

Child Labor in the DPRK, **Education and Indoctrination**

UNCRC Alternative Report
to the 5th Periodic Report for the Democratic People's
Republic of Korea (DPRK)



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Summary/Objective

The goal of this report is for the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child to strongly consider the DPRK's deplorable educational system at the 76th Pre-Sessional Working Group. A great number of reprehensible offenses have been committed by the DPRK against children's education. Falsely advertised "free" education, unchecked corporal punishment and abuse in school, and forced manual labor in place of time in the classroom are the most notable, and will all be detailed in this report.

But the most severe injustice is the content of the DPRK's education, which is all geared to either overtly or covertly instill fear and hate into the minds of the state's youngest and most impressionable minds. Education in the DPRK is filled with historical distortion and manipulative teachings that serve the state's rulers, instilling a reverence for the DPRK's government and leaders and a hatred toward any people or ideas that are not in alignment with the government's. Education should be truthful and promote the values of peace, tolerance, equality, and understanding (General Comment No. 1, Article 29). Education in the DPRK is already impaired for children due to the cost, the threat of abuse, and the time and hard work spent performing labor instead of learning, but the result ultimately is an education that is antithetical to the ideals of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The DPRK make a multitude of claims regarding the state of their education system in their State Party's Report that are abject falsehoods. This report utilizes the testimonies of North Korean defectors to make clear the reality of life in the DPRK for its citizens and its children, and to highlight the contradictions between the State Party's Report and the truth.

Methodology

This report investigates human rights violations that are occurring from within the education system referencing North Korean textbooks and class outlines that were restructured in September 2012 by the North Korean government. In addition, this report uses interviews conducted between May and July of 2016 from North Koreans currently living a new life in South Korea. These testimonies are drawn from PSCORE's recently published report *Forced To Hate: North Korea's Education System*. It utilizes their vivid testimonies to demonstrate the impact the indoctrination tactics of the North Korean education system had on their everyday lives.

The names of the interviewed North Korean defectors have been changed for their safety.

“Free” Education

Excerpts from the DPRK’s 2016 State Report regarding the cost of education:

“9. The Ordinance on the Enforcement of Universal 12-year Compulsory Education was promulgated at the 6th session of the 12th Supreme People’s Assembly on September 25, 2012, whereby the 12-year compulsory education system replaced the previous 11-year system, which was legalized through the amending of the Socialist Constitution and education-related laws and regulations. As a result, all children in the DPRK have access to general basic knowledge and modern basic technical knowledge free of charge throughout the 12 year-education period from 1-year preschool course at kindergartens, primary schools to junior and senior secondary schools.”

“10. The Law on General Secondary Education was adopted on January 10, 2011 by the PSPA Decree No 1355. This law has put in place a better system and order for the provision of free compulsory education, establishment and operation of general educational institutions, training of educational workers and improvement of the educational work. It laid a legal foundation for bringing up younger generation as the pillar of the nation knowledgeable, morally sound and physically strong.”

“33. Measures were taken and necessary conditions and amenities were provided to ensure that all children equally enjoy rights to education and decent living without any distinctions as to their parents’ occupations or social standing.”

Testimonies from North Korean defectors regarding the cost of education:

Despite the above claims regarding the cost of education from the DPRK’s State Report, testimonies from North Korean defectors illustrate a very different picture, showing that the DPRK’s free education does not actually come as advertised. While the DPRK claims that all children have access to education “free of charge”, students frequently make voluntary

contributions to their schools and the government, however student contributions are informally enforced and students become victim to exploitation.

“There was a lot you had to submit to the school. Copper, scrap iron, acorns (for bringing in foreign currency in the fall), rabbit fur, and so on. If you fail to bring it, you would surely be scolded by the teachers, and be bullied by your classmates for being too poor to pay up. Another reason why the kids would bully you was because each grade was divided into 4 classes, and if one student failed to bring in the goods, then his entire class would be kept at school until late, and then his classmates would become angry.

They would assign quotas for the day, the week, and the month, constantly demanding goods all throughout our times at school. But sometimes they would tell you to bring in the goods immediately the following day, and in that case we wouldn't have anything ready, so we would have to begin foraging right after lunch that same day.

Sometimes in the winter, the whole class would go around with a wheelbarrow and gather wood the entire day. I think we did this for about a week. One time, they told us to bring 5kgs' worth of corn each so that they could buy coal for heating throughout the winter. 5kg of corn could feed a family of 4 for 3 whole days.”

