

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 25/07/97

24 January 1997

Further information (2) on EXTRA 02/97 (ASA 25/03/97, 9 January 1997) and follow-up (ASA 25/05/97 of 16 January) - Fear of arrests as prisoners of conscience / fear of mass ill-treatment

REPUBLIC OF KOREA Five trade union leaders released
(SOUTH KOREA) Arrest warrants against 15 others suspended

On 21 January the authorities suspended arrest warrants against 15 trade union leaders and withdrew some 1,000 riot police from outside Myongdong Cathedral in Seoul where the seven top leaders had taken refuge. Five others who had been arrested were released on 23 January. President Kim Young-sam agreed to reconsider controversial labour and security legislation in discussion at the National Assembly. This legislation, passed in a secretive parliamentary session in late December, had provoked mass protests and strike action in recent weeks.

The government appears to have acted in response to domestic and international pressure. In South Korea thousands of workers took strike action and there were mass protest rallies involving workers, students, teachers, writers, lawyers, journalists, Catholic priests and Buddhist monks and nuns. An international trade union delegation went to South Korea in a demonstration of support.

On 23 January the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) issued a statement saying that the new legislation "does not fully meet the commitments made by the Korean Government concerning freedom of association and collective bargaining."

Opposition groups in South Korea acknowledged the government's decision but called for further concessions. The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) demanded the withdrawal of new legislation and the cancellation of arrest warrants against its leaders, calling on members to take strike action every Wednesday. The Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) also called on members to join protests against the new legislation. On 24 January a prosecution official is reported to have said that the arrest warrants against 15 KCTU leaders would be cancelled.

Amnesty International welcomes the government's decision to reconsider the labour legislation and Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP) Act and not to arrest trade union leaders. However, Amnesty International urges the government to ensure that any revised legislation is drafted in accordance with international standards on freedom of expression and association. It urges the government take steps to ensure that political suspects detained by the ANSP are protected from human rights violations.

In a related development, Amnesty International has learnt that 13 political prisoners were ill-treated in Anyang Prison after they went on hunger strike to protest against the new legislation. On 29 December the prisoners are reported to have been tied up, held in solitary confinement and denied access to their families. In some cases this punishment lasted for at least one week and possibly longer.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Letters or faxes may be sent in English, your own language or Korean:

- welcoming the government's decision to reconsider the recent revisions to labour legislation and the ANSP Act but urging the government to ensure that any revised legislation is drafted in conformity with international standards on freedom of expression and association;
- urging the government to take steps to ensure that political suspects detained by the ANSP are protected from human rights violations.

APPEALS TO:

1) President Kim Young-sam

The Blue House

1 Sejong-no

Chongno-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea

Fax: +822 770 0253

Salutation: Dear President

2) Minister of Justice

Mr Ahn Woo-mahn

1 Chungang-dong

Kwachon-myon

Shihung-gun

Kyonggi-do, Republic of Korea

Fax: +822 503 9711

Salutation: Dear Minister

3) Minister of Labour

Mr Jin Nyum

1 Chungang-dong

Kwachon-myon

Shihung-gun

Kyonggi-do, Republic of Korea

Fax: +822 503 9711

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

OECD

Mr Donald Johnston, Secretary-General, OECD

2 rue André Pascal

75775 Paris Cedex 16

France

Fax: +33 1 45 24 8500

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 21 February 1997.