for several years in North Pyongan Province. I started out as an intermediary wholesaler. I purchased goods from foreign-currency shops in Pyongyang and supplied them to small retailers in local cities. I had no problem traveling to and from Pyongyang as I constantly bribed police officers and the Ministry of State Security officials for travel permits. Although I was a full-time housewife, I was given a permit for local government-run corporations. However, I was forced out of business as competition became fierce due to young people adept at new technologies. It was then that I was contacted by the chauffeur of a high-ranking Ministry of State Security official to work as a broker to deliver valuable raw materials such as copper to border areas to be smuggled into China. It was a high-risk job yielding high returns. I was given part of the proceeds, instead of fees. The chauffeur's car was never inspected at any guard post. I had to deliver goods about once every week. I had no idea whether the high-ranking official was the mastermind behind this or, as the chauffeur insisted, the high-ranking official was turning a blind eye out of generosity. After making some money, I quit the job in fear of being tracked down. Afterward, I saw many brokers arrested and sent to prison."