UNODC

STUDY GUIDE

Topic 1. Combatting organised crime and illicit operations related to North Korea's Room 39

Topic 2. Responding to international black market networks connected to organ trafficking

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Transnational organized crime and financial crimes continue to pose serious issues to international security and legality. The activities reportedly associated with the North Korean entity, Room 39, namely sanctions busting, cyber crime, smuggling, and money laundering serve as examples of how criminals can work across borders and earn huge amounts of illegal money. Along with other crimes, such as black markets and organ trading, they illustrate how difficult it is to fight organized crime. In the UNODC, delegates will discuss approaches on how to enhance international cooperation, financial control, law enforcement and disruption of criminal networks.

1. LETTER FROM THE CHAIRBOARD

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) committee at JASMUN. It is our pleasure to welcome you to a committee that pushes you to look beyond typical diplomatic boundaries and examine one of the most opaque and clandestine networks connected to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Room 39. Throughout this committee, you will explore how a web of illicit finance operations, sanctions evasion, smuggling, cybercrime, shell companies, maritime trade, and international organized crime operates across boundaries.

Yet your role is not merely to identify or condemn the operations commonly associated with Room 39; rather, you will be asked to address how the international community can respond effectively while balancing national sovereignty, economic interests, humanitarian concerns, and the diverse interests of member states represented in this committee.

Each delegation has a unique relationship with the DPRK and a different role in the global community. North Korean actions directly impact some delegations, while others are significant financial, diplomatic, maritime, or regional actors. We hope you will leverage these differences to enable meaningful discourse and develop diverse solutions to this topic, instead of approaching it from a monolithic perspective. As you prepare for the committee, we strongly urge you to conduct research into your country's foreign policy, relations with the DPRK, past sanctions enforcement activities, financial regulations, and foreign aid policies.

We have provided country case studies and country guides within this guide to provide you with an initial foundation for your research, not an all-encompassing supplement.

Fundamentally, we believe the most effective diplomacy relies not on having the largest voice in committee, or always staunchly defending one's country's national interest, but on our ability to negotiate, compromise, form alliances, and come to solutions that are both ambitious and readily achievable. We hope this committee will inspire you to think critically, research thoughtfully, and engage in new and meaningful discussions on what can be achieved in the international arena. Best of luck with your preparation, and we look forward to seeing you in committee.

From The Chairboard
Mathilde Jara, Filip Izydorczyk, Stanisław Haller

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is the main global body concerned with tackling the spread of organized crime, illicit drug trafficking, corruption and international terrorism. It was established in 1997 when the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention were merged together, and it works with member states to strengthen their domestic criminal justice systems, bring about standardisation in law enforcement procedures and undermine transnational criminal operations. Instead of acting as a direct law enforcement agency with the power to carry out policing operations, the organisation depends on legal authorities which come from binding international treaties, particularly the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the United Nations Convention against Corruption. By means of these treaties it promotes mutual legal assistance, builds up the technical capabilities of member states, establishes alternative frameworks and enables the sharing of intelligence between countries, making sure that legal loopholes are systematically eliminated so as to prevent non-state actors and rogue operations from taking advantage of differences in jurisdiction.

Room 39, which is officially known as Office 39 of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, poses a special threat to international security since it functions as a state-approved criminal operation. It was set up in the late 1970s on the orders of Kim Il-sung and was intended for the purpose of producing hard foreign exchange so as to keep the regime's slush funds, provide financial support for military aspirations, and enable the political elite in Pyongyang to remain supported.

Different from conventional criminal syndicates that work against state authority, Room 39 makes use of the entire institutional structure of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; it employs diplomatic cover, state-owned enterprises, the country's commercial shipping fleets, and its sovereign financial institutions to carry out extensive criminal activities in various global markets, thus using state sovereignty as a weapon to avoid normal international law enforcement measures

The range of illegal activities carried out by Room 39 is aimed at maximizing the amount of money it receives while at the same time avoiding the sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council. In the past the office has been in charge of the large-scale production and distribution of high-purity methamphetamine and heroin, these drugs having usually been made in state laboratories and then exported via diplomatic pouches or by means of secret sea routes. Moreover, Room 39 is well known for producing 'Supernotes', which are counterfeit United States one-hundred-dollar bills made using special ink and paper so as to closely resemble real money. In addition to illicit products, the network regularly takes part in wildlife trafficking, the spread of weapons, the smuggling of gold, and the systematic exploitation of overseas forced labour; in this practice North Korean citizens are sent overseas where they are under intense surveillance and employed in construction, in forestry or in manufacturing, the majority of their wages being sent directly to the state treasury.

In recent years Room 39 has made adjustments to meet the demands of the digital age by incorporating advanced cybercrime units into its financial plans. Acting on instructions from the office, state-sponsored threat actors carry out high-value banking attacks, take advantage of weaknesses in decentralised financial systems, and carry out heists involving cryptocurrency exchanges worth millions of dollars. The money earned from these digital operations is then passed through complicated money-laundering channels, such as non-compliant foreign exchange platforms, offshore front companies and coin mixers, which makes it very difficult to trace and recover the assets. The shift to cyber-enabled financial crime enables the network to transfer huge amounts of money instantly between different countries while entirely avoiding traditional banking clearing houses and regulatory controls.

For those delegates dealing with this agenda, the main task is to resolve the basic conflict between sovereign immunity and effective enforcement of international law. Since Room 39 makes heavy use of diplomatic immunities, vessels flying the flags of convenience, and obscure shell companies registered in financial centres that do not comply with regulations, conventional anti-crime measures often end up at legal dead ends.

In order to deal with this problem, the delegates must establish strong mechanisms to improve international transparency regarding beneficial ownership, eliminate the regulatory gaps appearing in new financial technologies, and reinforce the implementation of the Palermo Convention. The international community can effectively sever the main economic sources that support this state-sponsored enterprise by disrupting the financial networks, shipping routes, and digital infrastructure which sustain Room 39.

Transnational environmental crime—this covering illegal logging, the trafficking of wild plants and animals, illegal mining, and the unlawful getting rid of hazardous waste—has now become one of the quickest-growing and most profitable areas of global organized crime. These organisations earn hundreds of billions of dollars every year and function at the point where environmental destruction, political corruption, and systemic financial crime meet. Unlike traditional organised crime, environmental crime results in irreversible damage to the environment, undermines fragile ecosystems, speeds up the loss of biodiversity, and takes away from developing countries both vital natural resources and tax income. Environmental illicit markets are increasingly the focus of transnational syndicates since there is a perception of a low risk and a high return, taking advantage of weak regulatory enforcement, lenient judicial penalties, and inconsistent international legal definitions.

The operational structure of environmental crime is based on highly sophisticated global supply chains that are very similar to legitimate international trade. For instance, in the case of illegal logging and the trafficking of timber, criminal organisations use fake permits, forged land-use documents, and corporate shell companies so as to get illegally felled timber into global consumer markets. In the case of illegal gold and mineral extraction, violent non-state armed groups and criminal cartels are involved, taking advantage of unregulated artisanal mining areas, forcing the displacement of indigenous people, and using toxic materials such as mercury, which then contaminates the local water systems. The raw materials are passed through intermediaries and mixed with those obtained by legal mining before being sent to international refineries and supply chains. Wildlife trafficking is just as complicated: endangered species are hunted, collected by regional trafficking centres, and smuggled across borders by means of commercial shipping containers or air freight, often with the help of bribes paid to customs officials and border inspectors.

Money laundering provides the essential financial foundation for these illegal operations, and criminal organisations regularly make use of trade-based money laundering, misinvoicing, accounts held in offshore banks, and unregulated money transfer systems in order to hide the origins of their funds. Moreover, the profits obtained from environmental exploitation are often reinvested in other kinds of criminal activity, such as human trafficking, the smuggling of arms, and the distribution of narcotics, thus extending the reach of international crime. Yet, even though these operations are on a large scale, law enforcement actions have historically been hampered by a shortage of financial investigations; in many places environmental offences are not regarded as predicate crimes for money laundering, which in turn stops authorities from being able to track down and seize the assets of the top-level organisers.

The UNODC believes that in order to develop an effective global strategy it is necessary to go beyond simple conservation measures and adopt a strict criminal justice approach. States members should coordinate their national legal systems by treating serious environmental offences as "serious crimes" within the framework of Article 2(b) of the Palermo Convention, thus bringing into play a minimum sentence of four years which in turn enables the use of strong international mechanisms for extradition, mutual legal assistance and joint law enforcement actions. Delegations are to improve transparency regarding beneficial ownership in the resource-extraction sector, reinforce their abilities to intercept vessels and goods at sea and at borders, and set up parallel financial investigations in all cases of environmental crime. The international community can destroy the economic motives behind environmental destruction by focusing on the financial networks and at the supply chain bottlenecks which allow illicit natural resources to get to consumer markets.

Topic 1:

Combatting Organised Crime and Illicit Operations Related to North Korea's Room 39.

Topic 2:

Responding to International Black Market Networks Connected to Organ Trafficking.

2. CASE STUDIES

Angola

Topic 1:

Angola and North Korea established diplomatic relations during the cold war as part of Pyongyang's initiative to expand its political and economic reach in the mid 1970s. Together these two countries developed a specific relationship, anchored on trade and commercial exchange instead of the usual military and ideological link that characterises the hermit kingdom's other regional connections. This special economic relationship opened the door to the illicit activity which is so closely associated with Room 39.

The main goal of the DPRK's African expansion was not actually the reinforcement of the Socialist and Juche global sphere of influence. Instead, the isolated and sanctioned regime needed to facilitate the import of dollars and other foreign currency into the coffers of its government, and found the perfect way to do so. These currencies, stored in external funds and shell companies are crucial to North Korea's finances and assets, as they allow her to run otherwise sanctioned operations abroad and at home, culminating in illegal purchases of arms, technology, informants and scientists, as well as unhindered stabilisation of her nuclear progress and internal black market networks. To milk Africa of her foreign currencies, the DPRK founded the Mansudae Art Studio in the early 80s, an entity supposedly dedicated to supplying Africa with lucratively priced monuments and buildings. While the project seemed completely superficial, supplying novelty population pacifiers conveniently available for failing African governments and leaders, its covert success was staggering. As of 2016, estimates put total Mansudae income at upwards of 260 million dollars, meaning that the DPRK had managed to circumnavigate UN sanctions to great success.

In Angola, the Mansudae studio built over 56 projects, including the famous Dr. Antonio Agostinho Neto Memorial (pictured below), earning a staggering sum of almost 55 million dollars for its parent regime.

However, these covert initiatives by the DPRK garnered response from the international community whose sanctions Room 39 tried to evade. From 2006 on, greater and greater limits had been imposed on employed North Koreans by UN Member States, including Angola, which in 2017 in compliance with UN resolution 2397 began repatriating all DPRK nationals back to their country.

