

£DPRK (NORTH KOREA)

@WHAT HAPPENED TO CHO HO PYONG AND HIS FAMILY?

Cho Ho Pyong was born in 1936 in Japan to a Korean father and a Japanese mother. In 1954 he married a Japanese woman, Koike Hideko, and in February 1962 the couple travelled to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea), wishing to settle there. According to letters he wrote from North Korea to his relatives in Japan, Cho Ho Pyong became a lecturer in physiology at the Medical University in Hamhung City, a major city on the east coast of the Korean peninsula. In the mid-1960s for some unknown reason he appears to have come under official suspicion and in 1967 he wrote to his relatives in Japan telling them that he was on his way to a place of "re-education". This he said was an orchard in Hamgyong South Province, close to Hamhung City. Cho Ho Pyong's relatives in Japan never heard from him again. In 1973 they received a letter from Koike Hideko saying that she was living alone with her three children, a son, born in 1963 and two daughters, born in 1965 and 1966. After this letter the relatives did not hear from her again. They made several attempts to visit North Korea but permission was never granted. On one occasion in 1983 permission was granted and then withdrawn.

In June 1994 Amnesty International described the cases of Cho Ho Pyong and Koike Hideko in its report: *North Korea, New Information About Political Prisoners (ASA 24/05/94)*. In this report the organization expressed concern that for an unknown reason the couple may have been taken into detention or "disappeared" and it urged the government to publish information about the family's whereabouts.

In April 1995 North Korean Government officials told Amnesty International that Cho Ho Pyong, Koike Hideko, and their three children, were killed in 1974 while attempting to leave the country. They said that Cho Ho Pyong, serving a 20-year prison sentence on charges of "espionage", had escaped from a rehabilitation centre, entered a navy base and stolen a navy boat after killing its guard. He and his family were all killed as they tried to escape. The bodies were not recovered, according to the North Korean authorities.

The information about Cho Ho Pyong was given in April 1995 to an Amnesty International delegation visiting North Korea for discussions about human rights concerns. Officials of the Ministry of Public Security gave the delegates new information about reported prisoners of conscience and political prisoners whose cases had been raised by the organization. The officials said that many of these people had never been detained and that in other cases information provided by Amnesty International had been insufficient to identify the relevant individuals or to investigate their whereabouts.

In a small number of cases, including those of Cho Ho Pyong and Koike Hideko, the Ministry of Public Security provided additional information. Officials told Amnesty International that Cho Ho Pyong had entered North Korea in 1962 in order to carry out espionage on behalf of an unnamed foreign country. In 1967 he was arrested on charges of espionage and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment. He was held in Ryongsong District, close to Hamhung City. On 23 October 1974 at 4.00pm while he was working close to the perimeter of the camp, he escaped. Then, according to officials, he went to his wife's house in Choyang-ri, Chongpyong county and on 24 October at 2.45am the entire family walked to a nearby port where several navy boats were docked. Cho Ho Pyong used a knife to kill one sailor who was guarding the boats and stole the man's automatic rifle. Cho Ho Pyong and his family then took a fishing boat but were fired on by navy officers¹ as they tried to make their escape. All members of the family were killed. Furthermore, the five bodies were never recovered.

In July 1995 North Korea's Institute for the Research of Human Rights sent Amnesty International supplementary information about the case. The letter explained that Cho Ho Pyong and his wife had planned the escape in advance through her visits to her husband and that the short distances between his place of detention, his wife's house and the port in Chonpyong district had enabled the family to attempt to leave North Korea just ten hours after Cho Ho Pyong's escape. Some excerpts from their letter, relating specifically to the family's deaths, are quoted below:

"As has already been mentioned, the patrol vessel repeatedly sent warnings to stop as soon as it detected the ship with Cho Ho Pyong. However he didn't obey them and, as the vessel was approaching nearer this ship, Cho Ho Pyong began firing with the rifle he seized. As a result one soldier was heavily wounded in the right side of his chest and fell down.

