

KIMILSUNGISM-KIMJONGILISM AND THE RIGHT TO

Freedom of Religion, Thought, and Conscience in North Korea



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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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To advance international freedom of religion or belief, by independently assessing and unflinchingly confronting threats to this fundamental right.

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Cover Photo: Visitors bowing in a show of respect for North Korean leaders Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il on Mansudae (Mansu Hill) in Pyongyang, North Korea.

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ABOUT THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

WHO WE ARE

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). USCIRF uses international standards to monitor violations of religious freedom or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.

WHAT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS

Inherent in religious freedom is the right to believe or not believe as one's conscience leads, and to live out one's beliefs openly, peacefully, and without fear. Freedom of religion or belief is an expansive right that includes the freedoms of thought, conscience, expression, association, and assembly. Religious freedom is a core human right that international law and treaty recognize; a necessary component of U.S. foreign policy and America's commitment to defending democracy and freedom globally; and a vital element of national security, critical to ensuring a more peaceful, prosperous, and stable world.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014, a United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea found “systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations” being committed, which in many instances “entailed crimes against humanity based on State policies.”¹ While religious freedom was not a substantive area of focus for the inquiry, it nevertheless found “that there is an almost complete denial of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as of the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, information and association.”

In 2021, a United States Commission on International Religious Freedom [report](#) established evidence that the North Korean government continued to perpetrate systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations since 2014.²

This report in 2022 finds the nature of ongoing religious freedom violations are driven by highly organized efforts of the Workers' Party of Korea to enforce an ideology known as Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism. For example, state-sponsored dissemination of prohibitions against religious belief may be considered according to at least three categories: 1) in applications of the Criminal Law; 2) in materials for compulsory education; 3) and through the adherence mechanisms of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism. Regardless of the mode or medium of messaging, and whether by a law enforcement officer enforcing the criminal code or a lecturer delivering the syllabus in an educational institution, it is through the adherence mechanisms of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism that the North Korean state warns the individual citizen to refrain from adopting any religious belief.

In lessons at school, students are taught about the “evils” of religion and superstitions, and this messaging is reinforced through a multitude of materials, including stories and movies.³ In higher education, instruction on Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism continues through twice-weekly study sessions and lectures on the words and teachings of the Supreme Leader. Warnings against religious belief are delivered during these meetings, through presentations of case studies featuring individuals arrested for engaging in superstitious practices.⁴ When North Koreans enter adulthood, warnings against religious belief continue in a similar manner.

Penalties for noncompliance can result in a forced labor sentence or more severe forms of penal sanction, but an apparent lack of ideological fervor is a sufficient early warning sign that is met with punitive measures.⁵ In effect, there is a continuous form of state-sponsored coercion on the individual to turn away from anything other than Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism.

Overt incentive systems are supported by citizens' knowledge that they are constantly monitored by covert surveillance structures. In such an environment, many are inclined to avoid using risk-laden terms like “religion” or “Bible” altogether. The ground level effect of coercive state policies aimed at denying the right to religious belief are palpable.

For criminal sanctions, individuals may be publicly prosecuted and sentenced by the Ministry of People's Security or the Prosecutor's Office for engaging in common superstitious practice, or secretly prosecuted and sentenced by the Ministry of State Security for links to Christianity.⁶

This report contributes to significant advances in understanding how and why this ideology is implemented across North Korea and presents implications for the deterrence of perpetrators and the pursuit of accountability and justice.

¹ United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, *Report of the Detailed Findings*, February 7, 2014, A/HRC/25/CRP.1.

² USCIRF, *Organized Persecution: Documenting Religious Freedom Violations in North Korea*, August 18, 2021, <https://www.uscifr.gov/publication/organized-persecution-documenting-religious-freedom-violations-north-korea>.

³ Interviews with W3, W19, W52, W60, W61, etc.

⁴ Interviews with W104, W177, W255, etc.

⁵ Interviews with W250, W252.

⁶ See USCIRF, *Organized Persecution: Documenting Religious Freedom Violations in North Korea*, August 18, 2021, <https://www.uscifr.gov/publication/organized-persecution-documenting-religious-freedom-violations-north-korea>.

RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC LEGAL PROVISIONS

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

The right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief (also known as “religious freedom”) is an expansive right that is protected under international law. This right and other interrelated rights are principally guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and international human rights treaties that North Korea has ratified or acceded to and remains a state party to: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

DOMESTIC LEGAL FRAMEWORK

North Korea’s domestic legal framework as it relates to religious freedom violations draws on at least five separate elements: 1) the Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Leadership System (Ten Principles); 2) the Charter of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK); 3) the Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK); 4) the Criminal Law of the DPRK;⁷ 5) and the Administrative Punishment Law of the DPRK. The Ten Principles rank the highest in a hierarchy of authority, with the other elements ranked in decreasing order of authority in the following list.⁸

1. The Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Leadership System

The Ten Principles, first released in 1974, are regarded as the most powerful document in North Korea.⁹ They consist of ten principal clauses with accompanying sub-clauses and establish the specific attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors required of all North Korean citizens. Due to the document’s calls for absolute obedience to the ideas of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, it shapes both the laws and their implementations in practice. The Ten Principles form the basis of WPK propaganda and organizational work, branches of which are embedded in every North Korean organization.

2. The WPK Charter

The WPK Charter establishes the structures and rules of the entity responsible for upholding the Ten Principles. It states that “Every Party committee at every level is the highest guidance element in any organization and serves that organization as its political staff.”¹⁰

3. The Socialist Constitution

Article 68 of the Socialist Constitution states: “Citizens have freedom of religious belief. This right is granted through the approval of the construction of religious buildings and the holding of religious ceremonies. Religion must not be used as a pretext for drawing in foreign forces or for harming the State or social order.”¹¹ With Article 3 establishing that the state is guided by the ideas of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, the Ten Principles taking precedence of authority, and the WPK determining in practice what is and is not harmful to the social order, Article 68 cannot be considered as evidence for the guarantee of religious freedom in either an external aspect, or *forum externum*, or private aspect, or *forum internum*.