- Jeong Yoon-Bo

“There is no required tuition, but the students must give bribes to the teachers. We have to give around 10~20 dollars' worth per week. We also have the “Children's Initiative”. The term is only really used when the students are young (i.e. in elementary school), and starting in middle school, it is referred to as “Support Service,” “National Initiative,” “Advanced Support Service,” and so on. We did it once a week. When we would gather, there was always some kind of announcement for a support service next week. They would demand meat, presents, clothes, gloves, socks, etc. They would demand various materials each week, so there was even a merchant selling the requested goods. To hand over the goods like this was like forfeiting a full meal for each person.”

- Kim Yeon-Ri

“We would have many Children’s Initiative sessions. Students had to participate in these sessions almost every week. (Our teachers) would have to collect the various items from us, but in truth, they were going insane, too. They would receive word to collect something else when they weren’t even finished collecting the previous items. If they weren’t able to collect enough, they would be criticized at the teachers’ assembly. The reason they have to do things like this was that they did not receive funding from the government to run the schools. So they would keep demanding things from the students.”

- Kim Cheol-Soo

“In order to support the People’s Army or the school itself, the school had us gather rabbit fur and herbs, make vests, raise rabbits, gather rabbit meat, and operate goat or rabbit farms. These ranches were supposed to make up for the school’s operation expenses, so the students had to manage them directly. Once, the school ordered us to bring scrap metal, so I got caught trying to sneak in a cauldron lid from home. At this, my grandmother lamented, ‘Just ask for the tuition money instead.’”

- Hwang Soo-Min

North Korea uses their socialist constitution to mandate free education. Unfortunately, as the above accounts illustrate, the reality is that North Korea does not have the means to provide free education to its citizens and is only able to do so at the cost of its own students. These costs do not take the form of an official tuition, but are very real nevertheless. The claim by the government that social and economic status do not affect the ability of someone to receive an education is also proven false by these testimonies, as poorer or disadvantaged

students struggle to cover the hidden costs. Inequality also stems from the common practice of bribery within the DPRK's education system.

“Students are evaluated based on grades, but you don’t necessarily have to do well to receive good grades. Even if you don’t do well academically, if you do well with the Children’s Initiative or otherwise have contributed substantially to the school (i.e. through large monetary donations), then the teachers would raise your marks. Thus, those students would end up ranking higher. Although you should be academically competent to be admitted into college, if you’re only mediocre at your studies, you would need lots of money to make up for it. It may be that out of those admitted into college, 8 out of 10 kids came from good social backgrounds, and only one or two got in because they studied hard. Background is extremely important, and if you come from a good one, you’re set for college admissions. This, of course, gives way to grade tampering. Each college has an admissions broker who would fix exam scores for you.”

- Kim Yeon-Ri

The North Korean government should not falsely promote to their own citizens and other nations that they provide free education, nor should they falsely claim that their education is equal for all citizens.

Unchecked and Unmonitored: Physical Abuse in Schools

Excerpt from the DPRK's 2016 State Report regarding corporal punishment in school:

“207. Measures taken for the prevention of corporal punishment at schools were detailed in para.208 of the previous Report. Persons working for and with children and parents were regularly briefed on the General Comment of the Committee on corporal punishment and the relevant provisions of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children and the Convention. Some secondary school teachers were reported to have gone beyond limits by scolding students for misbehaviour and violations of public order. Due measures were taken to enhance education and tighten control to prevent even the slightest case of corporal punishment.”

Testimonies from North Korean defectors regarding physical abuse in schools:

The DPRK claims to have a system in place to monitor and check corporal punishment within schools to “prevent even the slightest case[s]”. However, testimonies show that physical abuse is commonplace as a form of punishment.

“They would...demand firewood in the winter, and because I once brought in a month's worth of coal, I was seated in the warmest seat in the classroom (next to the heater). But one time I couldn't meet the quota and told the teacher that I'd bring the goods next time, and he threw a case of chalk at me. This was around the 4th grade of elementary school. If you couldn't keep up with the Children's Initiative or were unable to turn in what you were supposed to, then the teachers would take those students to the hallway and often beat their ankles. In the first year of middle school, I hit my head against the wall because the teacher pushed me so hard. I also had a bump on my head from being beaten on the head with club, and another time I was slapped across both sides of my face with the attendance book.

But if my father would give the school coal or grains on time, then the teachers would treat me well. Basically, the teachers beat you without mercy if you failed to turn in

what the school demanded of you, and if you turned them in in a timely manner, they would treat you well.”

- Huh Sang-Yoon

“(In political class,) students who haven’t done their homework would be forced to face the wall, and be hit on the head or hands with a blackboard pointer. Some teachers would even hit the students on the cheek, and some would make them run back and forth across the track field.”