Overall, Angola is a country which has cooperated with both the DPRK and the UN extensively. While it initially provided the hermit kingdom with an opportunity to extensively run illicit activities connected to room 39, it has now changed course to align it with the decisions of the broader international community. By 2020, it also terminated contracts with all DPRK medical personnel operating within its borders, showing definitively that backing away from Pyongyang is a core element of its policy. The DPRK responded to these actions by closing its diplomatic mission in Angola.

Regardless of this, Angola has also raised a key concern with regard to resolution 2397. It has stressed that North Korean citizens brought to work in Africa are often trafficked, forced, coerced or simply blackmailed by Room 39 officials to undertake subversive and illegal work in countries like Angola, and that forced repatriation may yield humanitarian concerns. These humanitarian concerns are also supplemented by those of the general corruption and resource limits present in Angolan law enforcement services, hindering proper prevention of DPRK illicit activities. As such, it is key for Angola that international initiatives against North Korea, which it is ready to support, must also yield support for proper conducting of resolution clauses in 'frontline states', where not all ties with the DPRK have yet been cut effectively.

Sources:

- CBS News. Mansudae Art Studio: Monuments Around the World.
- CBS News. North Korea: The Art of Surviving Sanctions.
- North Korean Economy Watch. Mansudae Overseas Development Group Projects. 23 June 2010.

Topic 2:

Angola's position on international black-market networks connected to organ trafficking is best understood through the country's broader struggle with transnational human trafficking, vulnerable migrant populations and the limitations of its law enforcement and healthcare infrastructure. Angola does not possess a well-documented major international organ-trafficking network operating from within its borders. Instead, Angola represents an important study of a state which has explicitly criminalised trafficking for the purpose of organ removal while simultaneously facing the geographical, economic and institutional conditions which can allow international trafficking networks to operate.

(ie: crime, extreme poverty, etc.) Angola's long land borders with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, Zambia and Namibia, alongside its extensive Atlantic coastline, create numerous channels through which people, money and criminal activity can cross national jurisdictions.

The Angolan government has attempted to address this threat through Law No. 3/14 of 10 February 2014 on the Criminalization of Offences Underlying Money Laundering, which established a comprehensive legal framework against human trafficking. Importantly for the present topic, Angolan legislation explicitly recognises the removal of human organs as a purpose of trafficking. Under the law, trafficking may involve the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons through coercion, fraud or other illicit means for the purpose of exploitation, including the extraction of organs. The relevant trafficking provisions provide for substantial prison sentences, demonstrating that Angola does not consider organ trafficking merely a medical or immigration issue, but rather a serious form of organised crime. This legal framework is particularly significant because black-market organ networks frequently rely upon the same mechanisms as other forms of human trafficking: vulnerable individuals are recruited by intermediaries, transported across borders, provided with fraudulent documentation or promises of financial compensation (key in regions such as Africa), and ultimately brought into contact with medical professionals willing to perform illegal procedures.

However, the existence of legislation has not completely eliminated the structural conditions which make Angola vulnerable to trafficking. Angola remains a country of origin, transit and destination for trafficking in persons, with poverty, unemployment, displacement, irregular migration and lack of documentation increasing the vulnerability of certain populations. The country's extensive borders are particularly significant, as trafficking networks can exploit differences between national legal systems to transport victims from one jurisdiction to another. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is of particular importance in this regard, as Angola already cooperates with Congolese authorities on transnational trafficking investigations. These existing links provide a foundation upon which cooperation against organ trafficking networks could be expanded. Rather than treating organ trafficking as an isolated medical crime, Angola therefore views it as part of a wider transnational criminal ecosystem involving recruiters, brokers, transporters, financial intermediaries and potentially corrupt medical professionals.

The medical dimension of organ trafficking creates a particularly difficult challenge for Angola and other developing states. Unlike many conventional trafficking operations, the removal of an organ normally requires access to specialised medical facilities, surgeons, anaesthetists and post-operative care. Consequently, an international black-market organ network cannot function solely through traditional criminal organisations; it may also require the participation or deliberate negligence of legitimate healthcare professionals. This creates a significant enforcement gap, since hospitals and clinics may possess the legitimate infrastructure necessary to perform transplants while traffickers manipulate the system through falsified donor documentation, fraudulent consent or concealed financial transactions. For Angola, strengthening oversight of medical institutions is therefore just as important as strengthening border controls. Hospitals performing transplants should be required to independently verify the identity of donors and recipients, establish that consent has been freely provided, document the relationship between donor and recipient and report suspicious international transactions or unexplained intermediary involvement.

Angola's geographical position also makes international cooperation crucial. A potential organ-trafficking operation may involve a recruiter in Angola, a victim from another African state, a broker operating from a third country, a recipient from a wealthier state and a medical facility somewhere else entirely. National police forces therefore cannot effectively dismantle such networks without exchanging information with their foreign counterparts. Angola has already cooperated with countries including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia, Mozambique, South Africa and Vietnam on transnational trafficking investigations, demonstrating that a foundation for this type of cooperation already exists. Angola can therefore advocate for increased cooperation between national police forces, immigration authorities, customs agencies, financial-intelligence units, healthcare regulators and INTERPOL. Such cooperation would allow states to identify trafficking routes, monitor suspected brokers and connect apparently unrelated investigations occurring in different jurisdictions.

A further concern is the distinction between victims of trafficking and individuals who may appear to have voluntarily agreed to an organ transaction. International organ-trafficking networks frequently exploit severe economic vulnerability by offering individuals large sums of money in exchange for an organ.

Although such transactions may initially appear consensual, extreme poverty, debt, unemployment or manipulation by intermediaries can undermine genuine informed consent. Angola therefore supports an approach which treats the protection of vulnerable individuals as central to the fight against organ trafficking. Potential donors should be interviewed independently of recipients and intermediaries, given access to legal and medical advice and assessed for coercion or exploitation before any transplant is authorised. This is particularly important because victims may suffer permanent physical and psychological consequences after an organ is removed, making traditional victim-support mechanisms insufficient.

The limitations of Angola's existing anti-trafficking infrastructure further demonstrate why international assistance is necessary. Although Angola has established an anti-trafficking police unit, a National Referral Mechanism and procedures for identifying trafficking victims, international assessments have identified shortages in specialised resources, shelters, expertise and nationwide data collection. Corruption and limited investigative capacity can further complicate the identification of trafficking networks. These weaknesses are particularly problematic in cases involving organ trafficking because successful investigations require cooperation between law enforcement and highly specialised medical authorities. Angola therefore believes that international initiatives should not focus exclusively on increasing criminal penalties, but should also provide technical assistance, training and resources to states where institutional limitations prevent effective enforcement.

Angola consequently supports the development of an international system for identifying and disrupting black-market organ networks. Such a mechanism should establish closer cooperation between INTERPOL, UNODC, national law-enforcement authorities and healthcare regulators. States should be encouraged to maintain secure records of international transplants, suspected trafficking brokers and medical professionals convicted of participating in illegal organ markets. Greater financial scrutiny should also be introduced, since the profitability of organ trafficking depends upon the movement and concealment of large payments between donors, brokers, recipients and medical intermediaries. Financial-intelligence units should therefore be encouraged to investigate suspicious payments connected to international transplantation, while respecting national privacy legislation and legitimate medical confidentiality.

The limitations of Angola's existing anti-trafficking infrastructure further demonstrate why international assistance is necessary. Although Angola has established an anti-

Ultimately, Angola's experience demonstrates that combating organ trafficking requires a broader approach than simply criminalising the final act of organ removal. The international community must address the conditions which allow traffickers to recruit vulnerable people, the cross-border networks which transport them, the financial structures which generate profit and the medical institutions which make illegal transplantation possible. Angola is prepared to cooperate with international organisations and neighbouring states in dismantling these networks, while emphasising that victims must be protected rather than treated as criminals. It is therefore key for Angola that any international response to organ trafficking combine stronger cross-border law-enforcement cooperation, medical-sector oversight, financial investigation, victim protection and capacity-building for states whose institutional resources remain limited. In Angola's view, only by targeting the entire network - rather than individual traffickers at its lowest level - can the international community effectively disrupt the growing international black market in human organs.

Sources:

- UNODC. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020: Sub-Saharan Africa. 2021.
- U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Angola.
- INTERPOL. North and West Africa: INTERPOL Report Highlights Human Trafficking for Organ Removal. 2021.
- United Nations Digital Library. United Nations Document.
- Serviço de Investigação Criminal (Angola). Tráfico de Pessoas.

Cambodia

Topic 1:

Cambodia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have maintained diplomatic relations since 1960, making Cambodia one of North Korea's longest standing diplomatic partners in Southeast Asia.

Throughout the Cold War and the decades which followed, relations were generally maintained through diplomatic, cultural and economic exchange rather than the extensive military relationship which Pyongyang developed with certain African and Middle Eastern states. Cambodia therefore became part of the wider international environment in which DPRK state-linked commercial entities could operate abroad, although the country has not been identified as one of the principal global supporters of North Korean illicit finance.

One of the most important examples of DPRK overseas commercial activity in Cambodia is the presence of Mansudae, the international arm of North Korea's state art department. Mansudae's overseas activities extended beyond Africa into Asia and Cambodia was among the countries where North Korean artists and construction specialists participated in projects. These activities are closely related to Room 39 because they demonstrate the wider DPRK model of generating foreign currency for the regime through state-linked enterprises operating outside North Korea. Rather than relying exclusively on direct illicit transactions, the DPRK has historically used apparently legitimate commercial enterprises, trading companies and overseas projects to generate revenue which can ultimately be transferred into both the regime's financial system and its supreme leader's personal accounts..

The distinction between legitimate commerce and sanctions evasion is particularly important in the Cambodian case. A monument or construction project is not illicit by default just because of its link to the DPRK, and thus Cambodia's historical economic dealings with North Korea cannot automatically be classified as Room 39 activity. The concern regarding illicit activity however emerged when the United Nations sanctions policy increasingly restricted the ability of DPRK entities to generate foreign export earnings abroad. Resolution 2397 (2017) required Member States to repatriate DPRK nationals earning income within their jurisdictions, unless subject to the resolution's exceptions and applicable international law. This created pressure on countries such as Cambodia to examine whether North Korean workers and businesses operating within their territory were contributing to prohibited DPRK revenue generation. This subsequently proved difficult for a country with limited economic and anti-corruption capacity, effectively failing to both remove illicit operations and protect legitimate ones, proving that implementation cannot depend solely upon identifying organisations with North Korea in their name. Cambodia's position is one that emphasizes the importance of targeted sanctions enforcement rather than indiscriminate criminalisation of DPRK citizens or businesses, which can prove harmful to both enforcer and enforcee.

