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## **Eight South Koreans convicted for breaching National Security Law**

Amnesty International has condemned the conviction of eight members of the Socialist Workers League (SWL), a small association that espouses socialism. All eight men were found guilty under Article 7.1 of the National Security Law (NSL) for ‘propagating or instigating a rebellion against the State’.

Among the eight is Oh Se-chul, a professor emeritus and founding member of the SWL, who was convicted for one-and-a-half years, suspended for three years. The other seven all received sentences ranging from one to one-and-a-half years, suspended from two to three years. All of them intend to appeal the decision.

The SWL was founded in 2008 and calls on the working class to build a ‘socialist state’. The SWL has about 70 members and has been seeking to register as a political party. The organization sought to promote itself and socialism by attending various demonstrations and distributing pamphlets.

“It is hard to see how eight men distributing pamphlets can constitute a genuine threat to national security. These men have been convicted solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression and association. The conviction must be overturned,” said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Deputy Director.

The NSL contains clauses that prohibit ‘anti-state’, ‘enemy-benefitting’ and ‘espionage’ activities but does not clearly define them. Amnesty International believes this law has been used as a form of censorship, to punish people for publishing and distributing material expressing views that oppose the positions or policies of the government.

“The NSL has long been used as a tool to silence dissent and to arbitrarily prosecute individuals who are peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association. To prevent further human rights violations this law needs to be abolished or fundamentally reformed to bring it in line with international standards,” said Catherine Baber.

Amnesty International recognises that South Korea has serious security concerns with regard to North Korea. However, security concerns should never be used to deny people the right to exercise their human rights, in particular the right to express their views peacefully.

In 2008, the Seoul District Court twice rejected requests to issue detention warrants for several members of the SWL. The judge rejected the requests noting that the activities of the SWL represented no substantial threat to the security of the country.

In August 2009, eight members of SWL including Professor Oh, were charged for violating Article 7 of the NSL. The unsuccessful attempts in 2008 to get a detention warrant had included charges under Article 3 (forming anti-state groups) as well as Article 7 of the NSL.