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£SOUTH KOREA

@National Security Law used to Silence Singing Troupe

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Five members of the singing troupe *Heemangsae* (Bird of Hope) are currently on trial under the National Security Law. Amnesty International believes that they are prisoners of conscience, held for the non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release. It is also concerned at reports that some of the prisoners were ill-treated during interrogation.

Heemangsae singing troupe was established in 1992 by activists and students in the Pusan area. It was planning to stage a musical called *Shining Morning*, written by one of its members and based on the poem *Black Mountain Red Blood* by Oh Bong-ok. This poem has been published and sold in bookshops in South Korea. The five members currently on trial have been charged under Article 7 of the National Security for trying to stage a musical containing pro-North Korean elements and for sending parts of the poem *Black Mountain Red Blood* via a computer communications network.

At least 13 members of *Heemangsae* have been arrested and questioned under the National Security Law since February 1994, including the company's director, the author of *Shining Morning* and several of the company's lead singers. Some were later released. The first arrests took place in late February when police searched the company's offices and confiscated copies of its new musical *Shining Morning*. More members, including two lead singers, were detained on 24 March as they were protesting against the arrests of their colleagues. Despite protests from international and domestic human rights groups, three more singers were detained on 15 April, apparently for continuing with the company's plans to stage *Shining Morning*.

Three of the *Heemangsae* members currently on trial were arrested on 22 February in Pusan City. They are **Kim Tae-il**, 30-year-old Chairperson of *Heemangsae* **Cho Jae-hyun**, 27-year-old student and author of the musical *Shining Morning* and **Lee Chang-ryol**, 30-year-old Planning Director of *Heemangsae*. The two others, **Lee Yoon-jung**, aged 26, and **Lee Sang-yeop**, also aged 26, are female singers who were arrested on 24 March during a peaceful demonstration to protest about the arrest of their colleagues. The prisoners were arrested and questioned by members of the Security Division of the Seoul Police Administration and are currently held in Seoul Prison. Their trial open at Seoul District Court on 13 May. In an opening statement, Kim Tae-il told the court that he had been stripped, threatened and beaten by police investigators.

The National Security Law, designed to protect state security, has often been used to curtail the rights to freedom of expression and association in South Korea. Its vague provisions prohibit activities deemed to be "praising" or "siding with" North Korea and enable the authorities to use the law to clamp down on people with socialist ideas or views considered to be similar to those of the North Korean Government. For many years Amnesty International and other human rights groups have urged the South Korean Government to amend the National Security Law so that it complies with international human rights standards on freedom of expression and association.

In recent months several other people have been charged for sending allegedly pro-North Korean information via a computer network in violation of the National Security Law. On 12 March senior prosecutors are reported to have decided to crackdown on the dissemination of leftist ideology through computer communications systems and the head of the Public Security Department of the Prosecutor General's Office is reported to have said: "There is a strong indication that the North is continuing to harbour ambitions of communizing the entire Korean peninsula and leftists are utilizing more discreet methods of spreading their belief". Amnesty International is concerned that the National Security Law is being used yet again to curtail the activities of people who are peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Lee Sang-yeop (left) and Lee Yoon-jung (right), taken shortly before their arrest on 24 March 1994

RECOMMENDED ACTION: please send immediate letters and faxes:

- ◆ expressing concern that imprisoned *Heemangsae* members are held in violation of their rights to freedom of expression and association;
- ◆ calling for the immediate and unconditional release of *Heemangsae* members currently on trial on charges under the National Security law

APPEALS TO:

◆ President Kim Young-sam

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Seoul, Republic of Korea Fax: +822 770 0253

◆ Mr Kim Doo-hee, Minister of Justice

Ministry of Justice
1 Chungang-dong
Kwachon-myon, Shihung-gun
Kyonggi Province, Republic of Korea Fax: +822 504 3337

COPIES TO:

◆ Chief Judge, Seoul District Criminal Court

1701-1 Socho-dong, Socho-gu
Seoul, Republic of Korea

- ◆ Diplomatic representatives of South Korea in your country

This appeal has been sent to all KOTARAN coordinators for action.

KEYWORDS: PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE / MUSICIANS / TORTURE / ILL-TREATMENT / STUDENTS /
WOMEN / DEMONSTRATIONS / CENSORSHIP / LEGISLATION / PHOTOGRAPHS /

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