⁷ The “Law on Rejecting the Reactionary Ideology and Culture” adopted in December 2020 appears to elaborate on and proscribe harsher criminal and administrative penalties for acts that had previously fallen under the remit of articles in the Criminal Law and Administrative Punishment Law. See M. Williams, “North Korea Intensifies War Against Foreign Influence,” 38 North, November 10, 2021, https://www.38north.org/2021/11/north-korea-intensifies-war-against-foreign-influence/#_ftn1.

⁸ The Ten Principles and WPK Charter have been described as “semi-laws” that “rank above the North Korean Constitution in terms of authority.” See J. Dowling and D.U. Hong, “The Enshrinement of Nuclear Statehood in North Korean Law,” Illinois Law Review, Online 48, 2021, <https://www.illinoislawreview.org/online/the-enshrinement-of-nuclear-statehood-in-north-korean-law/>.

⁹ See R. Collins, “North Korea’s Organization and Guidance Department,” Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2019, https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/Collins_OGD_Web.pdf.

¹⁰ *Id.*, p. 67.

¹¹ Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (revised in 2019), https://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/dprk-constitution-2019.pdf/file_view.

4. The Criminal Law

Several articles of the Criminal Law are relevant for the prosecution of individuals exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief. Shamanic practices are deemed to be illegal under the Article 256 prohibition against “Acts of Superstition.”¹² Use or possession of religious content can be punished under Article 183 for the crime of “Importing and Disseminating Degenerate Culture” or under Article 185 for the crime of “Listening to Hostile Broadcasts and Collection, Storage, Disseminating Hostile Goods.” Unauthorized contact with individuals linked to religious activities abroad can be punished under Article 222 for the crime of “Illegal International Communications.”

5. The Administrative Punishment Law

Several articles of the Administrative Punishment Law are relevant for the prosecution of individuals exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief. Shamanic practices can be punished under the Article 219 prohibition against “Acts of Superstition and Acts of Disseminating Falsehoods.”¹³ Use or possession of religious content can be punished under Article 152 for “Acts of Importing, Using, Disseminating Degenerate Culture” or under Article 153 for “Acts of Listening to Hostile Broadcasts and Collecting, Storing, Disseminating Hostile Goods.”

¹² Criminal Law of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (revised in 2015). Translated by D. Gang, <https://www.lawandnorthkorea.com/laws/criminal-law-2015?rq=criminal>.

¹³ Administrative Punishment Law of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (revised in 2011). Translated by D. Gang, <https://www.lawandnorthkorea.com/laws/administrative-punishment-law-2011>.

METHODOLOGY

This report draws on evidence from Korea Future and its database of in-person interviews with survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators of religious freedom violations in North Korea.¹⁴ Interviews were conducted between November 2019 and August 2021 by investigators for the North Korean Religious Freedom Database, focusing on specific violations of international law pertaining to the treatment of religious adherents in North Korea.¹⁵ Based on the patterns of violations that emerged, a set of 30 interviews was conducted in early 2021 to establish the scope, context, and severity of the most egregious violations.¹⁶

To inform analysis for this report, a further set of 30 interviews was conducted in early 2022 aimed at understanding the role of propaganda and state-sponsored coercion in the perpetration of systematic and ongoing violations. Using insights gained through previous investigations, individuals with first-hand experience in North Korea's administrative, propaganda, or law enforcement institutions were interviewed. The composition of the group was determined by a combination of factors, including availability and willingness, recency of experience, and implications for triangulation of information. All persons participated voluntarily and provided consent.

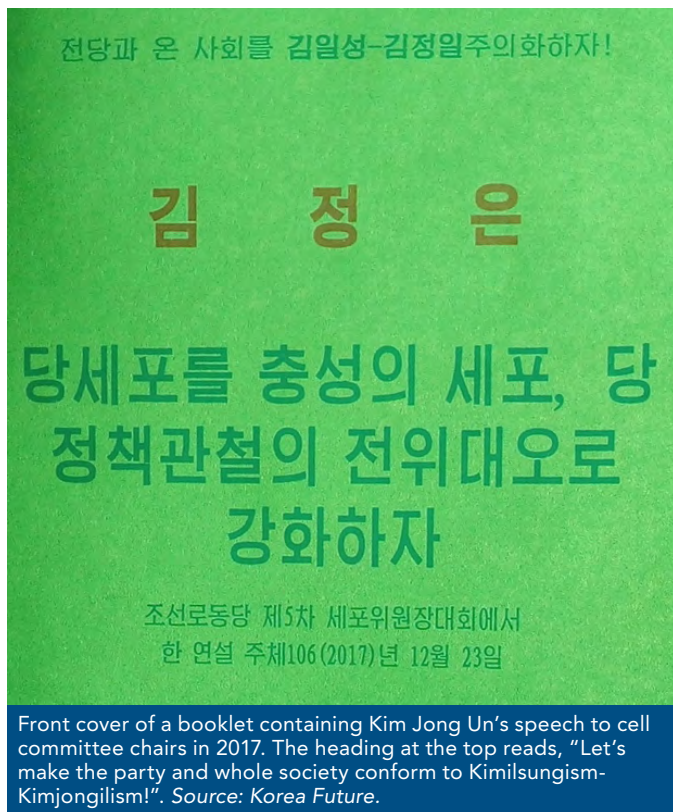
¹⁴ Korea Future, "North Korean Religious Freedom Database," 2021, <https://www.nkrf.io>.

¹⁵ Korea Future, "Persecuting Faith: Documenting Religious Freedom Violations in North Korea (Volume 2)," 2021, <https://www.koreafuture.org/resources>.

¹⁶ USCIRF, *Organized Persecution: Documenting Religious Freedom Violations in North Korea*, August 18, 2021, <https://www.uscifr.gov/publication/organized-persecution-documenting-religious-freedom-violations-north-korea>.

KIMILSUNGISM-KIMJONGILISM

In Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism, the individual must strive to follow the guidance of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il in both the internal and external aspects of life. It is not a new ideology, having first been announced as Kimilsungism by Kim Jong Il in 1974, when the Ten Principles were released. It became known as Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism after the death of Kim Jong Il in 2011.



