
Amnesty International

REPUBLIC OF KOREA (SOUTH KOREA)

Dozens Arrested As Government Cracks Down on “Leftist Ideology”

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At least 28 people have been arrested under the National Security Law during the month of May, marking a new government crack down on leftist and alleged pro-North Korean activities. Most of the arrests took place in the last two weeks of the month. Most of those arrested belong to groups with left wing political ideas and appear to have been detained solely on account of their ideology, which is alleged to be pro-North Korean. The arrests came soon after government ministers had made public statements about the danger of communist and leftist ideology on university campuses.

Amnesty International is calling for the release of all those held for the non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association, including those arrested in May and dozens of others arrested during the first five months of 1996. The organization has renewed its appeal to the South Korean Government to amend the National Security Law so that it conforms to international standards on freedom of expression and association.

According to press reports, at a ministerial meeting on 7 May Prime Minister Lee Soo-sung said that leftist ideology among students had reached a “critical point” and must be dealt with firmly. Ministers present at the meeting, including the Minister of Home Affairs and the Vice Minister of Education, apparently agreed to crack down on student groups which attempt to contact North Korea and those who seek to spread leftist ideology through the distribution of written material, videos and via computer communications networks. Amnesty International is concerned that these statements were followed by new arrests of students and others under the National Security Law and that arrests may continue.

Ministers are also reported to have decided that students and others with leftist ideas should be prevented from holding unauthorized demonstrations. Amnesty International is concerned that this should not be used as an excuse to prevent such groups from exercising their right to organize peaceful demonstrations.

Soon after the meeting on 7 May there were reports of new arrests under the National Security Law. On 16 May 13 students and army conscripts, including Son Yong-oh, Cho Yong-su and Lee Su-yong, were arrested for joining an organization called *Chonhakryon* (National Student Political Union), which was said by the authorities to be pro-North Korean. The authorities said that this was a “socialist workers’ party” which had been established in 1994 and that the 13 had been involved in unauthorized rallies of students and workers throughout the country.

Others arrested in late May and accused of belonging to leftist and pro-North Korean groups include Myong Won-chang of Sungkyunkwan University and Hyon In-suk(f) of Sung-i Womens’ College in Seoul who were arrested on 23 and 27 May and accused of belonging to *Chunhaktooryon* (National Patriotic Student Group). They also include Soh Mi-on(f), a nursery school teacher and

Hwang Yun-mi(f) a language teacher, who were arrested in Seoul on 28 May on charges of belonging to *Nasachong* (Young Patriotic Group) and of publishing and disseminating pro-North Korean literature. Outside Seoul, five students at Kyungbuk University in Taegu city were arrested on 29 May on suspicion of joining *Sanomaeng* (Socialist Workers' League).

For many years Amnesty International has called for the amendment of South Korea's National Security Law. The law provides long prison terms for people who are merely exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association, without use or advocacy of violence. In several ill-defined clauses it punishes "anti-state" activities and those which "benefit" the enemy (North Korea). It is also used against those who make unauthorized visits to North Korea or who have had unauthorized contacts with North Koreans. The most widely-used clause, Article 7, provides up to seven years' imprisonment for those who "praise" and "benefit" North Korea "with the knowledge" that it will damage state security. In practice, the majority of people arrested under the National Security Law pose no threat to state security and the law is used in an arbitrary fashion. The government's recent decision to clamp down on leftist ideology suggest that this will continue to be the case.

Please send letters and faxes in English, your own language or Korean:

- Expressing concern at new arrests under the National Security Law following government statements on the need to crack down on leftist ideology in South Korea;
- Calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all those held for the non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association;
- Calling for the National Security Law to be amended in accordance with international standards relating to freedom of expression and association.

Write to:

President Kim Young-sam

The Blue House, 1 Sejong-no
Chongno-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea
Fax: +82 2 770 0253

- Prime Minister Lee Soo-sung

Office of the Prime Minister
77 Sejong-no, Chongno-gu
Seoul 110-760, Republic of Korea
Fax: +82 2 739 5830

- Mr Ahn Woo-man, Minister of Justice

Ministry of Justice, 1 Chungang-dong, Kwachon-myon,
Shihung-gun, Kyonggi Province, Republic of Korea
Fax: +82 2 504 3337

- and to diplomatic representatives of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in your own country.

KEYWORDS: POLITICAL ACTIVIST1 / PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE / STUDENTS / TEACHERS / WOMEN / MILITARY AS VICTIMS / BANNING / CENSORSHIP /

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 8DJ, UNITED KINGDOM