

30 JANUARY 1998

AI INDEX: ASA 25/02/98

South Korea: Human rights activist must be released

As the trial of human rights activist Suh Jun-sik opens in Seoul today, Amnesty International is once again calling for his release.

"Suh Jun-sik has been arrested and put on trial for holding a film festival and for opposing government policies," Amnesty International said today. "The protection and promotion of human rights in South Korea will be hampered if human rights defenders have to work under threat of arrest and imprisonment."

The main charge against Suh Jun-sik, Director of the *Sarangbang* human rights group, relates to a human rights film festival organized by *Sarangbang* in October 1997. The group did not accept government censorship of the films shown and the authorities claimed the screening of one film "Red Hunt" was a violation of the National Security Law.

The authorities also said Suh Jun-sik owned books which "benefit" North Korea. In addition, as a former long-term political prisoner, he was accused of failing to report to the police about his overseas trips, including a visit to Amnesty International in May 1997.

Suh Jun-sik has also met government censorship behind bars. Articles about his case have been cut out of his daily newspapers and he has not been allowed to read his own organization's human rights publication.

Amnesty International is urging President-elect Kim Dae-jung to initiate human rights reforms to bring South Korean law and practice into line with international human rights standards. It also urges him to promote human rights work and to encourage rather than stifle the activities of human rights organizations in South Korea.

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