Cambodia is willing to support greater cooperation between domestic customs authorities, foreign agencies and international sanctions-monitoring bodies in order to identify entities genuinely connected to prohibited DPRK activities. At the same time, Cambodia must argue that legitimate diplomatic and economic activities must remain protected, and that sanctions implementation should not automatically treat every North Korean national as an illicit-finance actor.

Sources:

- United Nations Security Council. 1718 Sanctions Committee (DPRK).
- U.S. Department of the Treasury. Press Release: North Korea Sanctions.
- CBS News. North Korea Builds Monuments Around the World. 2018.

Topic 2:

Cambodia's position on international black-market organ trafficking is closely connected to its wider experience with international human trafficking. Cambodia occupies an exploitable geographical position in mainland Southeast Asia, sharing borders with Thailand, Laos and Vietnam and simultaneously maintaining extensive connections to regional migration and tourism networks. These characteristics create opportunities for organised criminal groups to move vulnerable people and product across borders. Although Cambodia does not have a single internationally famous organ-trafficking organisation comparable to some cases documented elsewhere in Asia, the country has been repeatedly identified as a significant environment for human trafficking and exploitation, making prevention of organ removal an important component of its wider anti-trafficking strategy.

The danger of organ trafficking is particularly significant because it can operate through the same recruitment mechanisms used by other trafficking networks. Criminal groups may promise victims employment, financial assistance or opportunities abroad before coercing or deceiving them into exploitation. INTERPOL has identified trafficking for organ removal as a form of organised crime which frequently exploits migrants and economically vulnerable people. The organisation has also stressed that these networks require complex cooperation between recruiters, brokers, medical professionals and unlicensed healthcare facilities.

Cambodia's regional position makes cooperation with neighbouring countries especially important. Victims can potentially be recruited in one country, transported through another and exploited somewhere else, while the recipient and medical intermediary may be located in yet another jurisdiction. Therefore, Cambodia supports greater information-sharing between ASEAN states, immigration authorities, police forces and medical regulatory bodies. Border officers should be trained to identify trafficking indicators, while potential victims should be referred to specialised protection services rather than treated merely as immigration offenders.

A particularly important lesson for Cambodia comes from the wider Asian trafficking environment. INTERPOL's Operation Storm Makers in 2022 involved 25 countries and resulted in 121 arrests, 193 new investigations and the identification of approximately 3,400 irregular migrants. The operation also uncovered an international organ-trafficking network involving Indonesian victims, Indian suspects and kidney transplants conducted in Türkiye. This case demonstrates that organ trafficking is inherently international and cannot be effectively investigated by one state acting alone. Cambodia therefore supports stronger regulation of the medical sector alongside traditional police measures. Hospitals performing transplant procedures should maintain verifiable donor and recipient records, independently establish informed consent and report suspicious intermediary activity. Financial transactions connected to transplant procedures should also be subject to appropriate institutional scrutiny, as brokers and organised criminal groups most often profit by exploiting the difference between the amount paid by recipients and the amount received by victims.

Sources:

- U.S. Department of State. 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Cambodia.
- INTERPOL. 121 Arrests in Operation Against Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking. 2022.

China

Topic 1:

China's relationship with the DPRK is rooted not only in geography and security, but also in their shared history as communist states. China and North Korea formally established their alliance through the 1961 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, which explicitly referred to Marxism-Leninism, proletarian internationalism and the development of "fraternal" relations.

Although China's modern economy and foreign policy have moved far beyond Maoist communism, Beijing continues to view the DPRK as an important socialist neighbour and a strategic buffer against US and western influence in East Asia. China and North Korea renewed their 1961 defence treaty in 2021, demonstrating that these historical ties remain politically significant. This ideological and strategic relationship has also historically allowed China to act as an important economic lifeline for North Korea. During the Cold War, Beijing supported Pyongyang as part of the broader communist bloc and sought to prevent the expansion of US influence on the Korean Peninsula. Modern Chinese policy is more pragmatic, but Beijing continues to resist what it sees as attempts by Western powers to establish unilateral dominance over international affairs. Recent Chinese statements have continued to emphasise opposition to "bloc confrontation" and US-led pressure on North Korea.

China therefore occupies a complicated position regarding Room 39. Beijing officially supports UN sanctions against prohibited DPRK activities, but it also opposes excessive sanctions and unilateral Western measures which it believes undermine national sovereignty. China has previously supported UN sanctions following North Korean nuclear tests, demonstrating that ideological solidarity does not mean unconditional support for Pyongyang. From China's perspective, the priority should therefore be preventing genuinely illicit DPRK activities without allowing sanctions to become a tool of Western geopolitical domination. China supports financial monitoring, customs cooperation and the enforcement of UN resolutions, but argues that these measures should remain multilateral and should not unnecessarily destabilise North Korea. Beijing can consequently present itself as a mediator between the DPRK and Western states, supporting regional stability while resisting what it considers excessive US-led pressure.

Sources:

- Council on Foreign Relations. The China-North Korea Relationship. 2024.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. President Xi Jinping Meets with DPRK’s Premier of the Cabinet Pak Thae Song. 10 July 2026.

Topic 2:

China approaches organ trafficking primarily through the principle that transplantation must be state-regulated and medically supervised.

China prohibited the commercial trade in human organs in its 2007 regulations, while its current legislation, introduced in 2024, explicitly criminalises organising the sale of human organs, forced or deceptive removal of organs and the acquisition of organs from minors. The issue is particularly important for China because it possesses one of the world's largest transplantation systems. In 2017 alone, China recorded 5,146 organ donations and approximately 16,000 transplant surgeries, according to China's National Health Commission. China has therefore attempted to replace informal or illegal organ markets with a centralised donation and allocation system.

China's approach also reflects its broader political philosophy: the state should maintain strong control over potentially exploitative markets rather than allowing organs to become commercial commodities. The 2024 regulations require government supervision, reporting of transplant activity and transparent allocation procedures, while imposing severe penalties on hospitals and medical professionals involved in illegal organ trading. In serious cases, hospitals can lose their transplant licences and medical professionals can be permanently prohibited from practising. China therefore supports greater international cooperation against organ-trafficking networks, particularly through information-sharing between governments, border authorities and medical regulators. However, Beijing opposes international mechanisms which it considers intrusive or politically motivated. China's preferred approach is state sovereignty combined with strict domestic regulation and international law-enforcement cooperation when instances of regulation-breaching are recorded.

Sources:

- UNODC. Assessment Toolkit: Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Organ Removal. 2015.
- Human Rights Watch. Organ Procurement and Judicial Execution in China. August 1994.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Topic 1:

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has historically maintained diplomatic and economic relations with North Korea despite their very different political systems.

During the Cold War, North Korea developed relationships across Africa as part of its effort to expand diplomatic influence beyond Asia and build economic connections capable of generating foreign currency. The DPRK's relationship with the DRC subsequently became particularly relevant through the activities of the Mansudae Overseas Project Group, a North Korean organisation involved in construction and monument projects across Africa and Asia.

The connection became controversial because Mansudae was not simply a cultural organisation. In 2017, the UN Security Council designated the Mansudae Overseas Project Group, identifying it as an organisation which exported DPRK workers and conducted construction and monument projects abroad in order to generate illicit financial revenue for the North Korean government, leadership or Workers' Party. The UN specifically identified the DRC among the African states where Mansudae had operated. This created a difficult situation for the DRC. On one hand, North Korean construction projects offered a relatively inexpensive source of infrastructure and artistic monuments for a country with significant infrastructure needs. On the other, payments to DPRK entities could potentially provide foreign currency to the North Korean state and therefore undermine international sanctions. The DRC consequently became part of the wider international debate over how developing states should enforce sanctions without sacrificing access to affordable construction and infrastructure.

The problem is particularly complicated by the DRC's own struggle with organised crime and illicit resource networks. The UN sanctions regime concerning the DRC specifically targets individuals and organisations supporting armed groups through the illicit exploitation and trade of natural resources such as gold and protected wildlife. As such, the DRC's position should emphasise strengthening domestic enforcement capacity rather than simply imposing additional sanctions, as these coupled with those already in place would overload the law enforcement capabilities of the state. The country is willing to support UN action against Room 39 related financial networks while demanding technical assistance, customs training and financial-monitoring support for developing states. Ultimately, the DRC should argue that fighting Room 39 must be integrated into the broader struggle against transnational financial crime, illegal resource extraction and weak-border governance, rather than treating North Korea as an isolated problem. This is due to the fact that weaker African governments involved with the illicit activities of the DPRK are often involved with them on a scale that simply does not indicate the hermit kingdom as the biggest offender.

Sources:

- The Sentry. Overt Affairs.
- United Nations Security Council. Security Council Toughens Sanctions Against Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2371 (2017). 2017.
- United Nations Security Council. Security Council Committee Established Pursuant to Resolution 1533 (2004) Concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Topic 2:

The DRC approaches organ trafficking within the broader context of human trafficking, organised crime and weak institutional capacity. The country faces major security challenges in its eastern provinces, where armed militia groups, criminal networks and illegal economic activities operate across borders. This creates an environment in which vulnerable populations can become exposed to different forms of trafficking and exploitation. The UN specifically identifies criminal networks involved in serious human-rights violations and illicit resource trade (including organ trafficking) as a continuing concern in the DRC. The DRC's greatest difficulty is therefore not creating legislation, but enforcing it across a vast territory with limited state or law enforcement presence. Eastern regions affected by armed conflict are particularly difficult for police and judicial institutions to monitor, while huge unguarded borders with neighbouring states make international criminal networks difficult to both investigate and terminate.

Organ trafficking itself remains difficult to quantify. UNODC recorded only 100 detected cases of trafficking for organ removal between 2007 and 2013 across 20 countries, while stressing that this represents only reported cases and that the true global scale is unknown (ie: it is much higher but cannot be determined for certain as trafficking networks operate without predetermined purposes for all victims). The DRC should thus advocate for regional intelligence-sharing, stronger border controls, victim identification and international assistance for police and judicial institutions, followed by closer investigations into the purposes and conduct of human trafficking.

Cooperation with neighbouring states would be particularly important because organ-trafficking networks, where they exist, can operate across multiple jurisdictions. However, this, in the unstable region which is the Congo river basin, may prove difficult due to diplomatic and military factors. It is therefore within the DRC's core interests to promote multilateral crime-stopping initiatives.

Sources:

- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Democratic Republic of the Congo: Anti-trafficking and Accountability Measures Crucial for Peace. 25 July 2025.
- FairPlanet. How the DRC Became a Modern Slavery Hub. 25 August 2024.

India

Topic 1:

India's relationship with North Korea is unusual because it combines Cold War diplomatic relations with modern strategic alignment caution. India established diplomatic relations with the DPRK in 1973 and historically maintained contacts with Pyongyang despite India's close relationships with both the Soviet Union and, later, Western states. This reflects India's long-standing preference for strategic autonomy rather than automatically aligning with either the Western or communist blocs.

