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## **North Korea: Amnesty International calls for release of detained US journalists**

Amnesty International today called on the North Korean government to release two US journalists held at a detention facility in Pyongyang, unless it can guarantee that they are prosecuted for recognizably criminal offences in proceedings that meet international fair trial standards.

Laura Ling and Euna Lee were arrested by North Korean officials on 17 March near the Tumen River, which separates North Korea and China. It is not yet clear whether the two women had crossed the border into North Korea or if they were in China when arrested.

“It is highly unlikely that these two journalists will receive a fair trial in North Korea, given the judicial system’s total lack of independence or transparency,” said Roseann Rife, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Deputy Programme Director.

On 30 March, the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) stated that the authorities had enough evidence and statements from the journalists to indict them on charges of “illegal entry” and “hostile acts”.

“These two journalists were investigating human rights abuses of North Korean women. If convicted, they could be imprisoned for up to 10 years and subjected to forced labour in appalling prison conditions,” said Roseann Rife.

Laura Ling and Euna Lee both work for the California-based Current TV media venture in San Francisco.

Two of their colleagues escaped arrest. Their cameraman, Mitch Koss, was deported from China and their Korean-Chinese guide is reportedly being detained by the Chinese authorities.

The US does not have formal diplomatic ties with North Korea and has been communicating with its authorities through the Swedish mission in Pyongyang. This weekend, the journalists were allowed to meet a Swedish diplomat.

Amnesty International said that as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the North Korean authorities are obliged, among other things, to ensure that both journalists:

- are tried in a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law;
- have access to a lawyer of their choice;
- have the right of appeal, if convicted; and
- are not subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Amnesty International also said that the two women should have continued access to consular assistance and proper medical care.

“In view of North Korea’s dismal record on human rights generally – and fair trial rights in particular – release would be a more realistic way of ensuring that Laura Ling and Euna Lee’s rights are protected,” said Roseann Rife.