
amnesty international

£Republic of Korea (South Korea)

@Appeal for the Release of Sok Tal-yun

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Sok Tal-yun, sentenced to life imprisonment under the National Security Law, has already spent 15 years in prison. Amnesty International believes that he was convicted after an unfair trial, largely on the basis of a confession extracted under torture. Sok Tal-yun's case is similar to that of dozens of other prisoners convicted under previous governments after trials which did not conform to international standards for fairness. Amnesty International is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Sok Tal-yun was born on Chin Island, off the southwest coast of Korea. He studied agriculture and commerce in Seoul city but returned to Chin Island when the Korean war broke out in 1950. Between 1960 and 1969 he worked as a policeman in Seoul and then returned to Chin Island to cultivate seaweed.

On 21 August 1980 Sok Tal-yun was arrested by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, KCIA, (later renamed the Agency for National Security Planning, ANSP). He was held at its headquarters in Seoul for 47 days, during which time he was denied access to lawyers and his family and tortured. Amnesty International has detailed testimony of the torture inflicted on Sok Tal-yun which included beatings, water torture, sexual assault and sleep deprivation.

Sok Tal-yun was accused and convicted of espionage for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and sentenced to life imprisonment. The specific charges were that he had passed state secrets to a North Korean agent called Park Yang Min and recruited another person as a spy. Park Yang Min was a relative whom Sok Tal-yun had not seen since the Korean War broke out (millions of people were separated from friends and family during the Korean war and the continued division of the Korean peninsula means that most have been unable to make contact since then.)

Sok Tal-yun appears to have been convicted largely on the basis of his own confession and that of one other person who later withdrew his testimony, claiming that it had been extracted under torture. In September 1982 Sok Tal-yun applied for a retrial, but his application was rejected. Under South Korean law it is extremely difficult to satisfy the criteria required in order to obtain a new trial.

This case is similar to dozens of others who were convicted of espionage and sentenced to long prison terms under the National Security Law during the 1970s and 1980s. There are many reports that these prisoners were held incommunicado for lengthy periods and convicted on the basis of confessions obtained under torture. Amnesty International is urging the South Korean Government to review all such cases. In January 1995 the South Korean Government ratified the UN Convention Against Torture, thus committing itself to order a "prompt and impartial investigation" when there are reasonable grounds to believe that torture has taken place (Article 12).

Under the National Security Law any unauthorized contact with North Korea may be defined as "espionage" and any information deemed useful to North Korea may be defined as a "state secret". Amnesty International has ascertained that many prisoners convicted of espionage have in fact been imprisoned for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association.

Sok Tal-yun, now aged 64, is now held in Chonju Prison and has become an accomplished calligrapher. His wife and four children live in Seoul.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send letters and faxes:

- ◆ *expressing concern at reports that Sok Tal-yun was tried unfairly, on the basis of a confession extracted under torture;*
- ◆ *calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Sok Tal-yun.*

Appeals to:

◆ President Kim Young-sam
The Blue House
1 Sejong-no, Chongno-gu, Seoul
Republic of Korea Fax: +822 770 0253

◆ Mr Ahn Woo-man, Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
1 Chungang-dong
Kwachon-myon, Shihung-gun, Kyonggi Province
Republic of Korea Fax: +822 504 3337

- ◆ *and to diplomatic representatives of South Korea in your country.*

This is one of a series of appeals, sent to South Korea action file groups for action

KEYWORDS: LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT / TRIALS / CONFESSIONS /
TORTURE/ILL-TREATMENT / INCOMMUNICADO DETENTION / POLICE AS VICTIMS / FARMERS
/ ESPIONAGE / ARTISTS / PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE /

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