Economically, however, India's relationship with North Korea has declined substantially because of UN sanctions. The Ministry of External Affairs states that trade with the DPRK, apart from food and medicine, has been restricted since April 2017, resulting in a considerable decline in bilateral trade. India nevertheless maintains some humanitarian and diplomatic engagement. The Indian government has provided humanitarian assistance to North Korea in response to food shortages while simultaneously implementing the UN sanctions regime. India has also formally incorporated the UN DPRK sanctions list into its domestic financial framework, demonstrating that it accepts international restrictions on prohibited DPRK economic activity.

India's position is therefore based on a distinction between the North Korean population and the North Korean regime. New Delhi can support action against the general financial apparatus of the regime, including Room 39 while arguing that humanitarian assistance and diplomatic relations should not be unnecessarily restricted. This fits India's wider diplomatic tradition of maintaining communication with states even when it is in conflict with their governments.

This has drawn significant criticism from the USA. India is thus an advocate for targeted sanctions, stronger financial intelligence and international cooperation against illicit DPRK networks, while preserving humanitarian channels and avoiding measures that unnecessarily destabilise the Korean Peninsula. Furthermore, India supports initiatives that do not damage both the western (US) and eastern (Chinese and Russian) spheres of influence, as this is seen as dangerous to its own strategic independence and claimed hegemony in the region.

Sources:

- Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. India–DPR Korea Relations. January 2021.

Topic 2:

India has a particularly relevant case study because it has historically faced illegal kidney-trafficking networks involving brokers, vulnerable workers and medical professionals. UNODC has documented cases in northern India in which poor labourers were deceived or pressured into selling kidneys, with investigations uncovering organised networks involving doctors and intermediaries, and exports to countries as far as Europe. In this case, the economic dimension is particularly important. Organ-trafficking networks exploit extreme differences in wealth: vulnerable people facing poverty can be offered money for organs, while wealthy recipients are able to pay intermediaries huge illicit amounts to obtain transplants. UNODC notes that organ-trafficking networks can involve not only criminal brokers but also medical professionals, ambulance drivers and mortuary workers, making the crime particularly difficult to detect as it can occur through the involvement of many individual parties, and not organised criminal supply chains. India has therefore strengthened its legal framework around transplantation and created mechanisms intended to prevent commercial organ trading. However, India's size, economic inequality and large medical sector make enforcement challenging. The existence of previously exposed kidney trafficking cases demonstrates why India supports greater international cooperation against brokers who can move victims and money across borders, as well as collect ‘orders’ in more developed states. India understands that stopping organ trafficking is as much a responsibility of the states that offer ‘supply’ of organs and victims, as of those which offer the ‘demand’ for organs. India should therefore consequently advocate for international coordination, medical-sector monitoring and financial investigations into organ transplant receivers.

At the same time, India should emphasise that legitimate organ donation must remain accessible and that policies should not discourage voluntary transplantation.

Sources:

- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Regional Programme for South Asia 2013–2015.
- Al Jazeera. 'Village of One Kidney': India-Bangladesh Organ Traffickers Rob Poor Donors. 4 July 2025.

International Criminal Police Organization - INTERPOL

Topic 1:

INTERPOL occupies a fundamentally different position from the states in this committee because it is not a political ally or adversary of North Korea. North Korea isn't even an official member country of the INTERPOL initiative. Its role is primarily operational: facilitating cooperation between national police forces, sharing intelligence and helping identify international criminal networks (hence INTER-pol). This makes INTERPOL particularly relevant to the Room 39 issue because many of the alleged financial and commercial activities associated with DPRK sanctions evasion cross several national jurisdictions, with INTERPOL being the only body able to assess the entire network as one entirely within its jurisdiction. Room 39-related activity can involve shell companies, financial intermediaries, shipping networks, forged documentation and individuals operating in third countries. INTERPOL's greatest advantage is therefore its ability to connect national law-enforcement agencies rather than attempting to motivate them to investigate crimes independently. Its international policing network can help states exchange information about suspects, companies, documents and movements, as well as quickly inform all involved actors to guarantee that when the DPRK's fraudulent activities do succeed, it is increasingly difficult for Pyongyang to actually extract income from them. This can occur through rapid contact with bank, financial, and customs administrations across numerous states, from those where money laundering or extraction occurs to those which unknowingly harbour the regime's private accounts. This approach is consistent with INTERPOL's existing work against international organised crime.

INTERPOL-coordinated operations always combine police, customs, immigration and government arms and use voluntary international databases to identify criminal networks. Unlike tariff or economic warfare, stopping financial fraud is within everyone's interests.

INTERPOL's role should therefore remain strictly law-enforcement focused rather than political/diplomatic. It can assist member states in identifying criminal networks connected to sanctions evasion, money laundering, document fraud and illicit financial activity, while leaving sanctions policy itself to the UN Security Council and individual governments. It cannot however independently press the DPRK to cease fraudulent actions, instead, it can only support dismantling those actions once they are detected. Furthermore, it should avoid promoting actions that favour certain alliance or state actors, favouring general safety and rule of law instead.

Sources:

- INTERPOL. Financial Crime.
- United Nations Security Council. Security Council Committee Established Pursuant to Resolution 1718 (2006).

Topic 2:

INTERPOL is particularly important to the fight against organ-trafficking networks because these crimes almost always involve multiple national and treaty jurisdictions. Victims may be recruited in one country, transported through another and exploited somewhere else. INTERPOL can therefore connect national police forces, border agencies and specialist investigators, as well as governments whose cooperation is key for guaranteeing that even in times of interstate conflict, areas are not left for exploitation by organised crime organisations.

The scale of international human trafficking demonstrates the value of this international cooperative model. In Operation Global Chain 2026, coordinated with INTERPOL, Europol, Frontex and Ameripol, authorities in 59 countries identified 2070 victims, arrested 1024 suspects and launched 465 investigations. Although the operation targeted broader human trafficking rather than specifically organ trafficking, it demonstrates the type of multinational law-enforcement cooperation that could be applied to organ-trafficking networks, if only states dedicated themselves more fully to these multilaterally beneficial initiatives.

INTERPOL's strategy should therefore focus on unifying countries, despite their diplomatic differences, towards the proper and international conducting of anti-crime operations, which in the context of organ trafficking benefit all state actors. Because global statistics on organ trafficking remain extremely limited, INTERPOL can also play an important role in improving international intelligence collection. UNODC states that the true global scale of trafficking for organ removal remains unknown due to data sharing restrictions which hamper supply chain identification, making intelligence-sharing particularly important.

Sources:

- INTERPOL. Over 1,000 Arrested in Global Crackdown on Human Trafficking Networks. 2026.
- INTERPOL. North and West Africa: INTERPOL Report Highlights Human Trafficking for Organ Removal. 30 September 2021.

Japan

Topic 1:

Japan's relationship with North Korea is overwhelmingly shaped by security concerns, the threat of the DPRK’s nuclear programme and the unresolved abduction of Japanese citizens. Unlike China, Japan does not have an ideological connection with Pyongyang and instead views the DPRK's military and illicit activities as direct threats to Japanese national security, as well as to the general stability of the region. Japan has consequently adopted some of the strongest unilateral sanctions against North Korea in addition to implementing UN Security Council measures. These measures are designed to restrict DPRK financial activity, trade and access to Japanese territory and citizens. Japan's approach is based on the belief that illicit revenue networks are directly connected to the North Korean government's ability to finance its military and nuclear programmes.

Economically, this has resulted in extremely limited bilateral commerce or personnel exchange. Japan has also restricted financial transactions and prohibited various forms of trade with the DPRK. To circumnavigate this, the DPRK has expanded cybercrime operations in Japan and other western-aligned states. The money gained from these initiatives goes directly to supplementing the funds available to North Korean armament and posturing efforts in the gulf of Korea.

The Japanese government therefore sees aggressive sanctions not simply as punishment for said posturing, but also as a means of reducing the financial resources available to Pyongyang's prohibited programmes. Hampering these programmes, which include nuclear, submarine and chemical weapon development initiatives, lies at the heart of Japan's interests and foreign policy. If this must be done through a general economic and financial siege of Pyongyang, so be it.

Japan's position is also influenced by the fact that Room 39-style sanctions evasion can involve sophisticated international financial networks and hundreds of unaffiliated partners. These networks can also be exploited by other non-state criminal organisations, leaving states such as Japan under criminal siege if these networks are not treated as hostile incursions designed to weaken Japan, but simple crime. Japan should therefore advocate for stronger financial intelligence on fraud networks, maritime monitoring to avoid smuggling or false flag 'shadow fleets', sanctions enforcement and cooperation between national law-enforcement agencies of willing Member States. Tokyo is willing to favour targeted measures against the DPRK government, people's party and leadership's financial networks while maintaining humanitarian exemptions only for trade of goods related to disaster or famine relief. Overall, Japan's position is that organised crime and sanctions evasion connected to North Korea are not isolated economic crimes, they are part of the wider security gap in the region, which if left unattended could not only strengthen the standing of the DPRK but also allow for the rise in unaffiliated criminal activity.

Sources:

- Indo-Pacific Defense FORUM. North Korea's Shadow Economy Fueled by Illicit Activities. May 2025.
- The Straits Times. US, South Korea, Japan Express Concern Over North Korea's "Malicious" Cyber Activities. 2023.
- NK News. Japan Blacklists North Korean Arms Dealer in Sanctions Targeting Russia's War. 10 January 2025

Topic 2:

Japan approaches organ trafficking primarily through strict medical regulation and international law-enforcement cooperation. Unlike countries where large informal transplant markets have historically existed, Japan has developed a highly regulated medical system intended to separate legitimate and certified organ donation from commercial exploitation.

The wider international problem remains significant because UNODC has identified trafficking for organ removal in multiple regions. However, only 100 cases were officially detected across 20 countries between 2007 and 2013, demonstrating both the relatively small number of officially detected cases and the possibility of substantial under-reporting due to the failure of agencies to grasp that trafficked individuals may be destined for organ exploitation without their own or their initial trafficker's knowledge.

Japan's strongest contribution is therefore likely to be technological and institutional rather than simply domestic enforcement. Japanese police, customs authorities and medical institutions can cooperate with international partners to identify suspicious financial transfers, fraudulent medical documentation and cross-border trafficking arrangements. Japan should support INTERPOL intelligence-sharing, international standards for transplant hospitals, financial monitoring and stronger screening of medical tourism. It should also advocate for victim protection because individuals trafficked for organ removal are frequently recruited through economic vulnerability or deception. Similarly, Tokyo should support international monitoring and termination of huge trafficking chains, as to guarantee that all intermediaries are subject to persecution, and not just those performing the initial recruitment of the victim or those illegally selling a trafficked organ. Japan must argue that the international community must prevent legitimate medical systems from becoming entry points for criminal networks, while preserving access to ethical and voluntary transplantation in accordance with individual states' domestic law.