KIMILSUNGISM-KIMJONGILISM AND "RELIGION OR BELIEF" IN FORB

| *"Religion" was not a commonly used word.¹⁷*

The North Korean state does not consider Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism to be a religion. It is officially referred to as a *sasang* (ideology), and it is considered treacherous for a North Korean inside North Korea to refer to it as a *chonggyo* (religion). According to standard usages of the

English language, however, a direct translation of the terms "ideology" and "religion" as they are used in North Korea can be misleading. Notwithstanding scholarly debates on whether the North Korean state's ideological system should or should not be classified as a religion, the closest institutional analogues to Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism in Western discourse are found in examples of organized religion rather than in examples of political ideology.

The right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), as it is understood in Article 18 of the ICCPR, consists of both the *forum internum* and the *forum externum*, with the *forum internum* being the internal and private realm of the individual where freedom to choose a religion or belief, or none, is absolute and no state interference can be justified.¹⁸

Nonetheless, in North Korea, Article 1 of the Ten Principles states, "We must give our all in the struggle to unify the entire society with Kimilsungism and Kimjongilism."¹⁹ Article 4 of the same document states, "We must be thoroughly armed with the revolutionary ideas of the great Comrades Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il and the Party's lines and policies that are the realization of these ideas." Article 5 of the same document states, "We must adhere strictly to the principle of unconditional obedience in accomplishing the instructions passed on by the great Comrades Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il and in the Party's lines and policies."

In addition to the absolute internal rights guaranteed by the right to FoRB, included among the various outward manifestations of religion or belief to be protected under international law are distinct rituals, buildings, and texts.²⁰ Compliance with Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism requires participation in daily morning recitations and weekly or biweekly criticism sessions. Morning recitations take place in schools, workplaces, and residential areas, adhering to a standard format that begins with a reading of the directives or words of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, or Kim Jong Un:

| *Every self-criticism session begins with recitations. The same goes for every debate and every group criticism session.²¹*

¹⁷ Interview with W241.

¹⁸ See for example, "Freedom of Thought" in an interim report by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, <https://undocs.org/A/76/380>.

¹⁹ The translations of the Ten Principles are adapted from: <https://www.illinoislawreview.org/online/the-enshrinement-of-nuclear-statehood-in-north-korean-law/>.

²⁰ See the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief's "Digest on Freedom of Religion or Belief," <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-religion-or-belief/international-standards#7>. Accessed April 15, 2022.

²¹ Interview with W250.

[The sessions] were a regular component of life. When everyone gathered at 7 a.m., the elementary level party secretary read out materials from above. For example, what Kim Jong Il instructed about something.²²

Authorized texts used in regular meetings include the leader's words, interpretations, and instruction materials published by the WPK, and the Ten Principles. Attendees carry booklets of the Ten Principles or notebooks, where they write down the leader's sayings and instructions as needed. The words are known as *malssŭm* ([revered] words) or *kyosi* (teachings).

Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism lectures are held in dedicated spaces known as "study centers." They are ubiquitous and found in schools, workplaces, and geographical administrative units down to the level of *ri* or labor districts.²³ Sizes of study centers vary according to the type of unit and level they are attached to. A district level study center was described as "a two-story building with an assembly hall, containing a stage and podium."²⁴ The study centers for city level Ministry of People's Security (MPS) branches consist of designated rooms at the branch headquarters, with each department having its own room.²⁵ The study center at a university in Hyesan was described in the following way:

The main building of our college was a five-story building. The study center took up most of the fourth floor. There were a few classrooms and three halls. There were around a thousand students at our college, and the halls could fit us all in at once. They did not allow that though because crowding would lower the decorum. There were portraits of the young Supreme Leader's activities on the walls, and inside it was comfortably warm that you could fall asleep.²⁶

Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism makes no explicit claim that North Korea's leaders are gods; rather, they are presented as extraordinary beings. Specialist instructors deliver these instructions at an age-appropriate level. In the words of a Children's Union supervisor tasked with ideological education at an elementary school in North Hamgyŏng Province:

Whether we were teaching Kimilsungism to children or being trained in Kimilsungism at college, lectures aimed to instill in the listener that Kim Il Sung was a preternatural being. For example, we taught children that Kim Il Sung remained unscathed in battle using a deflection technique. After noticing that Kim Il Sung's bodyguards had inadvertently let the enemy come too close, Kim Jong Suk [the first wife of Kim Il Sung] rushed to protect him. It was then she discovered that bullets fired at Kim Il Sung always diverted their course.²⁷



Members of the Youth League swear an oath: "We who are the vanguard of the youth accept Great Comrade Kim Il Sung and Great Comrade Kim Jong Il to be the eternal sun of Juche and the eternal leaders of the movement of Korean youth. Inheriting the brilliant ideas and accomplishments of the leaders, we shall be true followers of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism."²⁸ Source: Rodong Sinmun.

Or in the words of a Youth League supervisor tasked with ideological education at a middle school in Ryanggang Province:

I used to teach the fundamentals of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism. I taught there were palpable signs of Kim Il Sung being a special kind of being from when he was young. It was the same for Kim Jong Il, and then there were materials on Kim Jong Un. The materials contained accounts like how he was able to drive a boat equipped with modern technology at the age of five, so that onlookers marveled at the boy.²⁹

Indoctrination about the accomplishments of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il continues throughout childhood and into adulthood, with the instructor's goal being "to guide the individual to give their life to Kimilsungism."³⁰ The direct translation of terms such as morning recitations, criticism sessions, lectures, or study centers are not suggestive of religion. Nevertheless, several North Koreans interviewed for this report who encountered Christianity during or after their escape from North Korea used Christianity as an analogy for describing the processes of instruction and participation in Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism. For example, interviewees who

²² Interview with W211.

²³ Interviews with W16, W67, W86, W90, W148, etc.

²⁴ Interview with W240.

²⁵ Interviews with W243, W245.

²⁶ Interview with W235.

²⁷ Interview with W236.

²⁸ "Oath meeting of vanguard youth," Rodong Sinmun, July 6, 2018, http://rodong.rep.kp/ko/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2018-07-06-0019. Accessed April 24, 2022.

²⁹ Interview with W241.