- Choi Soo-Hyang

If there actually is a system in place in the DPRK for corporal punishment to be monitored and reported, it is ineffective. Students are left at the mercy of their superiors and too often, due to the demanding and stressful conditions they operate under, disapproval and disdain take the shape of violence.

Forced Manual Labor during School

Excerpt from Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Article 31:

“In the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea the minimum working age is 16 years. The State shall prohibit the employment of children under the minimum working age.”

Testimonies from the DPRK’s 2016 State Report regarding child labor:

Although younger children may be subject to less physical labor, there are those testifying that regardless, forced labor starts from when a child is in elementary school. North Korean defectors have testified to being forced into various forms of labor throughout the entire year. They were forced into labor in accordance to the needs of the farmlands, such as planting trees, weeding, harvesting fruit, and more. The closer in proximity the farmland area was to the school and the poorer the school’s financial state, the harder the work would be, and the more likely one was to be exploited for various types of labor.

“Around 50% of the class came from poor families, had no support or money, and had to be drafted for labor. A classmate of mine told me that all he remembered from his days in school was the labor. (If we’d go for farming labor,) there were days when we would have to work in the fields until we turned darker than monkeys. This kind of labor became more commonplace after Kim Jong-Un came into power. There’s a quote from him saying, ‘The youth is our nation’s pillar.’”

- Kim Yeon-Ri

“(At school), we turned in money and still had to work. It would have been nicer if we could have paid and focused on studying like they do in capitalist societies. We had no time to study whatsoever. In middle school, we had to go to nearby farms and plant rice, grow cabbage, and other farm work like that. From 2013 to 2014, there were lots of activities involving planting grass to make the surroundings appear neat.

Every week, we went out to plant grass and water them. We also had to gather money to buy the grass seeds.

(As a young student,) we were supposed to go to school from Monday to Saturday and rest on Sunday, but every Sunday, I was drafted for work so there was no time to rest. My friends and I would complain to each other about how the days of the week should be referred to as 'Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Saturday,' and that there was no need to call the last day a 'Sunday.' After class lectures, there was no time to look at the textbooks again."

- Kim Jin-Joo

"I'd go to school in the morning, and then go to farm work in the afternoon from 1 to 5. There's been times where the teacher would criticize and beat someone for going to class and trying to go home straight after. You can't do that here (in South Korea), but in North Korea, harsh punishment was viable. I walked on foot for 1-2 hours in the fields. But the rich kids could just submit corn and rice and use the time for self-advancement rather than field labor. My father was a coal mining captain, so my family lived pretty well. And so instead of going to field labor, I could learn to play the accordion. However, I too had to go to field labor about three times a week. I worked in the scorching hot sun, with no boots and my pants pulled up to my knees; when you go pick weeds and plant rice, sometimes leeches would get on your legs, and it was very exhausting.

The work differed with each season. In March, we planted corn and nutrients, and in the fall, we harvested corn and rice. Amongst the agricultural work, we had to carry a large water container on our heads, and it was very heavy. If we ended up with crops, then the farms would submit the crops to the school. With that, the schools can function. If you weren't at the fields, then you had to help out at the faculty vegetable garden. This wasn't work we had to do during the weekends, but rather on weekdays, during class time. It was like this during elementary school, middle school, and high school."

- Huh Sang-Yoon

Ideology and Education

Excerpt from the DPRK's 2016 State Report regarding values taught in school:

“214. Understanding of foreign cultures was promoted and love for peace, tolerance, equality and friendship was reinforced among children through teaching subjects like history, geography and law.”

Testimonies from North Korean defectors regarding the values taught in school:

The DPRK's education openly promotes political ideology that is hateful and violent toward other nations and groups of people. This is so deeply ingrained in the education system, that it manifests itself everywhere, even in the most nonpolitical subjects.

“The math textbook and the questions inside are all related to hateful education. There are questions such as ‘The marines destroyed the American battleships. Several of them have been destroyed, and several of them are left. When the cannons are set at a 45-degree angle and the battleships are X meters away, how will you aim and shoot?’

In addition, education is based on the materials that the guidance officers receive from the government, such as the information of past exploitations. (i.e ‘Japan plundered several tons of gold, etc...’)

- Kim Chul-Soo

“In art class, I was asked to draw the Americans being shot by guns, including civilians. It was in an art textbook. I have drawn that a lot when I was in elementary school, once a semester.

In music class, there were lyrics saying, 'Let's smash the foreign nosed Americans.' I also learned it in elementary school.

In Korean language class, I learned about an American missionary who killed a hungry child who entered his yard by releasing a military dog. We learned a lot about the American missionaries, especially in elementary school.