Sources:

- UNODC. Assessment Toolkit: Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Organ Removal. 2015.
- The New York Times. Organ Trafficking / Organ Sales in Asia. 17 February 2009.

Kim Jong Un Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Topic 1:

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea rejects the Western characterisation of Room 39 and related activities as criminal enterprises controlled by the state.

Pyongyang instead frames many international sanctions as an attempt by the United States and its allies to undermine DPRK sovereignty and prevent the country from developing independently. This fits Kim Jong Un's wider emphasis on Juche, national self-reliance and resistance to foreign interference.

Economically, however, the DPRK faces extensive restrictions. UN sanctions prohibit or restrict major sources of foreign currency, including coal, textiles, seafood and the employment of DPRK workers abroad. Resolution 2397 also requires states to repatriate DPRK nationals earning income abroad. These restrictions have encouraged Pyongyang to search for alternative methods of obtaining foreign currency. For Pyongyang and the Kim dynasty, foreign currency is key as it allows for the import of advanced technology, including ICBM components, scientists and rare materials, as well as for the recruitment of foreign scientists, informants and for the stabilisation of internal black markets. Without a constant influx of foreign currency to its mass hidden accounts, the Kim dynasty risks losing both its external and internal leverage, as well as personal financial holdings. For the leadership of an unstable state fighting famines and international pressure, this could prove fatal.

North Korea has consequently been accused by international investigators of using networks of front companies, overseas representatives and financial intermediaries to circumvent sanctions. Former UN Panel of Experts investigators have described DPRK networks using Chinese bank accounts and front companies to move funds internationally, while cryptocurrency theft has increasingly become another alleged source of revenue. Furthermore, recruited workers as well as North Korean infiltrators in genuine companies help to launder and extract money from illicit initiatives including cybercrime and stakeholding in organised crime networks.

From Pyongyang's perspective, however, these accusations are politically motivated and form part of a broader campaign of economic warfare against the DPRK. Kim Jong Un therefore has little incentive to accept international mechanisms specifically designed to expose Room 39. Instead, North Korea would likely demand the removal or reduction of sanctions and insist that its economic activity be treated as an issue of sovereign national development. For Kim Jong Un, states such as Japan have no right to treat all of the DPRK’s economic initiatives as criminal. As far as he should be concerned, these are just further steps in the capitalist west’s war on the Juche and his supreme leadership.

Sources:

- 38 North. Insights From the UN Panel of Experts on North Korea. Joel S. Wit and Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt, 14 May 2024.
- North Korean Economy Watch. Mansudae Overseas Development Group Projects. 23 June 2010.

Topic 2:

The DPRK's position on organ trafficking should be approached carefully because there is extremely limited independently verifiable information about the scale of organ trafficking inside North Korea. Pyongyang argues, as with all international allegations, that allegations concerning trafficking must be based on independently verified evidence rather than politically motivated accusations. The DPRK must also emphasise that economic sanctions and international isolation make access to legitimate medical resources more difficult, and therefore humanitarian cooperation should not be restricted by broader political disputes. Furthermore, it is within the hermit kingdom’s policy to blame any medical misconduct within its borders on western capitalist-motivated sanctions which limit the effectiveness of its internal healthcare system. Nevertheless, North Korea's isolation creates serious challenges for international monitoring. International organisations have limited access to the country, making independent verification of allegations substantially more difficult than in states with open medical and judicial systems.

The DPRK could therefore support a general international framework against organ trafficking, provided that it applies equally to all states and does not allow foreign governments to interfere in DPRK sovereignty. Pyongyang would likely oppose country-specific investigations unless they were authorised through an agreed international mechanism where the DPRK and its Juche-friendly allies would have a substantial say.

Sources:

- UNODC. Assessment Toolkit: Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Organ Removal. 2015.

Sources:

- UNODC. Assessment Toolkit: Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Organ Removal. 2015.

Malaysia

Topic 1:

Malaysia provides one of the clearest examples of a country whose relationship with North Korea shifted from economic and diplomatic engagement to confrontation. For decades, Malaysia maintained relatively friendly relations with the DPRK and was one of the few countries whose citizens could travel between the two states relatively easily. North Korea also maintained diplomatic and commercial networks in Malaysia, making the country useful as a regional base for DPRK business.

This relationship deteriorated dramatically following the 2017 assassination of Kim Jong-nam (RIP our would be dictator) at Kuala Lumpur International Airport. The incident triggered a major diplomatic crisis and exposed the extent to which North Korean networks were operating within Malaysia. The relationship deteriorated further when Malaysia pursued the extradition of North Korean businessman Mun Chol Myong, who was accused of money laundering and sanctions violations. North Korea eventually severed diplomatic relations with Malaysia in 2021 after Malaysia's courts rejected Mun's appeal.

The economic dimension is particularly important because Malaysia had previously provided a relatively open commercial environment for DPRK-linked businesses. The UN subsequently identified Malaysia among the countries where the Mansudae Overseas Project Group had conducted business, alongside other African and Asian states. Malaysia has therefore moved from being a relatively permissive economic partner to a country much more willing to enforce international sanctions. Its position demonstrates how diplomatic relations can change when illicit financial networks begin to conflict with national law and international obligations to more friendly and powerful states.

Malaysia should advocate for stronger financial intelligence, company registration monitoring, customs cooperation and information-sharing between Southeast Asian states, with specific regard to all DPRK nationals.

Malaysia clearly understands that for the DPRK, trade representatives are just a way to get a foot in the door, and are soon followed by illicit activities and initiatives which threaten the integrity of the nation and its citizens. At the same time, Kuala Lumpur can argue that enforcement should be based on evidence and domestic law rather than political pressure from larger powers.

Sources:

- United Nations Security Council. Security Council Toughens Sanctions Against Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2371 (2017). 2017.
- Wikipedia. Malaysia–North Korea Relations.
- North Korean Economy Watch. Mansudae Overseas Development Group Projects.

Topic 2:

Malaysia is particularly relevant to the issue of international organ-trafficking networks because of its position as a major Southeast Asian transport, financial and medical hub. Its extensive international connections mean that Malaysia can potentially function as a transit point for transnational criminal networks, making cooperation between police, immigration authorities, customs and medical institutions particularly important. Malaysia should approach the issue of organ trafficking as part of the wider problem of human trafficking and organised crime due to the presence of large international and multifocus crime groups operating in the region. Therefore, Malaysia's strongest contribution should be regional. Southeast Asia contains extensive cross-border movement, meaning criminal networks can exploit differences between national laws and enforcement capabilities. Malaysia can therefore advocate for ASEAN-level intelligence-sharing, common investigative standards, stronger border screening and cooperation between medical regulators and police forces, possibly under large organisations such as INTERPOL.

Sources:

- United Nations Security Council. Security Council Toughens Sanctions Against Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2371 (2017). 2017.

Mozambique

Topic 1:

There have been a series of business and military ties between Mozambique and North Korea, leading to concerns about the violation of the international sanctions imposed on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Reports in 2018 stated that there was an engagement between North Korea and Mozambique in terms of contracts amounting to millions of dollars, which included fishing boats. It was also alleged that there had been a collaboration in the form of military equipment and training provided to Mozambique by North Korean personnel. This was seen to be a way in which North Korea could be earning revenue from these foreign collaborations and hence bypassing international sanctions.

This is especially important in light of the existence of Office 39, which is a North Korean entity that earns foreign exchange on behalf of the country's leadership. Office 39 has been involved in many financial frauds and use of foreign businesses as a means of concealing money. The involvement of North Korea in foreign enterprises shows the difficulty of ascertaining the real beneficiaries of international dealings.

Mozambique maintained that it was not aware of any violation of UN sanctions and dismissed suggestions that it had made any forbidden agreements with North Korea. The Mozambican authorities insisted that their country was ready to work with the United Nations in its investigations, even inviting the Panel of Experts to conduct research on the matter. Furthermore, claiming that they were cooperating with local firms to ensure they knew about international sanctions.

The problem was further extended in 2020 when Mozambique presented a report of the implementation regarding the DPRK sanctions regime. Mozambique denied sanctions violation but defended cooperation with North Korea, especially in the sphere of medicine. In particular, at that time, almost 100 North Koreans worked as doctors in Mozambique. However, Mozambique argued that its cooperation with North Korea was suspended.

Thus, it becomes clear that the example of Mozambique poses problems of differentiation between genuine cooperation and sanctions evasion.

- United Nations Security Council. Security Council Toughens Sanctions Against Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2371 (2017). 2017.
- Wikipedia. Malaysia–North Korea Relations.
- North Korean Economy Watch. Mansudae Overseas Development Group Projects.

It also highlights problems of government accountability for actions performed by private businesses on their territories, the use of foreign businesses to cover up the financial interests of North Korea, as well as the efficiency of sanctions in preventing funds from getting into organizations like Office 39.

Sources:

- NK News. Mozambique Denies North Korean Sanctions Violations, Defends Medical Cooperation. 26 May 2020.
- Voice of America. Mozambique Denies Doing Business with North Korea. 7 February 2018.

Topic 2:

It is known that among countries which have the most obvious documented links to organ trafficking is Mozambique where attacks against people with albinism became more frequent starting from 2013, first in Cabo Delgado, and then in Niassa, Nampula, and Manica. People with albinism, including children, are abducted or killed and their organs are removed and trafficked. According to the situation analysis made by the UNICRI/IOM, such acts of violence can be considered trafficking for organ removal as defined by the Palermo Protocol.

According to the report of the U.S. Department of State, people with albinism are becoming more vulnerable to trafficking for organ removal in Mozambique. Trafficking networks involve informal networks of Mozambican or South African traffickers, and trafficking routes run both within the country and beyond its borders. In 2015, the authorities of Mozambique arrested 50 people for trafficking of people with albinism for organ removal.

Criminal prosecutions have also taken place. One example from Cabo Delgado saw two people sentenced to 35 years in prison following their conviction for the trafficking of persons for organ removal and the murder of a child with albinism so as to sell the organs of the child.

This gives a practical example of an organized trafficking case which involves recruitment or targeting of a vulnerable victim, murder, removal of body parts, and intended illegal sale in the black market.

The situation is not limited to Mozambique's borders. The UNODC's regional research on Southern Africa has indicated that victims with albinism have been abducted for the purpose of removal of their body parts in SADC countries, while trafficking networks can cross international borders. In addition, UN research has revealed that there are cases where some attacks are carried out for the acquisition of body parts for ritual purposes rather than transplant, implying that organ trafficking and trafficking in human body parts are related but different activities.

It is clear that the case of Mozambique offers a particular case of trafficking for the removal of organs/body parts among vulnerable victims and cross-border criminal networks.