³⁰ Interview with W236.

took part in Christian missionary activities following their escape from North Korea or who encountered Christianity after their arrival in South Korea said:

[In Christianity] every day we had a routine of waking up at 06:00 for morning prayers, holding thanksgiving prayers, and reflecting before bedtime on what we did wrong and how to improve ourselves. That is what the daily life-conduct sessions [in North Korea] are like.³¹

Much of the ideological instruction consisted of learning the words of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. ... It is just like how Christians here [in South Korea] use the Bible.... When you hear 'Great Comrade Kim Il Sung taught the following,' you must memorize the exact words that follow. You must use the verbatim citations to start any meeting, whether it is a session for criticism or something else.³²

A ZERO-SUM RELATIONSHIP

According to the profound truth of Juche ideology, the master of fate is none other than the person whose fate it is, and each holds the power to forge their own fate. The workers and youth in our republic have fully internalized this truth, so they do not believe in any religion.³³

The preceding extract was published in 2018 as a part of a constitutional commentary published by the WPK and made with reference to Article 68 of the Socialist Constitution. While Article 68 of the constitution states that North Korean citizens are guaranteed the right to freedom of religion or belief, the official WPK commentary on Article 68 clarifies that one who has internalized “the profound truth of Juche ideology” does not believe in any religion. In an April 2019 revision, the phrase “the Juche ideology and the Songun ideology” in Article 3 of the Socialist Constitution was replaced with “Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism.” It reads:

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is guided in its building and activities only by great Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism.³⁴

Whether it is referred to as Juche or Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism, adherence to it entails and demands the renunciation of other systems of religion or belief. A North Korean citizen cannot adhere both to Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism and to another religion or belief. To believe in the truth of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism is to deny the

existence of religions and beliefs and to participate in their extermination within North Korea.

What is effectively a zero-sum relationship between state ideology and religious belief is not only codified but put into everyday practice by the state. In explaining the functions of the Propaganda and Agitation Department, a former propaganda secretary for a residential district explained, “We taught that people must not believe any other ideology; they must only believe in the Supreme Leader.”³⁵ A former agitation officer assigned to a factory said, “We had to look firmly to the monolithic ideology, in absolute terms. No alternatives to it could be allowed to exist in North Korea.”³⁶

For North Koreans being sent abroad for foreign currency earnings where they may encounter religions or beliefs, the warnings are more explicit than implicit. An individual who was dispatched to a region in Russia as a forced laborer described the lectures that took place before their departure from North Korea:

They delivered the lectures in person using a booklet, rather than giving us any reading materials. There were around 200 of us in an assembly hall. ... They were extremely strict when it came to the topic of religion. We were ordered to avoid all contact with it. We were taught that religions are tools used by imperialists to prepare the ground for invasion. It was treated as such a serious matter that anyone who engaged with religion would not survive.³⁷

A sentiment that was repeated by interviewees who held positions in law enforcement or as party officials was that for individuals in similarly “trusted” positions, there were sharper distinctions between crimes that could or could not be forgiven. While penal sanctions could rehabilitate an official who had consulted a shaman or committed theft, crimes against Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism, such as adherence to Christianity, were perceived to be in the most severe category. A former Central Party official put it the following way:

Other criminal acts can be forgiven, but if a crime is against ideology or against the work being done by the departments for party propaganda or for party organization, there is no such thing as forgiveness. If you committed murder instead of one these categories of crimes, you would stand a better chance at mercy.³⁸

³¹ Interview with W260.

³² Interview with W237.

³³ DPRK Constitutional Commentary, 2018, WPK Publishing House. Sourced and translated by the report's authors.

³⁴ Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (revised in 2019), https://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/dprk-constitution-2019.pdf/file_view.

³⁵ Interview with W235.

³⁶ Interview with W237.

³⁷ Interview with W238.

³⁸ Interview with W244.

STATE-SPONSORED COERCION OF KIMILSUNGISM-KIMJONGILISM

There exists a zero-sum formulation inherent in Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism, and adherence to it is enforced by the state. Although an individual is free to adopt, recant, or proselytize any belief, ICCPR Article 18(2) states, “No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.” The definition of “coercion” in this context is that of state-sponsored coercion, referring to the state’s obligation not to use coercion to impair the right to freedom of religion or belief.³⁹ The United Nations Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 22 states that the terms “religion” and “belief” are to be broadly construed, with the right to freedom of religion or belief not to be limited in its application to religions with institutional or traditional statuses.⁴⁰

If Juche or Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism were to be regarded as a system of religion or belief according to such a definition, the situation in North Korea may be characterized as one whereby the state is systematically coercing adherence and, by extension, also coercing recantation of other religions or beliefs.

If Juche or Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism were to be regarded as a political ideology and not as a system of religion or belief, the state’s systematic use of coercion to compel adherence to it is still crucially relevant to the situation of state-sponsored religious freedom violations in North Korea, because Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism requires its followers not only to reject other systems of religion or belief, but also to “eradicate” their presence in society,⁴¹ which may have ramifications under international criminal law.

COMPELLING ADHERENCE THROUGH POLICIES OR PRACTICES THAT RESTRICT PUBLIC FACILITIES

In General Comment 22, the UN Human Rights Committee noted that a state’s use of coercion in violation of Article 18’s prohibition may include “the use or threat of physical force or penal sanctions” and “policies or practices having the same intention or effect, such as for example those restricting access to education, medical care, employment or the rights guaranteed by Article 25 and other provisions of the Covenant.”⁴² As educational, medical care, and employment facilities are generally in the public realm and the rights mentioned are those to be safeguarded by the state, the focus is not on coercion by individuals in private settings but on state coercion in the public context.⁴³ In North Korea, the state controls these public facilities and many more and restricts access to them based on state assessments of the individual’s adherence to Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism.

Education

Adherence to Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism is a requirement for students in compulsory education. The content is taught in age-appropriate methods of delivery, as in the following description of a lesson given by a former kindergarten teacher:

Younger students were taught through pictures of Mount Paekdu and that three generations of the great General’s bloodline came from that location. ... When the teacher stated a fact such as the birthday of Supreme Leader Kim Il Sung, students recited out loud and committed them to memory. It was important for us to instill in them [the greatness of the Kims] when the children were still young.... We had learned these things from the age of four and were raised to believe that they were true.⁴⁴

³⁹ UN Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 22 of 1993.

⁴⁰ The comment is taken to be authoritative as the Human Rights Committee is responsible for oversight and implementation of the civil and political rights set out in the ICCPR.

