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# *amnesty international*

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## £SOUTH KOREA

### @The case of Son Pyong-son

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Amnesty International is concerned about Son Pyong-son, a 53-year-old former politician who is now serving a life term under the National Security Law. It is calling for a full and independent investigation into reports that he was tortured severely during interrogation and believes that he may be a prisoner of conscience.

Son Pyong-son studied political science at Pusan University. He later took up floriculture as a trade and in 1980 he became President of the National Association of Floriculture. In 1990 he joined the *Minjung* Party (People's Party) and became Chairman of the party's reunification committee. At this time he also played an active part in peace and anti-nuclear activities. The *Minjung* Party was disbanded in March 1992 after it failed to win any seats in the parliamentary election.

On 26 September 1992 Son Pyong-son was arrested by six or seven officials of the Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP). They did not have a warrant of arrest and did not inform his family that he had been arrested. He said that he was taken to the ANSP interrogation facility, forced to wear a military uniform and questioned for 20 days about his alleged contacts with North Korea. He said he was beaten by teams of interrogators over a period of several days and forced to do repeated and strenuous physical exercises such as squatting with his arms stretched out, standing on his head and standing on his hands. He was only permitted a few hours of sleep each day. On several occasions during his interrogation he was treated by a doctor who apparently took his blood pressure and gave him injections. He was also threatened and insulted by interrogators who called him "spy Son" and said "people like you should be killed". He was not permitted to see his lawyer until 5 October, ten days after his arrest. He was denied access to his family members until he was transferred to a prison, on 17 October.

Son Pyong-son was accused of having received instructions from North Korea, via radio transmissions and letters. These included questions about the activities of the *Minjung* Party and an instruction to set up an underground leadership of the party loyal to North Korea. He was also accused of recruiting his daughter, Son Min-yong, as a spy. She was also arrested. Son Pyong-son denied that he had spied for North Korea and his supporters argued that he was not in a position to have access to any secret information. He was one of 67 people arrested in September and October 1992 for their alleged links with a "spy" ring operated by the North Korean Government. The prisoners were said to be linked to a South Korean branch of the North Korean Workers Party, but Amnesty International believes that many of them had no involvement with spying activities. Around 40 of the prisoners were later sentenced to prison terms ranging from one year to life imprisonment.

Son Pyong-son's trial opened in December 1992 and the prosecution sought a death sentence. In February 1993 he was sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of joining an "anti-state" organization and passing state secrets to North Korea. He is currently held in Chonju Prison.

Under the National Security Law, an "anti-state" organization is defined as one "with the structure of command and control, as organized for the purpose of assuring a title of the government or disturbing the State". This definition has been widely interpreted by the South Korean courts which has used the term to describe a variety of domestic organizations and also the North Korean Government. The law has frequently been used to imprison people with left-wing views and those with views considered similar to those of the North Korean Government. Under the National Security Law the definition of "espionage" has also been widely interpreted. The courts have ruled that "state secret" may include any information which could be useful to North Korea, even if it is publicly available in the South. The law has often been used to imprison people who met North Koreans in third countries or who disseminated information deemed to be useful to the North, whether or not this information was already in the public domain.

Amnesty International is calling for a full and independent investigation into the reports that Son Pyong-son was held incommunicado and tortured during interrogation. It is concerned that he may be a prisoner of conscience, held for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association.

**KEYWORDS:** LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT / TORTURE/ILL-TREATMENT / ARBITRARY ARREST / INCOMMUNICADO DETENTION / POLITICAL PRISONERS / POLITICIANS / HORTICULTURALISTS / ESPIONAGE / PHOTOGRAPHS /

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