
amnesty international

£SOUTH KOREA

@Imprisoned publisher Choi Il-bung

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Choi Il-bung, aged 36, is serving a two-year sentence under the National Security Law for alleged "anti-state" activities. Amnesty International believes that Choi Il-bung is held solely for the non-violent exercise of his rights of freedom of expression and association. It is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

During the 1980s Choi Il-bung studied religious sociology at Claremont College in California, USA. He then returned to South Korea and taught briefly at Hanguk University of Foreign Studies. In January 1989 he established a small publishing company called *Shyngpyongron*, specialising in socialist publications. The company went bankrupt and closed down in June 1990. In October 1990 Choi Il-bung and several friends established International Socialists, a small group which published socialist books and articles and held study sessions. At least three editorial staff members of the group were arrested in March 1992 and Choi Il-bung is believed to have gone into hiding. He was arrested in September 1992.

Choi Il-bung was charged under Article 7 of the National Security Law. He was accused of publishing socialist material, including several well-known socialist works, and articles about reunification (between North and South Korea) and the environment. He was also accused of recruiting new members to International Socialists and participating in study and discussion sessions. The books he has published include a range of well-known socialist publications including: *Permanent Revolution* by Leon Trotsky, *Lenin's Last Struggle* by Moshe Lewin, *How Marxism Works* by Tony Cliff and *Market Plan and Democracy* by Catherine Samary.

The National Security Law gives the authorities wide powers to punish "anti-state" activities and contacts with "anti-state" organizations (including North Korea). The law has often been used to imprison those who have disagreed with government policy or who have expressed support for North Korean or communist/socialist views. Many members of South Korean socialist groups have been imprisoned on similar charges and were excluded from an amnesty in February 1993 to mark the inauguration of President Kim Young-sam.

Amnesty International believes that Choi Il-bung was imprisoned solely because of his socialist views and activities and that he did not use or advocate the use of violence. During his trial, Choi Il-bung told the court that International Socialists did not support terrorism. The charge sheet against Choi Il-bung indicates that he had refused to associate with people who sought change through agitation and that he favoured change through publication instead.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the South Korean Government to amend the National Security Law by removing provisions which punish non-violent political activities with imprisonment. It is urging the new government of President Kim Young-sam to make this an urgent priority.

Please send appeals to the South Korean Minister of Justice seeking:

- The immediate and unconditional release of Choi Il-bung;
- The amendment of the National Security Law, removing provisions which punish non-violent political activities;

APPEALS TO:

Mr Kim Doo-hee, Minister of Justice
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1 Chungang-dong
Kwachon-myon, Shihung-gun
Kyonggi Province,
Republic of Korea.
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Copies to:

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