In literature class, in middle school, we learn poetry. The title of one poem was, 'Naked America'. And it said that even though Americans dress up like gentlemen, they are no different from being naked. Its message implies that they are actually naked because they have neither dignity nor conscience as human beings."

- Lee Ji-Eun

Schools also hold field days, in which the activities and games are also used as a means of promoting hateful ideology:

"On Field Day, we played a game that involved using a club to beat up a puppet wearing an American military helmet."

- Kim Chul-Soo

"There is an athletic competition on 6.6 day (Children's Day, especially for kindergarten students). We make a model of an American, and are supposed to hit it."

- Kim Jin-Joo

"The last activity of the school field day was 'Crush the American'."

- Park Chang-Shik

“When I was in elementary and middle school, almost everybody took part in the beating game (relay) every year.”

- Hwang Soo-Min

“There is a military game (gunfight) in elementary school. Some children gather up and are divided into two teams, the American team and the North Korean partisan team. The American team is not allowed to win. Therefore, a teacher handpicks the students for the team that would have the best chance of winning.

There are only weak and unhealthy children in the American team, and they are easily outnumbered. Children don't want to join the American team. They say, ‘Why am I on the American side?!’ and some of them refuse to come to school or cry. Moreover, there are parents who protest, saying “Why should my child play that role? It's like you're making them out to be like the Americans.”

- Lee Seon-Ri

The DPRK also does wrong by its citizens by distorting historical events, instead providing them with a retelling of events that supports the hateful ideology they are taught, and paints the DPRK in a glowing light while its enemies are portrayed in the most downcast way possible.

“I was taught that it was the South that invaded the North on Sunday while everyone was asleep [when in reality the North invaded the South and started the Korean War].”

- Hwang Soo-Min

“Kim Il-Sung was supposed to be the one that single-handedly defeated the Japanese and liberated Korea [in World War II]. [When I came to South Korea] I learned that this was entirely false. Everything I learned about the three great generals throughout elementary school, middle school, high school and even college was lies. One of the most surprising facts was that there were many others who were involved in the process of Korean independence. I still thought that Kim Il-Sung liberated Korea when I arrived at South Korea.”

- Lee Ji-Yeon

“Schools teach that the United States is our ‘sworn enemy’ and that Japan is the ‘100-year old enemy.’ They also teach that South Korea is where pro-Japanese collaborators, America's tools, and traitors who sold their country live. [Regarding former communist countries,] I learned that Russia used to be a great country but it fell as its communism fell and that China is like a brother nation... I was not taught about any other country at school. Museums talk about few other countries, when they suggest that North Korea dispatched military officers to other communist countries such as Cuba or the Czech Republic. Other countries, especially capitalist countries, were portrayed negatively. I only know of few other countries, including Brazil (because of soccer), Switzerland (for their watches), Britain, and Egypt (because of a cartoon).”

- Kim Yeon-Ri

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has previously stated that education should be for “the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin” (General Comment No. 1: The Aims of Education). The education system in the DPRK stands in conflict with these aims for education. The DPRK does not teach respect for other civilizations or for the people living there. In fact, they teach the opposite.

Recommendation

PSCORE strongly requests that the international community urge North Korea to comply with international standards and norms regarding education in ways such as, but not limited to:

- A. Urging North Korea to follow the UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,
- B. Urging North Korea to end all types of forced labor for students,
- C. Urging North Korea to cease falsely claiming that North Korea offers “free education” for all students,
- D. Urging North Korea to cease indoctrinating citizens to idolize the Kim Regime,
- E. Urging North Korea to cease distorting history,
- F. Urging North Korea to cease education based on violence and hatred;

PSCORE also asks that all states party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child ensure foreign aid is given to North Korea if and only if North Korea is abiding by the international laws it has ratified, and that all states party to the Convention as well as international bodies and non-governmental organizations update their information on the DPRK by:

- A. Deleting the false claim that North Korea provides free education for all its students,
- B. Updating that although North Korea merely claims to offer free education, in reality, students are drafted into forced labor as an alternative form of tuition.

PSCORE recommends that the Committee commit to making education a prominent issue in its discussion of children’s rights as it relates to the DPRK. Education is an essential aspect of a child’s upbringing and all children deserve to have the opportunity to learn in a fair and free environment. This Committee has previously established its goals and aims for the education of children, and the values it seeks to inspire in them. The DPRK stands in opposition to them, and should stop abusing children mentally, physically, and economically. Kim Jong Un, the current dictator, needs to release the citizens of the DPRK from his cruel kingdom. We compel the Committee to take appropriate action.

References

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