

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 134/96

Mass arrests / fear of ill-treatment

20 August 1996

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

(SOUTH KOREA) Over 3000 students

Over 3000 students were arrested by riot police on 20 August following several days of violence on the campus of Yonsei University in Seoul. Amnesty International is concerned at reports that riot policemen beat students as they were being arrested and driven away in police vans. There are also fears that the students may face further ill-treatment during police questioning. The organization is appealing to the authorities to ensure that all detained students are protected from further police ill-treatment and that they are given access to families, legal counsel and, where necessary, appropriate medical attention.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Violence between police and students erupted when government authorities banned a student festival at Yonsei University, apparently on the grounds that it was pro-North Korean. The festival had been organized by *Hanchongyon* (the national federation of student councils) to mark the 15 August anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese rule. Similar student events are held each year in August and are sometimes banned by the government because the students' demands are similar to those made by North Korea. The students were demanding reunification with the North, the abolition of the National Security Law and the withdrawal of 37,000 US troops from South Korea. On 14 August, the authorities sent thousands of riot policemen to break up the rally. Several hundred students and policemen were injured in days of violence, as police cut off supplies of food and medicine to the students. On 20 August, riot policemen stormed the campus and arrested thousands of students. A total of 5,600 students have been arrested since the disturbances began.

Amnesty International does not condone the use of violence by student demonstrators during several days of rioting at Yonsei University. The organization's main concern is that the rights of detainees should now be protected, in accordance with international human rights standards. It is also concerned at reports that unarmed students were ill-treated in the course of arrest.

Amnesty International believes that the authorities' decision to ban the demonstration was politically motivated and may have caused the increased tension which led to the violence.

Detainees in South Korea are routinely deprived of sleep and sometimes beaten during police interrogation. They are sometimes denied prompt access to families and lawyers.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express or airmail letters in English, Korean or your own language:

- expressing concern at reports that students were kicked and beaten by police as they were arrested on 20 August;
- urging the authorities to ensure that all those detained are protected from police ill-treatment and that they are given regular access to families, legal counsel and any necessary medical attention;

- urging the authorities to release any students held for the non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association.

APPEALS TO:

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Salutation: Dear Minister

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COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 September 1996.