Sources:

- UNICRI. Situation Analysis on the Human Rights and Protection of Persons with Albinism in Mozambique with a Special Focus on Human Trafficking. 2019.
- UNODC. Understanding Human Trafficking for Organ Removal. 2024.
- U.S. Department of State. 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mozambique. 2016.
- U.S. Department of State. 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mozambique. 2018.
- U.S. Department of State. 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mozambique. 2019.

Philippines

Topic 1:

The Philippines is listed among the countries where counterfeit cigarettes made by North Korea were seized. A Congressional Research Service report by the United States indicated that millions of counterfeit Marlboros, Mild Sevens and other cigarettes made in North Korea had been confiscated in Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam and Belize. According to the report, production of counterfeit cigarettes was an important income generator for North Korea's illegal operations.

A more particular case was the one that occurred in Manila in October 2013, where an amount of about 8.79 million fake Marlboro cigarettes were seized. The cigarettes were said to be camouflaged by the use of genuine cigarettes from North Korea, while the shipping documents showed that the shipper of these fake cigarettes was a company operating in Dalian, China. However, it was found out that the company in the shipping documents had no existence in the said location.

The relationship to Office 39, on the other hand, needs careful attention. Office 39 is a North Korean entity which has been implicated in creating funds for the regime through its economic misdeeds and has been tied to criminal economic transactions by American investigators. According to previous reports from the United States and Congress, the cigarette counterfeiting business in North Korea has been associated with their criminal economy for profit, but these sources did not confirm whether the 2013 cigarettes in Manila were run by Office 39. Hence, the Philippines incident should be seen as evidence of North Korean illicit products in the global market.

The Philippines has experienced an equally big problem with counterfeiting and smuggling of cigarettes and tobacco internally, regardless of North Korea. The Philippine government has been confiscating counterfeit cigarettes, equipment for making counterfeit cigarettes, and fake tax stamps from time to time. In 2021, the Bureau of Customs confiscated ₱38 million worth of counterfeit cigarettes in the Port of Subic, whereas in February 2026, the government confiscated ₱39.3 million worth of illegal cigarettes and dried tobacco that were being smuggled into Manila. These are not considered North Korean operations by the Philippine government.

For this reason, the Philippines constitutes a good case of how North Korean smuggled merchandise has found its way to international markets through complicated chains and intermediary actors, yet at the same time showing the challenge of separating North Korea-related activities from general cigarette smuggling through the criminal network. This situation raises issues around the identification of the origin of the smuggled goods, the employment of intermediary firms, the control at sea and custom, as well as profit tracking.

Sources:

- Congressional Research Service. RL33885.
- U.S. Department of Justice. Press Release.
- Bureau of Customs, Republic of the Philippines. BOC Subic Destroys Assorted Brands of Counterfeit Cigarettes. 25 April 2022.

Topic 2:

There is a well-established problem in the Philippines concerning the sale of kidneys, especially in poor neighborhoods near Manila. The brokers, who are often called “kidney hunters”, find people ready to sell their kidney and match them with the buyers. In 2019, Channel NewsAsia carried out an investigation and described the activities of brokers who work in poor areas and explained how they recruit new donors, take them for the examination and match them with the recipients. One of the donors said that he received about 115,000 Philippine pesos but only 85,000 were left because of the commission.

It is very important that there are mediators in such transactions. Instead of the direct sale, the mediators recruit the donor, negotiate money, take him/her for the examination and transplantation. There is academic research on the kidney trade in Manila that describes the same thing and the vulnerability of poor people involved in the trade. UNODC's investigative toolkit itself gives an example of the black organ market in Manila as the example of trafficking for organ removal.

There has been a legislative response in the case of the Philippines. The country's anti-trafficking laws acknowledge the practice of trafficking of persons for organ harvesting as a crime, while its health authorities monitor living-donor transplantations. Nevertheless, investigations and reports still indicate the existence of illegal kidney procurement networks.

Sources:

- Congressional Research Service. RL33885.
- U.S. Department of Justice. Press Release.
- Bureau of Customs, Republic of the Philippines. BOC Subic Destroys Assorted Brands of Counterfeit Cigarettes. 25 April 2022.

Republic of Korea

Topic 1:

The Republic of Korea has been cited as both a destination country and a transshipment country of narcotics from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). According to the 2010 designations by the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office 39 produced methamphetamine in North Korea and supplied the drug to small-time smugglers of North Korea, who further shipped the narcotics to China and South Korea.

As per the 2010 designations, Office 39 is engaged in the manufacturing, smuggling and distribution of narcotics, which include methamphetamine, opium and heroin.

This link was also established through an investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2013 where five people were charged with conspiracy to bring 100 kilograms of North Korean methamphetamine into America. From the indictment of the case, it is revealed that some members of a crime syndicate in Hong Kong were already selling in excess of 30 kilograms of North Korean methamphetamine before they were intercepted in Thailand and the Philippines. One of the defendants was a citizen of the Philippines.

Additionally, South Korea has been recognized as another location through which narcotics may be transshipped. A report by the U.S. Department of State stated that methamphetamine found its way into South Korea from China and also that some of the drug smugglers had confessed to getting their drugs from North Korea and then transshipping them through China. Another reason why South Korea was seen as a possible transshipment area was due to its major seaports and extensive international contacts.

The government of South Korea has not been seen as engaging in any way with the narcotics operations in North Korea. Instead, the law-enforcement officials of South Korea have assisted international organizations in drug trafficking investigations. It is mentioned in the U.S. State Department that there was collaboration in international narcotics investigations between South Korean law enforcement officials, the DEA, customs, and prosecutors.

These documented cases therefore provide an established link between North Korean-produced drugs, drug-trafficking networks, and South Korea as either a destination or transit point for the drugs. The 2010 U.S. Treasury Department classification offers the most explicit link between the activities and Office 39

Sources:

- U.S. Department of the Treasury. Treasury Designates Key Nodes of the Illicit Financing Network of North Korea’s Office 39. 18 November 2010.
- U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. DEA News: 5 Extradited, Charged With North Korean Drug Trafficking Conspiracy. 20 November 2013.
- U.S. Department of State. International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports.

Topic 2:

The Republic of Korea is involved in this issue mainly because of the phenomena of transplant tourism and overseas transplantation rather than the country being a main source of trafficked organs domestically. According to an article published in Transplantation, 2,206 Korean recipients had been observed to receive organs abroad between 2000 and 2016. Out of the total numbers, 977 kidney transplants and 1,229 liver transplants were observed. For 97 percent of the overseas kidney transplants and for 98 percent of liver transplants, China was the destination of the transplant. The results have been explicitly referred to as significant in dealing with organ trafficking and transplant tourism.

In previous research done on Korean recipients between 1999 and 2005, there was a very rapid growth in overseas transplantation. The number of kidney transplants overseas grew from 6 in 2001 to 206 in 2005 and that of liver transplants from 1 to 261 during the same period. The study mentioned that overseas transplantation posed some concerns related to commercial organ transplantation and transplant tourism.

At the same time, South Korea also enacted stringent regulations on the domestic transplant. Korean regulations stipulate the approval for living donation transplants and the examination of the connection between the donor and recipient. According to research done by the Asan Medical Center Transplantation Program, the Korean legislation and Korean Network for Organ Sharing regulations are formulated to avoid organ trafficking, where living donation can only be performed under certain relations.

South Korea is, hence, an example of a country where the demand for transplants has been one of the factors driving the movement of patients across the border, as well as regulating the transplant process.

Sources:

- PubMed. [Article indexed under PMID 28863044].
- Kwon, Choon Hyuck David, Suk-Koo Lee, and Jongwon Ha. Trend and Outcome of Korean Patients Receiving Overseas Solid Organ Transplantation between 1999 and 2005. Journal of Korean Medical Science, 2011, 26(1): 17–21.
- Kim, Sang-Hoon et al. Institutional Standard Framework and Experience of Living Donor Liver Transplantation for Overseas Non-Korean Patients at Asan Medical Center. Korean Journal of Transplantation, 2021, 35(2): 93–99.

Russian Federation

Topic 1:

The Russian Federation has had dealings in several cases involving sanctions evasion by North Korea, which has involved the transportation of banned goods, money laundering, and the hiring of North Korean workers. One such clear case happened in 2018 when the US Treasury Department sanctioned two Russia-based shipping firms, Primorye Maritime Logistics Co. Ltd and Gudzon Shipping Co. LLC. The ship named M/V Patriot, which flew under the Russian flag, was found to have made two shipments of oil through ship-to-ship transfers to the North Korean ships. It transferred about 1,500 tons of oil to the Chong Rim 2 and 2,000 tons to the Chon Ma San.

The oil was finally bought by Taesong Bank, a North Korean bank that operates under the control of Office 39 of the Workers' Party of Korea. This ship was already listed by both the United States and the United Nations because of their involvement in such illegal operations. The Chon Ma San is one such North Korean vessel that had participated in ship-to-ship transfers in violation of UN sanctions.

Russia has also served as a location for North Korean laborers and financiers. In 2020, the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned a Russian construction company, Mokran LLC, and North Korean company, Korea Cholsan General Trading Corporation, for arranging the employment of North Korean laborers in Russia. Korea Cholsan has been portrayed as a company that oversees the operations of North Korean laborers in Russia while a group of Russian companies has received permits for the entry and employment of North Korean laborers in Russia. It has been reported by the United States that the money earned by such laborers goes to the North Korean government.

Such association has been seen in some of the latest incidents too. For instance, in March 2024, the U.S. Treasury imposed sanctions on O In Chun, who acts on behalf of Korea Daesong Bank and operates from Russia. It is known that Korea Daesong Bank is owned by Office 39 and O In Chun was identified as doing activities for the bank in the matter of transferring or unfreezing the funds associated with financial activities of North Korea.

However, in more recent times in 2025, it has been found that the IT workers from North Korea worked from Russia to make money in order to earn revenues for the DPRK. As per the statement of the Department of Justice, the IT workers working from Russia used fake or stolen identities to earn through remote employment and used cryptocurrency as well as financial transactions to make payments.

These examples show some of the known connections that exist between the North Korean illegal operations in generating money and Russia, such as sanctions-busting shipments through sea, North Korean labor, financial representatives and IT workers abroad. The 2018 case of M/V Patriot is the example showing the closest connection to Office 39, since the North Korean company that bought the oil was subordinated to Office 39.

Sources:

- U.S. Department of the Treasury. Treasury Sanctions Entities Involved in Exporting Workers from North Korea. 2020.
- U.S. Department of the Treasury. Treasury Sanctions Key Facilitators Behind North Korea's Illicit Financial Activities and Military Support to Russia. 2024.
- U.S. Department of the Treasury. [Press Release: SM463].
- U.S. Department of State. Alert to Countries, Companies, and Other Entities Regarding North Korean IT Workers. 2026.