⁴¹ See USCIRF, *Organized Persecution: Documenting Religious Freedom Violations in North Korea*, August 18, 2021, pp. 9 and 11, <https://www.uscifr.gov/publication/organized-persecution-documenting-religious-freedom-violations-north-korea>.

⁴² UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 22, paragraph 5.

⁴³ See P.M. Taylor, “Freedom of religious choice” in *Freedom of Religion: UN and European Human Rights Law and Practice*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

⁴⁴ Interview with W258.

Ongoing assessments of students' ideological adherence are an important component of the permanent record.⁴⁵ Recognition of academic excellence is contingent on the student having sufficient *songbun* and good ideological performance, because the WPK is responsible for assessing the future potential of students:

*When I was at school, from the time I was inducted into the Children's Union and put on the Union's necktie, I served in committee positions including as subsection chair and section chair. ... Our family background ... was very solid so there were no restrictions to my abilities being recognized in consideration for the system where the most capable students are progressed through. ... The ri-level party committee authorized appointments. No student appointment is possible outside of WPK approval.*⁴⁶

Teachers can be dismissed from their roles for ideological transgressions such as reading a fortune-telling book.⁴⁷ As teachers are professional revolutionaries, it is possible for them to progress to political cadre roles, with allowances for expedited vetting based on prior background checks.⁴⁸ The capacity for social influence in the position is linked to emphases on ideological pedigree:

*Preschool teachers were organized by the party and had to be ideologically prepared to teach children. Therefore, we studied a lot of revolutionary history. ... Pre-school teachers had to have impeccable ideological credentials, because we would be entrusted with guiding the growth of children.*⁴⁹

As with other professions, teachers are ideologically monitored throughout their career. At the ground level, their surveillance is managed by WPK-controlled Children's Union or Youth League guidance supervisors who are embedded in schools.⁵⁰ They are responsible for ensuring that teachers are correctly indoctrinating students in Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism, as well as for ensuring that the teachers' own personal and professional conduct remains aligned with the ideology. The supervisors form "a permanently embedded unit, responsible for scrutinizing day-to-day life in schools and submitting the information in reports to the WPK."⁵¹ As ideological education is holistically conceived, the responsibilities of a Children's Union or Youth League

official do not end when teachers and students finish school for the day:

*My first and foremost duty was to arm [the youth] with the monolithic ideology of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism. This formed the basis for all other tasks. Not all young people thought in the same way, so it was important to take a complex and comprehensive approach in the pursuit of their ideological strengthening. We implemented many kinds of projects for this end, such as campaigns for raising rabbits and local community service.*⁵²

Employment

The North Korean state's use of a hereditary caste system known as *songbun* to implement policies of discrimination has been well documented.⁵³ As the classifications are based in part on judgments of ideological and political loyalty, it is unsurprising that they are considered in job assignments directly involved in the administration of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism. It is worth noting that family background checks for employment as custodians of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism study centers are akin to the process required for the appointment of party cadres and were explained as such: "This is because a study center houses the bust and images of the Supreme Leader."⁵⁴

Ideological assessments are also required for work in technocratic fields such as engineering and medicine.⁵⁵ In fact, employment in all career tracks requires the individual to participate in Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism sessions at the workplace. Even if an employee is not a party member, he or she must refrain from religious activities and make efforts to "eradicate superstition from society" by reporting on Bible sightings and other suspected religious behavior to the authorities.⁵⁶ These instructions are delivered through WPK recitations and lectures at the workplace, and employees' alignment with the guidance is enforced through WPK-controlled self and mutual criticism sessions. Bribes can mitigate a lower *songbun* if the minimum class requirements for a job are not met, but assessments of an individual's ideological performance is crucial for completion of any

⁴⁵ Interviews with W3, W16, W51, etc.

⁴⁶ Interview with W259.

⁴⁷ Interviews with W132, W192.

⁴⁸ Interview with W246.

⁴⁹ Interview with W253.

⁵⁰ Interviews with W97, W164, W241, etc.

⁵¹ Interview with W236.

⁵² Interview with W259.

⁵³ See R. Collins, *Marked for Life: Songun, North Korea's Social Classification System*, Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2012, https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK_Songbun_Web.pdf.

⁵⁴ Interview with W242.

⁵⁵ Interview with W256.

⁵⁶ Interviews with W173, W196, W251, etc.

initial studies and training, appointment to the job, and for staying in the job.⁵⁷ For example, it was explained that “as doctors are in a position to supervise and influence many people, they have to be people who are thoroughly ideologically aligned.”⁵⁸

The ideological entry requirements for being assigned to work on a farm are not as rigorous, but adherence to Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism is still compulsory. After reporting to work, farm laborers begin their day with morning recitations, using material provided by the local party committee’s propaganda section.⁵⁹ Sub-section leaders then distribute the daily tasks, with output goals on farm cooperatives cast as “labor battles” to be fought in compliance with WPK guidance:

*There were battles for rice planting, harvesting, weeding, and sowing. The elementary-level WPK committee had a supervisor who assigned battle plans. My job was to write these down on paper and post them on notice boards that were about three meters in length.*⁶⁰

A former railway station employee stated that railway station staff were required to attend regular study sessions, regardless of whether they held WPK membership:

*When the deputy secretary read aloud from a book containing the reverent words of the Supreme Leader, we recorded what was said by hand. They had inspections at certain times, no one could afford to be caught with sloppy notes. ... It didn’t matter that you were not a WPK member, non-party members also had to memorize the Ten Principles and the Supreme Leader’s annual speeches.... They wanted to ensure that our thoughts did not stray.*⁶¹

While participation in ideological meetings is important in many professional sectors in North Korea, it is especially true for personnel in law enforcement. A former MPS official said:

*How well you do in the party organization affects your professional work assessments. Whether you are loyal to the Supreme Leader is the most important criterion and then your revolutionary spirit. They assess you by examining your participation in ideological meetings, your commitment to party organizational work, and your overall personal conduct. [You must demonstrate that] the values are habitually embedded in day-to-day activities. Therefore, you show up early in the morning to clean the leader’s portrait or volunteer for guard duties during holidays, to demonstrate a high loyalty level. Such efforts are noted. If you diligently participate in study sessions, you are regarded as having a high revolutionary spirit.*⁶²

