Over 5800 South Korean students were arrested between 12 and 22 August following a violent confrontation with riot police on the campus of Yonsei University in Seoul. On 20 August alone over 3000 students were arrested. While not condoning the use of violence by students, Amnesty International is concerned about numerous reports of human rights violations committed by the police during a surprisingly harsh crackdown. These included beatings, threats and sexual intimidation in the course of arrest and police interrogation. Amnesty International is also concerned that the crackdown may entail further arrests for non-violent political activities since the government has declared its determination to root out “pro-North Korean” and “leftist” elements in student and labour groups.

**Background information**

Violence between police and students erupted when government authorities banned a student festival at Yonsei University, 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. The students were demanding reunification with North Korea, the abolition of the National Security Law and the withdrawal of 37,000 US troops from South Korea. Their demands are unpalatable to the South Korean authorities because they are seen to be similar to those made by the North Korean Government.

The students defied the ban and went ahead with the festival and the authorities responded by sending thousands of riot policemen to break it up. Hundreds of students and policemen were injured during six days of violence and one policeman died.

Between 12 and 20 August the authorities employed around 20,000 policemen to suppress the demonstration at Yonsei University and used 12 helicopters to drop tear gas on the students. They blocked all exits from the university campus and refused to allow the delivery of food and medicine for injured students. On 19 August the water supply was cut off. As a consequence of this blockade many students suffered from dehydration and diarrhoea and in some cases the authorities refused to allow ambulances to enter Yonsei University to transport injured students. Over 1000 students are reported to have sustained burns and blisters from exposure to tear gas.

On 20 August riot policemen stormed the campus and arrested thousands of students. While many of those arrested have now been released, over 400 have been indicted on charges of violence and illegal demonstration. Several dozen have also been charged under the National Security Law which punishes pro-North Korean activities. Others are still under investigation and arrests continued during the last week of August.
Ill-treatment during arrest and interrogation

Amnesty International received numerous reports that students were beaten during arrest. Reports of ill-treatment were received from eye-witnesses and victims and police brutality was filmed by news reporters on the scene.

Amnesty International emphasizes that it does not condone the use of violence by student protesters. However, the organization is concerned about the reported ill-treatment of unarmed students in the course of arrest and further ill-treatment during interrogation. It is concerned that ill-treatment is likely to continue if there are further arrests.

Some of those detained had no apparent connection with the demonstration. On 16 August Lee Seungjoon, a student of Kyonghee University, was detained by a group of policemen as he was returning home from a part-time job. He said to have been beaten on the head as he was transported to Sudaemoon Police Station. He was released without charge two days later. On 18 August, Myoung-hyo, a student of Hanshin University, was detained and beaten as he was waiting for a subway train near to Yonsei University. During police interrogation a police officer is alleged to have hit him again, urging him to confess that he had participated in the demonstration. He was also released without charge on 20 August. Two unnamed female students were detained close to Yonsei University as they were walking in the street. As they climbed into the police bus, policemen are reported to have shouted sexual insults and touched their breasts.

In dozens of cases unarmed students were beaten with police batons and kicked as they were being detained on 20 and 21 August. Some said they had been forced to crawl over pieces of broken glass. Some female students reported being forced to stand in a line with their hands above their heads as riot policemen shouted sexual insults, touched their breasts and slapped their faces. One student reported hearing policemen shout insults and threaten to rape the students.

Yang Han-seung, a student of Dongkuk University, said that he was beaten by about 10 policemen as he was arrested on 20 August. Cho Hyoung-kyu, a student of Seoul National University, said that his teeth were broken as he was kicked in the face by policemen. Several others reported being kicked and hit with batons as they were arrested, some requiring hospital treatment.

The students arrested on 20 August were initially detained in two girls' schools and then taken to over 30 police stations throughout Seoul. All were reportedly denied access to their families until arrest warrants were issued on 22 August. Many reported that they were beaten as a means of making them confess that they had used violence. Two students said that they had been forced to pose for a photograph, wielding a metal pipe. One female student said that police had threatened to strip her unless she confessed to using violence.

Fear of further arrest and ill-treatment

Since the mass arrests on 20 August police have arrested hundreds of students at universities throughout the country and have reportedly confiscated steel pipes and fire bombs. They also confiscated leaflets and other printed material deemed to support North Korea. Amnesty International is concerned that some students may have been detained under the National Security Law merely for belonging to Hanchongnyon, which has now been outlawed as a pro-North Korean body. It is also concerned that a number of recent government statements point to a new crackdown on freedom of expression and association, which may be extended to other groups of activists and workers. President Kim Young-sam is reported to have defined the activities of Hanchongnyon as a “pro-North Korean guerilla operation”. Officials are reported to have said that “leftist forces” had infiltrated labour groups, thereby suggesting that they may also be included in the current crackdown.

Hundreds of people have been detained under the National Security Law during 1996, mostly for non-violent offences deemed to “praise” and “benefit” North Korea. For many years Amnesty
International has called for an amendment to the law so that the rights to freedom of expression and association are protected. The organization also has long-standing concerns about police ill-treatment of detainees - including beatings and sleep deprivation. It has urged the authorities to enforce practical measures to ensure that all detainees are protected from ill-treatment.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Please send letters and faxes:

• expressing concern at reports that students were kicked and beaten by police as they were arrested and during interrogation;
• urging the authorities to ensure that all detainees are protected from ill-treatment in accordance with international standards;
• Calling for the release of those held for non-violent activities under the National Security Law.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) President Kim Young-sam,
The Blue House, 1 Sejong-no, Chongno-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea, Fax: +82 2 770 0253

2) Mr Ahn Woo-man, Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice, 1 Chungang-dong, Kwachon-myon, Shihung-gun, Kyonggi Province, Republic of Korea
Fax: +82 2 504 3337

3) Mr Park Il-yong, Director
National Police Administration
209 Mi Ku-dong, Sudamoon-gu
Choonno-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea
Fax: +82 2 720 2686 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

-diplomatic representatives of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in your country.

• *This appeal has been sent to KOTARAN Coordinators for quick action by groups.*

**KEYWORDS:** STUDENTS1 / TORTURE/ILL-TREATMENT1 / MASS ARREST1 / INCOMMUNICADO DETENTION / CONFESSIONS / SEXUAL HARASSMENT / ILL-HEALTH / BANNING / WOMEN / POLICE / DEMONSTRATIONS / ANNIVERSARIES

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 8DJ, UNITED KINGDOM