Topic 2:

The Russian Federation is relevant to organ trafficking as far as its legal system and trafficking corridors are concerned however, there are fewer records about major organ trafficking operations inside the country compared to other countries such as the Philippines or Mozambique.

The OSCE has reviewed trafficking of organs in the Russian Federation in particular. In the course of a visit in 2017, OSCE Special Representative has stated that according to Russian law enforcement agencies, there were no instances of human trafficking for the purpose of organ removal registered in Russia since 2013. However, at the same time the OSCE has stressed the importance of addressing the problem due to demand for transplants globally and shortage of legal organs.

Russia has been seen to participate in investigations conducted internationally on trafficking. In a UN study on trafficking for organ removal, there is evidence of victims from the Russian Federation, Moldova, and Turkey being trafficked to Kosovo for organ removal.

This means that Russians have been found to be among the victims of transnational organ removal but this does not mean that Russia is the place where the organ-trafficking industry takes place.

The criminal code of Russia also includes provisions against trafficking for the purpose of obtaining human organs or tissue. There is legal research done on Russian legislation in which it can be seen that trafficking for the purpose of organ or tissue removal is also included in Article 127.1 of the Russian Criminal Code.

Sources:

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Singapore

Topic 1:

Singapore has been reported to have been used as a basis for transactions with North Korea as well as financial dealings with North Korea on numerous occasions. The reason is that Singapore has been known to be an important trading and shipping center, and therefore, the entities based there have been used in sanctions evasion investigations.

Another noteworthy case is that of T Specialist, a Singapore-based firm that provided luxury goods to North Korea from 2010 through 2017. It was discovered that the firm had been providing various types of goods such as watches, jewelry, and other luxury products to the North Korean Korean Bugsae Shop. In 2019, the director of the firm was sentenced following his conviction for certain offenses related to the provision of these goods. Such activities took place against UN restrictions on the provision of luxury goods to North Korea.

Furthermore, there was another case where a Singaporean firm known as Sinsms Pte Ltd was charged in 2019 of exporting wine and spirit products valued at above S$600,000 to North Korea using the Chinese port of Dalian. These exports occurred from October 2016 to January 2017 and were charged under the sanctions law of Singapore.

Singapore has also faced cases involving petroleum products and ship-to-ship transfers. In 2018, there was an inquiry into the possible transfer of gasoil from Singapore-related ship MT Yuk Tung to the North Korean flagged Rye Song Gang 1. This led to criminal charges, including the conviction of a company director on charges of hindering the investigation process. Ship-to-ship transfers of refined petroleum products to North Korean ships is prohibited under UN sanctions.

Finance has also been a source of problems. In 2021, Tan Wee Beng, a businessman from Singapore who had been flagged by U.S. intelligence agencies as a money launderer linked to North Korea, pleaded guilty in Singapore for the submission of false invoices involving North Korea-related companies. The false invoices helped to hide North Korean links in some transactions from banks.

Finally, enforcement of the DPRK sanctions was thereafter strengthened by Singapore. In 2017, Singapore halted all trade with North Korea. The law in Singapore ensures that UN sanctions are enforced, and also provides for asset freezes on DPRK-designated individuals and entities. The present day Singapore Customs regulations bar certain imports, exports, transshipments and in-transit cargo in connection with DPRK, while others need licenses.

Sources:

- Singapore Customs. United Nations Security Council Sanctions Overview.
- Singapore Customs. List of Prohibited Exports and (Outward) Transhipment or Goods in Transit to the DPRK.
- Attorney-General's Chambers, Singapore. United Nations Act: United Nations (Sanctions—DPRK) Regulations 2010.
- The Straits Times. Singaporean Charged with Supplying Luxury Items to North Korea. 18 October 2018.

Topic 2:

Singapore has one of the most well-documented instances of an international trafficking ring for kidneys which involves a broker, foreign organ providers and a local recipient. In 2008, Tang Wee Sung, a Singaporean businessman, was in need of a kidney transplant and thus got into contact with Wang Chin Sing, who served as an intermediary and promised to find a willing provider. Wang then approached Sulaiman Damanik, who is an Indonesian citizen and was ready to sell his kidney for about S$23,700. Toni, another Indonesian, was used as an intermediary.

However, the whole transaction was marred by attempts to disguise the commercial aspects of this deal. In particular, Wang tried to make the donor lie about his relationship with Tang and claim that he was willing to donate his kidney without expecting any remuneration.

Convictions were obtained against the offenders in the Singapore courts. Sulaiman was found guilty of entering into an arrangement to provide his kidney on a remunerative basis, Tang was found guilty of attempting to procure a kidney, and Wang was found guilty of making arrangements in several kidney selling cases. The High Court noted that Wang was the middleman involved in the kidney selling operations.

The case has implications for the international black market because it includes donors from Indonesia, the recipient in Singapore, and the intermediary who connects the participants together.

Sources:

- Singapore High Court. Wang Chin Sing v Public Prosecutor [2008] SGHC 215. 19 November 2008.
- Singapore High Court. [2010] SGHC 53.
- Ministry of Health, Singapore. Investigation into Suspected Organ Trading. 27 June 2008.
- Attorney-General's Chambers, Singapore. Human Organ Transplant Act 1987.

Switzerland

Topic 1:

Although the relationship between Switzerland and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has been continued diplomatically and economically, the level of trading activities between the two countries has reduced to such an extent due to international sanctions imposed on the DPRK. According to the Federal Department of Economic Affairs in Switzerland, there is no more trade between the two countries at all. Since 18 May 2016, Swiss companies are supposed to submit advance declarations to SECO concerning export and transit to/from the DPRK.

However, Switzerland has been linked to North Korea through various financial institutions and Office 39. According to Switzerland's list of sanction lists, Office 39 is an office in the DPRK government which is listed as a designee.

Another institution linked to Office 39 is the Korea Daesong Bank, which has been identified as being owned and controlled by Office 39.

Swiss-North Korean business relations can be exemplified by an incident in 2013 where a company based in Switzerland, named Bartholet Maschinenbau, planned to deliver chair lifts and cable cars valued at around CHF 7 million to the North Korean Masikryong Ski Resort. The export was banned by the Swiss government as the items were classified as luxurious goods and sports facilities.

After the sanctions were tightened in 2016, Switzerland stopped the export of more commodities to North Korea, including luxurious items, as well as imposed certain financial service restrictions on the finances that have any link to North Korea. The Swiss banks were prohibited from establishing their branches or subsidiaries in North Korea, and vice versa.

However, even with these constraints, Switzerland maintains some humanitarian and diplomatic connections with North Korea. In a report by the Swiss Government, there were three Swiss firms that exported dairy produce to the World Food Program and UNICEF in North Korea from 2000 to 2023. Humanitarian exports are allowed within the sanctions regime. In the same report, it was revealed that there were three administrative criminal cases concerning North Korea sanctions of Switzerland.

Sources:

- Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), Switzerland. Bilateral Relations Switzerland–Democratic People's Republic of Korea. 2026.
- OpenSanctions. Korea Daesong Bank.
- OhMyFin. SECO – North Korea: Sanctions List.
- SWI swissinfo.ch. North Koreans Complain About Blocked Ski Lift Deal. 2013.

Topic 2:

Switzerland is more concerned about this matter through regulation and prevention, as well as international cooperation, than by the existence of a substantial number of internal organ trafficking cases within the country. According to the Swiss laws, the sale or purchase of human organs is prohibited. According to the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, both selling and buying an organ could be considered a criminal offense.

In addition to the above, Swiss legislation prohibits organ trade not only inside Switzerland but also internationally. This is because according to the Swiss Transplantation Act, the trade of human organs "in Switzerland or from Switzerland abroad" as well as transplantation of purchased human organs is prohibited.

Switzerland is also participating in international initiatives to fight organ trafficking and transplant tourism. Its strategy relies on making sure the transplantation procedure takes place within medical channels and does not involve any form of exploitation of the donor for monetary gain. More precisely, the government of Switzerland explicitly states that individuals selling their kidneys could do so due to financial reasons and lack medical information about potential dangers. Switzerland can thus be said to be a case of preventing its health care and financial system from being used in international organ trading.

Sources:

- Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH), Switzerland. Organ and Tissue Donor Register.
- Federal Council of Switzerland. Transplantation Act.
- Federal Authorities of Switzerland. Federal Act on the Transplantation of Organs, Tissues and Cells

Thailand

Topic 1:

There have been incidents where Thailand has been involved with North Korean sanctions violations through trade, shipping, and money transactions. Thailand keeps a list of people and businesses that have been designated through UN sanctions. Currently, there is Office 39 that has been identified as a designated North Korean entity.

One notable case was that of Ri Myong Ho who was a North Korean envoy based in the North Korean Embassy in Thailand. According to the indictment by the U.S. Department of Justice, Ri started in 2015 to use his diplomatic immunity to ship some goods from Thailand to North Korea. These shipments were done using the port of Dalian, China and the transactions involved payment of U.S. dollars to U.S. banks. The indictment reveals that Ri together with his accomplices employed some front companies in Thailand and Malaysia and concealed the final destinations from the banks. He was charged with sanctions evasion, bank fraud and 18 counts of international money laundering.

There has also been North Korea's link to shipping from Thailand. Gooryong Shipping Co. Ltd., which used to be called Gooryong Shipping Bangkok, was sanctioned by the United States' treasury department in 2018. The company had addresses in Pyongyang and Bangkok and was described as being a North Korean shipping company under sanctions. The company's ship Goo Ryong was also sanctioned. The company continued to appear on the U.S. treasury department list in subsequent updates.

North Korean shipping companies in Bangkok were not limited to Gooryong Shipping. U.S. sanctions have revealed other North Korean-linked maritime organizations that operated in connection with Thailand. The companies were engaged in international shipping and trading, thus offering an opportunity for North Korean goods and money transactions to pass through the intermediary countries.

Subsequently, Thailand has toughened its enforcement of UN sanctions. In particular, its Anti-Money Laundering Office publishes a public list of the UN-designated individuals and entities related to the DPRK. The list includes Office 39 as well as a large number of North Korean trading and shipping companies. Currently, the Thai list shows Office 39 as a designated entity according to its sanctions program.

Some of the examples of such instances include North Korean officers operating out of Thailand, Thai companies associated with DPRK business as well as North Korean shipping organizations having their mailing address in Bangkok. The example of Ri Myong Ho is especially enlightening in this regard as it deals with the case where the shipment was done from Thailand to North Korea using a third country.

Sources:

- U.S. Department of Justice. Former North Korean Diplomat Indicted on Sanctions-Evasion Conspiracy and Bank Fraud Charges.
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, OFAC. North Korea Designations. 24 January 2018.
- FreightWaves. OFAC Sanctions Additional North Korean Shipowners. 2018.
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, OFAC. [North Korea Sanctions Document].
- OhMyFin. Thailand AMLO Sanctions.

