



Women Mobilizing
to End the War
KOREA PEACE NOW

Korea Peace Now Factsheet #3

The Humanitarian Impact of Sanctions on North Korea

Since North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in 2006, the UN Security Council has imposed nearly a dozen sanctions against the country, adding to unilateral U.S. sanctions. While advocates of sanctions may regard them as a peaceful alternative to military action, there is evidence that sanctions take a significant humanitarian toll on the North Korean people, restricting the work of NGOs, humanitarian agencies, and aid groups that provide a lifeline for some 13 million vulnerable North Koreans. In direct contravention of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, sanctions punish North Korean civilians for the actions of their government. Here's how sanctions harm ordinary North Koreans:

Sanctions hinder urgently needed humanitarian aid and could result in devastating long-term effects.

- According to a 2018 UNICEF report, 200,000 North Korean children already suffer from acute malnutrition, and sanctions put 60,000 of these vulnerable children at risk of starvation due to the disruption in the availability of humanitarian supplies caused by tightening sanctions.
- Unilateral US sanctions delay or outright block vital humanitarian shipments to the North Korean people. One NGO recently reported that it took them over a year and a half to ship 16 boxes of beans to the DPRK.
- Sanctions passed in 2017 prohibit the transport of any metal goods, significantly hampering the shipment of basic medical supplies. A shipment of reproductive health kits was subjected to significant delay because it contained aluminum steam sterilizers — the most important part of the kit.

Sanctions target North Korea's civilian economy and harm the most vulnerable members of its population.

- Current sanctions have the greatest impact not on the power elites who are the intended targets, but on the most vulnerable North Koreans: working-class families, particularly children and seniors living in remote areas with restricted access to medical supplies, food, and fuel for cooking and heating.
- Additionally, bans on exports and the dispatch of workers abroad impact the ability of ordinary citizens to support their livelihood. The ban on textile exports in particular is exerting a disproportionate effect on female employment, which represents the majority of the labor force in that sector.
- Sanctions on the fishing, garment and coal industries, coupled with South Korea's decision to close a joint factory complex employing more than 50,000 North Koreans, will deprive many people of income in an increasingly market-based economy.

Conclusion

The Korean War will not be resolved through more sanctions, military pressure, and isolation, but by building trust through dialogue and negotiation. A commitment to improving the already dire humanitarian situation in North Korea would go a long way toward demonstrating the U.S.'s sincere commitment to normalizing relations. Humanitarian issues must be decoupled from negotiations over North Korea's nuclear program, and, at a minimum, any sanctions must be modified to allow the timely delivery of humanitarian aid to those who need it the most.