Economic Barriers

Being a party member requires adherence to Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism. There is a ceiling on advancement in state employment without being a party member. A lifetime of employment by the state and its enterprises is not something an individual can choose to opt out of, at least officially speaking. Nevertheless, many North Koreans do make their living outside the remit of their state-assigned roles and do so to put food on their table, because state wages are either too low or sporadic.⁶³ Given private work is often not officially sanctioned, any individual wishing to avoid a sentence of forced labor or other types of state sanction must navigate their existence in North Korea through a combination of ideological adherence and monetary bribes.⁶⁴ In effect, “Only when the members and leader of your elementary-unit cooperate in maintaining a good demonstration of ideological preparedness can you secure time for rest and personal business.”⁶⁵ This leads to situations where “[t]he poorest people were usually the ones conducting mass ideological events” like group dance performances:

*Participation [in mass events] meant missing out on market activities, so those who could afford it bribed their way out of it or paid someone to attend instead of them. In our district and nearby districts, it was the destitute people who had to do the performances.*⁶⁶

⁵⁷ Interviews with W164, W177, W207, etc.

⁵⁸ Interview with W255.

⁵⁹ Interviews with W119, W123, W165, etc.

⁶⁰ Interview with W257.

⁶¹ Interview with W251.

⁶² Interview with W245.

⁶³ See for example, J.V. Hastings, D. Wertz, and A. Yeo, *Market Activities and the Building Blocks of Civil Society in North Korea*, 2021, NCNK, <https://www.ncnk.org/news/special-report-market-activities-building-blocks-civil-society-north-korea>.

⁶⁴ Interviews with W52, W88, W111, etc.

⁶⁵ Interview with W240.

⁶⁶ Interview with W252.

It is not only a career in state employment that demands the individual's adherence to Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism, but also the pursuit of private activities if they are to remain condoned by the state. One of the perceived benefits of a job in the security or law enforcement sector is the opportunity to collect bribes.⁶⁷ An account provided by a former border guard is illustrative of this seeming paradox, whereby the state's policies and practices result in ideological adherence being a prerequisite not only for a state-approved job, but for opportunities to earn money in a technically illegal manner:

*You need a good family background to get a job as a border guard. ... Life was better than in other regiments. ... Though there wasn't really any pay, it offered opportunities to take part in smuggling operations.*⁶⁸

COMPELLING ADHERENCE AND RECATATION BY USE OF WARNINGS

*They would question your ideological level if you did not participate. People attended because everyone had to, not necessarily out of fervent ideological preparedness.*⁶⁹

State-sponsored dissemination of prohibitions against religious belief may be considered according to at least three categories: 1) in applications of the Criminal Law; 2) in materials for compulsory education; 3) and through the adherence mechanisms of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism. Regardless of the mode or medium of messaging, and whether by a law enforcement officer enforcing the criminal code or a lecturer delivering the syllabus in an educational institution, it is through the adherence mechanisms of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism that the North Korean state warns the individual citizen to refrain from adopting any religious belief.

In lessons at school, students are taught about the “evils” of religion and superstitions, and this messaging is reinforced through a multitude of materials, including stories and movies.⁷⁰ Some interviewees said they grew fearful of encountering crosses or missionaries,⁷¹ while others said such instruction aroused their curiosity.⁷² In higher education, instruction on Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism continues through twice-weekly study sessions and lectures on the

words and teachings of the Supreme Leader. Warnings against religious belief are delivered during these meetings, through presentations of case studies featuring individuals arrested for engaging in superstitious practices.⁷³

When North Koreans enter adulthood, warnings against religious belief continue in a similar manner:

*They gave frequent lectures on the need to refrain from the practice of superstition, detailing the location, date, and details of a superstition offence. For example, they warned of families raising a child to practice superstition. ... The lecture materials said that one such incident had been uncovered by the authorities, where a woman had raised her daughter to be a shaman to sell her away.*⁷⁴

Penalties for noncompliance can result in a forced labor sentence or more severe forms of penal sanction, but an apparent lack of ideological fervor is a sufficient early warning sign that is met with punitive measures.⁷⁵ In effect, there is a continuous form of state-sponsored coercion on the individual to turn away from anything other than Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism. Former members of the Women's Union—membership in which is mandatory for women who would not otherwise be attached to a WPK-controlled organizational unit—described a competitive system in which the avoidance of penalties was a constant incentive toward conformity:

*There was a system for punishing those lacking in revolutionary spirit.... The Women's Union committee punished units with insufficient levels of ideological preparedness. We were about 60 elementary units, each led by a unit head. Of these units, units deemed to have exemplary conduct were excused from quota assignments. ... Units that lagged were given more quota assignments, extra criticism sessions, and increased attendance requirements for ideological events.*⁷⁶

*When a unit had low attendance rates for ideological training or too many of its members dodged mobilization [for ideological celebrations, such as the birthday of Kim Il Sung], the Union punished it by assigning extra quotas. The quota assignments could be anything, from procuring burlap sacks to plants and rabbit hides.*⁷⁷

⁶⁷ Interviews with W7, W18, W66, etc.

⁶⁸ Interview with W249.

⁶⁹ Interview with W240.

⁷⁰ Interviews with W3, W19, W52, W60, W61, etc.

⁷¹ Interviews with W4, W21, W58, etc.

⁷² Interviews with W72, W97, W113, etc.

⁷³ Interviews with W104, W177, W255, etc.

⁷⁴ Interview with W173.

⁷⁵ Interviews with W250, W252.

⁷⁶ Interview with W240.

⁷⁷ Interview with W252.