Topic 2:

Thailand has been involved in international networks of organ trafficking, including cases which involved foreign donors and recipients. In one case reported by the Israelis, a recipient flew from Europe to Bangkok accompanied by a Ukrainian donor after she had met with an intermediary. The indictment states that she and her husband were taken to a hospital in Bangkok, where they were told to lie about the relationship between the donor and themselves. The donor was then subjected to kidney removal surgery and the kidney was transplanted into the recipient. The intermediary received US$120,000 for his involvement.

This involvement of Thailand in organ trafficking is related to the country's status as a regional medical centre. International patients have long been attracted to Thailand because of the health care services it offers, while the transplantation program in Thailand has developed rules which are meant to prevent commercial activity in organ transplantation. The World Health Organization reports that regulations in Thailand's transplantation program became stricter following the scandalous kidney transplantation in 1999.

Other regional examples that are comparable with the present case involve Thailand as the destination for transplantations. In the case of reporting about a network of organ trafficking that involved Cambodia, there is a report about a young man from Cambodia who was recruited to sell his kidney, and was then taken to a Thai hospital for transplantation.

Sources:

- World Health Organization. Transplantation. WHO
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). UN Report Details Grave Abuses Against Those Trafficked into Scam Centres. 20 February 2026. OHCHR

United States

Topic 1:

The United States has been instrumental in probing into and dismantling the sanctions evasion schemes of North Korea.

Many of the most specific details on North Korean illegal finance transactions available in the public domain have been derived through investigations carried out by the U.S. Department of Treasury, the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the FBI. The investigations were centered on how the North Koreans were able to use the front company structure, money laundering operations, correspondent banking networks, and sanctions evasion activities to access the international financial system despite global limitations.

The first major case involved a Hong Kong bank called Banco Delta Asia (BDA). In 2005, the U.S. Treasury Department designated BDA as a "primary money laundering concern," based on USA PATRIOT Act legislation. According to the Treasury, BDA had been offering financial services to North Korean government institutions and front companies for more than 20 years and had been involved in financial transactions linked to counterfeiting of currencies, fake tobacco, and drug smuggling. Following this designation, around $25 million worth of North Korean-linked funds were blocked and many international banks started limiting transactions with North Korea. This case has since become known as one of the earliest attempts to disrupt North Korea's access to the global banking network.

Office 39 was labeled by the U.S. Treasury in 2010 and referred to as an organization that made money for the North Korean regime through illegal business practices. Treasury indicated that Office 39 operated a network of organizations that were utilized to conduct their business overseas and was engaged in activities such as narcotics trafficking, money laundering, bulk-cash smuggling and purchase of luxury goods. Korea Daesong Bank and Korea Daesong General Trading Corporation were the organizations labeled by the Treasury as an integral part of the Office 39 financial network.

Sanctions-evasion plots continued to come to light throughout the 2010s and 2020s. For example, in 2016, the U.S. government indicted Chinese citizens and a China-based firm for using front companies to process dollar-denominated transactions for the benefit of a designated North Korean bank. As noted by the DOJ, the plot took place over several years and was designed to keep the North Korean identity hidden behind offshore companies from U.S. financial institutions.

Furthermore in 2017, the United States initiated actions in order to forfeit over $11 million from companies believed to have been involved in laundering money on behalf of designated North Korean entities.

It was said in court papers that the use of front companies was involved in making payments via the U.S. financial system for purchasing petroleum products and other goods that would be delivered to North Korea. North Korean money launderers reportedly used sophisticated worldwide networks of shell companies and foreign bank accounts.

Moreover, efforts were made to seek foreign technology and telecommunications equipment. In 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) filed a complaint for the forfeiture of almost $1 million linked to the companies which served as intermediaries for the procurement of telecommunications equipment, with U.S.-origin content, by North Korea. It was stated that the companies set up shell companies and hid the identity of buyers to avoid sanctions.

In other words, the United States has been a leader of the efforts to uncover and prosecute the North Korean sanctions evasion network. The investigations carried out by the U.S. law enforcement agencies have demonstrated the employment of front companies, fake invoices, hidden ownership structures, offshore bank accounts, and other money laundering schemes in order to get North Korean money into the global financial system. They contain some of the most comprehensive information on how North Korean entities have been evading international sanctions.

Sources:

- U.S. Department of the Treasury. Treasury Designates Banco Delta Asia as Primary Money Laundering Concern under USA PATRIOT Act. 15 September 2005. Treasury
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, OFAC. North Korea Executive Order / North Korea Designations / Non-Proliferation Designations. 30 August 2010. OFAC
- U.S. Department of the Treasury. Treasury Designates Key Nodes of the Illicit Financing Network of North Korea's Office 39. 18 November 2010. Treasury
- U.S. Department of Justice. Department of Justice Announces Charges of North Korean and Malaysia Nationals for Bank Fraud, Money Laundering and North Korea Sanctions Violations. 11 September 2020.
- U.S. Department of Justice. United States Files Complaints to Forfeit More Than $11 Million From Companies That Allegedly Laundered Funds To Benefit Sanctioned North Korean Entities. 22 August 2017.

- U.S. Department of Justice. Four Chinese Nationals and China-Based Company Charged with Using Front Companies to Evade U.S. Sanctions Targeting North Korea's Nuclear Weapons and Ballistic Missile Programs. 26 September 2016.
- U.S. Department of Justice. Chinese Telecommunications Conglomerate Huawei and Subsidiaries Charged in Racketeering Conspiracy and Conspiracy to Steal Trade Secrets. 13 February 2020.

Topic 2:

The United States is pertinent in the context of being a destination country as well as having significant laws on organ trafficking. For instance, the National Organ Transplant Act of 1984 makes it illegal to knowingly acquire, receive or transfer a human organ for valuable consideration for transplantation. Thus, all forms of commercial organ sale are forbidden within the country.

Moreover, the US government treats organ trafficking as human trafficking. According to the proposed 2025 U.S. legislation, trafficking for organ removal includes recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person for organ removal by means of threat, coercion, abduction, deception, fraud, abuse of power or vulnerable position or payments. In addition, in 2025, the United States experienced some cases of trafficking of human organs and body parts outside the usual transplant process.

Specifically, Cedric Lodge who was a former morgue manager at Harvard Medical School pleaded guilty to the interstate transportation of human remains. According to prosecutors, from 2018 to 2020, Lodge removed donated human remains including organs, brains, skin, and other body parts from the morgue and sold them interstate.

While this is not a typical example of a case involving the trafficking of organs for transplantation, it serves to show that illegal markets do exist where human body parts may be sold without being within any official medical system. The U.S., for one, is strict about any commercial organ trade.

Sources:

- U.S. Congress. National Organ Transplant Act (S. 2048), 98th Congress. 1983.

- U.S. Congress. H.R. 1503, 119th Congress — Forced Organ Harvesting Enforcement Act of 2025. 2025.
- U.S. Department of Justice. Former Harvard Morgue Manager and Wife Sentenced for Trafficking Stolen Human Remains. 16 December 2025.

Viet Nam

Topic 1:

Although Vietnam has sustained good diplomatic and economic ties with the DPRK, it has also emerged during investigations into North Korean illegitimate financial dealings and sanction evasion. As an important trading and finance center in Southeast Asia, Vietnam is among the countries that have been used to conduct transactions with connections to North Korea. According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury in 2006, a number of international financial institutions, including those based in Vietnam, had voluntarily stopped doing business with North Korea in relation to the fear of the use of the international financial systems for criminal purposes.

There have been instances of North Korean organizations conducting themselves illegally overseas via the use of fronts and middlemen to mask the real transactions. According to the Treasury, the DPRK is known to use government organs and fronts to mask the transactions that involve its arms and other illegal activities. North Korean trading organizations have kept representatives in many countries to enable the transfer of goods and payments to be made through third countries and not directly between North Korea and trading partners.

North Korea has also been connected to Vietnamese shipping and trade networks. Sanctions records from the United States have included North Korean shipping and trading firms active in the international sphere. Overall, the North Korean transportation network was used for making illegal transfers and circumventing the sanctions imposed on the regime. In 2016, the U.S. Treasury specifically cited the use of the North Korean transportation network for making prohibited shipments of weapons of mass destruction and associated materials.

Vietnam has made efforts to comply with international restrictions against North Korea. After the establishment of stricter sanctions by the United Nations, Vietnam limited its trade ties with North Korea and monitored North Korean financial activity more carefully.

Vietnam is an active participant in international efforts to block the transfer of prohibited goods and funds associated with North Korea.

Therefore, it should be acknowledged that Vietnam maintains its legitimate relations with North Korea while participating in international efforts to curb the violations of the sanctions against the country. Vietnam's banking and trade sectors were earlier found to be vulnerable to the illicit activities of North Korea, while North Korea used international networks and intermediaries for its financial transactions.

Sources:

- U.S. Department of the Treasury. Testimony of Assistant Secretary Marshall S. Billingslea Before House Foreign Affairs Committee on Threat Posed by North Korea. 12 September 2017. Treasury
- U.S. Department of the Treasury. Treasury Sanctions Facilitators of DPRK IT Worker Fraud Targeting U.S. Businesses. Treasury
- U.S. Department of the Treasury. Announcement of Sanctions against North Korean Transportation, Mining, Energy, and Financial Services Industries and North Korean Government Officials and Organizations. Treasury

Topic 2:

The country of Vietnam has recorded instances of organ-trafficking networks, where brokers recruit sellers of kidneys. The Vietnamese authorities have described such networks as highly organized, with different people involved in recruiting both buyers and sellers, negotiating prices, arranging medical tests, and forging documents in order to legitimize the illegal operations.

A high-ranking officer of the Criminal Police Department of Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security gave his speech at the 2023 conference organized by the Vietnamese Ministry of Health about organ donation and the problem of organ trafficking. According to the officer, brokers charged recipients VND 800 million to 1 billion per kidney while sellers got only VND 200-250 million.

Academic literature also has recorded examples of the recruitment of vulnerable persons. A research done in 2021, which included participation of various governmental and non-governmental organizations of Vietnam, showed that traffickers target poor people and use Facebook and Zalo groups to arrange deals. One researcher told about an instance of kidney donation by a man to his daughter who suffered from cancer.

The government of Vietnam has also issued warnings regarding cross-border trafficking cases. The people from Vietnam are enticed by job offers abroad and then become easy prey to exploitation cases. There have been reports about such cases in which there was movement across borders, and there were claims that organ harvesting was attempted.

In other words, Vietnam is one country from which an illustration of an organ trafficking network can be drawn. This network includes all the aspects of social media recruitment, brokers, and fake documentation. This involves vulnerable individuals being lured as organ sellers and rich people paying money for organs.

Sources:

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