Cho Ho Pyong should have obeyed the warnings of the people's army and surrendered, but continued firing. Indignant at the reckless acts of Cho Ho Pyong, the soldiers of the people's army could not but open counter fire. The power of the weapons of our people's army has already been known to the world. The reason for not being able to mention here what kind of weapons the soldiers used may be well understandable. It may also be well guessed what might have happened to the ship and the people that received counter fire from our people's army soldiers.. . .

[the soldiers] had approached near the ship and watched it with nightglasses, to identify them. Through the distinguishing of faces which was conducted with the photos of various people,

¹The navy is part of the Korean People's Army

including Cho Ho Pyong and his family members, it was confirmed at once that the people in the ship were Cho Ho Pyong and his family members.

On the basis of the compiled materials, our investigation organ clarified that the people killed to death by our people's army soldiers were none other than Cho Ho Pyong, who had been arrested while conducting espionage acts against our Republic, and his family members. . ."

Amnesty International welcomed the North Korean authorities' oral and written responses to its concerns on this case. The organization believes however that the official account of the deaths of Cho Ho Pyong and his family are still unsatisfactory and continues to seek further information on points which have remained unclarified .

According to the official account, on the night of the escape Cho Ho Pyong, his wife, and three young children walked to a closed navy base situated close to their home. They were able to enter the base without attracting attention, to kill a guard and to board a boat. This seems implausible, given the level of security which can be expected at such a naval base. There is no official explanation as to why the five bodies were not recovered. According to the official account, the bodies "sunk" and could not be recovered, in spite of the fact that the navy conducted a search and the incident occurred close to the coast.

The North Korean authorities state that Cho Ho Pyong and his family were clearly identified and shot to death as they tried to escape. Amnesty International is concerned that soldiers opened fire and killed three children, who had clearly been identified as children beforehand.

This official account bears some similarity to that given on the case of Shibata Kozo (another former political prisoner) and his family. In June 1994 North Korean Government officials told Amnesty International that Shibata Kozo and his entire family were killed in a train crash in March 1990, just two months after he had finished serving a 26-year prison sentence on charges of espionage. In this case too there was no documentary evidence of the deaths and on the basis of facts given, Amnesty International feared that Shibata Kozo and his family may have died in other circumstances.

Through its dialogue with Amnesty International, and its ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the North Korean Government has recognized that human rights are an international responsibility. However, international human rights mechanisms can only be effective in a climate of openness and accountability. Amnesty International believes it is incumbent upon the North Korean Government to provide detailed and convincing information about human rights issues, particularly as free access to the country by independent observers is not permitted.

Amnesty International is asking the North Korean Government to provide the following supplementary information about the cases of Cho Ho Pyong, Koike Hideko and their children which would confirm the circumstances of their deaths:

- Information about the reasons for Cho Ho Pyong's arrest, the charges against him and the date and outcome of his trial.
- The reason why repeated requests for information from the couple's relatives in Japan and from Amnesty International remained unanswered.
- Documentary evidence about the alleged incident, including details of eye-witness accounts.
- The results of any official investigation into the incident, in particular into the killing of three young children by officers of the Korean People's Army;
- Copies of the victims' death certificates or other official notification of the deaths.

The North Korean Government does not normally permit international organizations to visit North Korea for human rights research. Amnesty International has twice visited North Korea for official discussions on its concerns. On its most recent visit, in April 1995, North Korean Government officials told Amnesty International that some 1000 prisoners are held in three "rehabilitation centres" and that those convicted of "anti-state" offences are held at Hyongsan centre in the capital Pyongyang.

Amnesty International has also obtained information on human rights issues from independent sources outside the country. In a series of reports the organization has expressed concern to the North Korean Government about cases of unacknowledged detention, reports of torture and ill-treatment and use of the death penalty in North Korea ².

²See *North Korea: Summary of Amnesty International's concerns* (ASA 24/04/93), issued in October 1993; *North Korea: New information about political prisoners* (ASA 24/05/95), issued in June 1994; *North Korea: Concern about the fate of Shibata Kozo* (ASA 24/07/94), issued in September 1994.

Map of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)