Overt incentive systems are supported by citizens' knowledge that they are constantly monitored by covert surveillance structures. For example:

The heads of residential units were subordinate to the district administration office. That office was run by an administrative manager, a district-level party secretary, and a MSS guidance officer assigned to the district. ... The MSS guidance officer managed informant networks, to detect ideological corruption or espionage attempts.⁷⁸

The MSS guidance officers could rarely be seen, but they were the ones who knew everything about everyone. There was layer after layer after layer of surveillance.⁷⁹

In such an environment, many are inclined to avoid using risk-laden terms like "religion" or "Bible" altogether. The ground level effect of coercive state policies aimed at denying the right to religious belief are palpable:

You could say there might be religions [in North Korea], but you could never have a conversation like, 'I believe in God. Do you believe in God?'⁸⁰

MPS officers did not talk about prohibitions on religion, but they talked a lot about prohibitions on superstition. Only after I came here [to South Korea] did I realize that by 'superstition' they meant all kinds of religious beliefs.⁸¹

I believed it was dangerous to talk about the 'Bible' because it was a type of superstition.⁸²

COERCION THROUGH PENAL SANCTIONS

It is not only the North Korean judiciary that implements punitive sanctions, as sentences of re-education through forced labor can be administered by committees subordinate to the WPK. These WPK-controlled committees can hand out administrative rather than criminal penalties to enforce an individual's adherence to state ideology and even apply them to students in higher education:

If a student missed [ideological] sessions for several weeks, this information was submitted to the student party-affairs supervisor of the college's elementary party committee. ... They were required to undergo forced labor re-education on campus.... They were not allowed to attend lectures during this time.⁸³

The elementary unit secretary led morning recitations at college. We did this every morning because there was surveillance to ensure compliance. ... There were penalties for missing a meeting. Students with several absences were summoned by the Youth League secretary, which meant serious trouble. They were barred from attending classes and had to revolutionize through forced labor on campus grounds.⁸⁴

Each academic department had a quarterly Youth League review meeting for all students in the department. The annual [Youth League] review meeting required the whole school to be in attendance. Students who had been sent to revolutionary re-education during the year or had been marked for public criticism were put on the spot. A blemish like that follows you around: in classes, in quarterly reviews, in the yearly review. It is really agonizing to be denounced in public again and again.⁸⁵

For criminal sanctions, individuals may be publicly prosecuted and sentenced by the Ministry of People's Security or the Prosecutor's Office for engaging in common superstitious practice, or secretly prosecuted and sentenced by the Ministry of State Security (MSS) for links to Christianity.⁸⁶ Whether it is the MPS or MSS that prosecutes individuals for their religious beliefs, it is done under WPK guidance. In the words of a former MPS official:

Everything in North Korea must be justified according to the Ten Principles. This is the yardstick by which something must be punished as bad or exalted as good. ... All duties of administrative officials are executed in the framework of WPK organizational activities.⁸⁷

⁷⁸ Interview with W259.

⁷⁹ Interview with W255.

⁸⁰ Interview with W6.

⁸¹ Interview with W97.

⁸² Interview with W168.

⁸³ Interview with W207.

⁸⁴ Interview with W255.

⁸⁵ Interview with W250.

⁸⁶ See USCIRF, Organized Persecution: Documenting Religious Freedom Violations in North Korea, August 18, 2021, <https://www.uscifr.gov/publication/organized-persecution-documenting-religious-freedom-violations-north-korea>.

⁸⁷ Interview with W243.

THE ROLE OF THE WORKERS' PARTY OF KOREA

The State's overall objective is to make the whole society conform to Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism.⁸⁸

The preamble of the Socialist Constitution states that the document is the “codification” of the ideas of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il and is to be called the “Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il Constitution”:

The Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea shall, as the codification of the Juche-oriented ideas of the great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung and the great leader Comrade Kim Jong Il on State building and their exploits in it, be called Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il Constitution.⁸⁹

Kim Jong Un stated in 2012:

The work of the judiciary and prosecution is crucial. Our party is therefore deeply interested in the work and is actively leading the judiciary and prosecution, so that their work is carried out according to the intentions of the party.⁹⁰

In 2016, Kim Jong Un stated that it is a responsibility for state organs to employ both “instruction” and “enforcement” regarding law abidance, with the goal of making people willingly obey the constitution and laws:

The people's governmental organs should strengthen efforts in law abidance instruction and law enforcement, so that the people make conscious efforts to obey the Socialist Constitution and other laws and regulations of the State.⁹¹

The above *malssŭm* or “revered words” are invoked through citation in subsequent authorized texts, as part of exhortations like the following published in December 2019 by the *Rodong Sinmun*, which is the official WPK newspaper:

All judicial workers should always be aware of their sacred duty, to thoroughly crush in a timely manner the crafty schemes of imperialists and impure hostile elements aimed at harming the party, people's government, and socialist order....⁹²

It is thus codified that all governmental organs, including the law enforcement, the prosecution, and the judiciary, strive for North Korean people to obey Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism, adherence to which entails a continuous struggle to eradicate from society oppositional beliefs such as shamanism or Christianity. This work is to be conducted under WPK leadership, as stated in the preamble and in Article 11 of the Socialist Constitution:

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea shall conduct all activities under the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea.⁹³

Under the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Korean people will uphold the great Comrade Kim Il Sung and the great Comrade Kim Jong Il as the eternal leaders of Juche Korea....⁹⁴

As stipulated in the WPK Charter, this leadership is exercised through embedded party committees: “Every Party committee at every level is the highest guidance element in any organization and serves that organization as its political staff.”⁹⁵

⁸⁸ DPRK Constitutional Commentary, 2018, WPK Publishing House. Sourced and translated by the report's authors.

⁸⁹ Preamble to the Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (revised in 2019), https://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/dprk-constitution-2019.pdf/file_view.

⁹⁰ “Marshal Kim Jong Un sends letter to participants of the nationwide meeting of judicial and prosecution workers,” Choson Sinbo, https://chosonsinbo.com/2012/11/kcna_121127/. Accessed April 15, 2022. Translated by the report's authors.

⁹¹ “North Korea says installation of Kim Jong Un as President of State Affairs Commission is historical event, emphasizes loyalty,” Hankooki, <https://daily.hankooki.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=448686>. Accessed April 15, 2022. Translated by the report's authors.

⁹² “Establishment of a Law Abidance Spirit and the Building a Powerful Socialist Country,” *Rodong Sinmun*, rodong.rep.kp/ko/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2019-12-12-0015. Accessed April 15, 2022. Translated by the report's authors.

⁹³ Preamble to the Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (revised in 2019), https://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/dprk-constitution-2019.pdf/file_view.

⁹⁴ Article 11 of the Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (revised in 2019), https://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/dprk-constitution-2019.pdf/file_view.

⁹⁵ See footnote 3.

DIRECTIVES

*The Central Party controls civilian and judicial institutions alike.*⁹⁶

A former MPS youth guidance supervisor responsible for ideological study sessions, through which directives calling for the eradication of superstitions were disseminated, said:

*My orders came from the province level Youth League committee, not from the political section of my MPS branch. When instructed by the committee, I relayed information to and liaised with the deputy head of the MPS political section. We planned details of implementation together and ensured that the [committee's] timeline was coordinated with the MPS agenda.*⁹⁷

A former MPS official stated that directives for law enforcement implementations were issued through and in the context of study sessions:

*Standard sessions consisted of an intensive study of the Supreme Leader's teachings and words relating to the work of people's security. ... When there were new directives or proclamations relating to social order, they were delivered by the political guidance officer to cell-level secretaries summoned by the political section. The secretaries relayed the directives and implementation guidelines to cell members.*⁹⁸

Previous investigations found evidence for targeted campaigns of ideological instruction and crackdowns implemented in the wake of a political directive, such as the 2018 directive to “eradicate the practice of superstition.”⁹⁹

Another former MPS official stated that while everyday law enforcement activities were sometimes characterized as struggles, directives calling for “severe struggles” required a wider participation and more coordination than was routine:

*When directives for a severe struggle were issued, both the political and administrative personnel worked to comprehensively implement the instructions. The directives were widely issued to prosecutors' offices, to law enforcement, and to political organizations such as the Youth League.*¹⁰⁰

The directive to eradicate superstitious practices appears to have been widely issued in just such a manner. A former Youth League secretary stated:

There was the prohibition on superstitious practices issued as a Central Party directive, relayed to us by the party committee directly above us. It called for the complete eradication of superstitious practices and was assigned as a project for all WPK organizations.

In addition to organizing study sessions and lectures, political officials' contributions to the project involved assisting with information gathering, to ensure that “If you did commit wrong, you would be found out sooner rather than later”:

*In the criticism sessions, people who had engaged in a superstitious act would have to confess their transgression and resolve to follow the directive in such and such a way. It was not just left to those choosing to confess. The elementary committee chair had a box for people to submit suspicious behaviors. ... I also asked for notes with further information to be pushed through a gap in the door. I made sure to follow up on tips by directing people to monitor certain individuals.*¹⁰¹

The evidence so far points towards an interpretation that each state-sponsored violation of religious freedom in North Korea is executed through the common organizational and interpretational framework of the WPK, under one central authority with multiple enabling institutions. The following statement offers a useful summary:

*After a public trial has been held for someone found to have committed superstitious acts ... a directive might be issued nationwide to every organizational unit. The directive is followed by lecture materials on the prohibited behavior and becomes part of an operation to oppose un-socialist activities. They do not tend to refer to 'religion' in the context of religious activities; 'religion' was not a commonly used word. North Korean society is socialist, so the lecturer would say that we must root out un-socialist activities and then read out loud from the issued booklets. The leader of the organizational unit is responsible for the instruction that follows from it. This kind of thing happened during college as well as throughout my teaching career.*¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Interview with W243.

⁹⁷ Interview with W260.

⁹⁸ Interview with W245.

⁹⁹ See USCIRF, *Organized Persecution: Documenting Religious Freedom Violations in North Korea*, August 18, 2021, <https://www.uscifr.gov/publication/organized-persecution-documenting-religious-freedom-violations-north-korea>.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with W246.

¹⁰¹ Interview with W259.

¹⁰² Interview with W241.

ENFORCING ACCOUNTABILITY TO KIMILSUNGISM-KIMJONGILISM

Each administrative section had a function. The inspection department inspected crimes and the investigation department investigated crimes. These fulfilled the duties of the MPS. In doing so, we were fulfilling the duties of the WPK by ensuring that our MPS duties were done in pursuit of the party's commands, policy lines, and politics.¹⁰³

North Korea's constitution declares that the state is to be guided by Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism under the leadership of the WPK, and Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism demands an absolute obedience to the Ten Principles regardless of their incompatibility with domestic or international laws relating to the right to religious freedom.

With regard to directing and enforcing a nationwide adherence to the Ten Principles, the WPK manages accountability mechanisms for persons and entities implicated in ongoing religious freedom violations. Mass organizations such as the Youth League and Women's Union are accountable to their political committees, while paramilitary organizations such as the MSS and MPS are accountable to their internal political sections. Regarding the WPK's knowledge of religious freedom violations perpetrated by its subordinate entities, statements like the following are illuminating:

Everything done by an MPS official was continuously reported by cell-level secretaries, to be considered by the political section. Just as with Youth League members, WPK members held a particular type of criticism session on a quarterly basis, where reporting for the period underwent a comprehensive review. The organizational guidance officer of the political section consolidated this information and reported it to the deputy director for organization. The deputy director for organization produced the final reports.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Interview with W246.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with W260.

CONCLUSION

The systematic violation of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) in North Korea is driven by the WPK's centrally organized efforts to enforce Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism across state and society. At the same time as the systematic enforcement of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism violates the right to freedom of religion or belief, the enforcement is closely related to the denial of other fundamental human rights including the right to life (Article 3); to not be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment (Article 5); to not be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention (Article 8); to the freedom of movement, and to leave one's own country (Article 13); of freedom of opinion and expression, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas (Article 19); or to not be compelled to belong to an association (Article 20).

The WPK continues to maintain robust accountability mechanisms for prioritizing the enforcement of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism. This indicates bleak near-term prospects for religious freedom and other closely related rights in North Korea. There is little evidence so far to suggest that the situation has improved since 2014, when the UN commission of inquiry found "an almost complete denial of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."¹⁰⁵ Documentation of ongoing violations, or the 'crime base', is therefore crucial for the pursuit of accountability and justice. An understanding of the WPK's enforcement of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism can assist states and justice stakeholders deter these violations and hold perpetrators accountable.

¹⁰⁵ A report in April 2022 by the current UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in DPRK concludes, "During the six years carrying out his mandate, the Special Rapporteur has witnessed a further deterioration of the human rights situation inside of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea." See *Situation of Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, Report to the Human Rights Council, April 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/A.HRC49_74_advanceuneditedversion.docx.

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