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SOUTH KOREA: TWO TEACHERS IMPRISONED

Lee Yong-ju, Chairman of the South Kyongsang provincial branch of Chonkyojo (Korean Teachers and Educational Workers Union) and Ahn Jong-bok, vice-Chairman of the same branch, were arrested on 27 March 1990. Both have been sentenced to one year's imprisonment for their non-violent trade union activities. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release. It is also concerned at reports that they have been ill-treated while in detention.

Chonkyojo was inaugurated on 28 May 1989 and was immediately declared to be illegal by the South Korean authorities. The Constitution guarantees trade union rights, except for public employees, and the Civil Service Law prohibits teachers in state-run schools from establishing or joining unions. Similar restrictions apply to teachers in private schools under the Private School Law. (When it ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in April 1990 the government made a reservation to Article 22 which guarantees the right to form and join trade unions).

At Chonkyojo's inauguration rally, its first President Yun Yong-kyu declared its aims to be the realization of a "nationalistic, democratic and humane" education system. He criticised the lack of democracy and autonomy within the school system and the use of teachers and schools as propaganda tools for the government. He stated that the union sought recognition of teachers' rights to form a union, the election of school principals, the establishment of teachers' organizations at school level and broad educational reforms. The organization was accused by the authorities of trying to introduce "leftist" ideology into schools and attempting to "change the country's democratic

system". The authorities did, however, accept that the school curriculum and some textbooks were in need of revision.

Since Chonkyojo was established in May 1989, over 10,000 teachers are reported to have been arrested and briefly detained for taking part in demonstration rallies in support of the union's aims. Because the union is regarded as illegal, it never receives police permission to hold demonstrations, including those held on university grounds. Some teachers are reported to have needed medical attention as a result of clashes with the police who have intervened to prevent rallies. Ninety-one teachers have been given suspended prison sentences. In June 1989 five of the union's leaders, including its president Yun Yong-kyu, were arrested. Yun Yong-kyu was charged under the Civil Service Law and the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations and sentenced to one year's imprisonment. He was released at the end of June 1990.

A large number of Chonkyojo members have been dismissed from their posts and 1,500 are reported to have filed a suit protesting against their dismissal. Teachers in private schools have filed a suit with the Constitutional Court about their right to belong to a union. At the time of writing, the outcome of these hearings is not known.

On 27 March 1990 over 40 Chonkyojo members in South Kyongsang province visited the Provincial Educational Committee in Masan to meet with its Chairperson and to ask for reforms in the school administration. They were not allowed to meet officials of the Provincial Educational Committee and were accused by the authorities of obstructing the conduct of official duties. Four teachers, Lee Yong-ju, Ahn Jong-bok, Kim Yong-taek and Lee Yin-shik, were arrested. Forty-one others were charged without being detained, of whom 14 have been fined. Some of these teachers, who have been dismissed from their jobs because of their membership of Chonkyojo, may face imprisonment for non-payment of their fines. Amnesty International has learned that arrest warrants have been issued for six other Chonkyojo leaders, all of whom are chairpersons of provincial branches of the union.

Lee Yin-shik and Kim Yong-taek were released soon after their arrest. Lee Yong-ju and Ahn Jong-bok remained in custody and on 14 September 1990 they were sentenced to one year's imprisonment by Masan District Court. They were convicted of obstructing the performance of official duties. Amnesty International understands that no violence had occurred during the incident. In addition to their one year sentences, the two men must serve six months of a suspended sentence imposed in 1989.

In July 1990 several prisoners in Masan Prison, including Lee Yong-ju and Ahn Jong-bok, staged a hunger strike to protest against the treatment of non-political prisoners. After four days the prison authorities intervened to end the protest and Lee Yong-ju and Ahn Jong-bok were reported to have been beaten by prison officials. The beatings resulted in Ahn Jong-bok being hospitalized for 15 days and he is reported to be still in need of medical attention.

Although the authorities have agreed to some educational reforms, they still refuse all dialogue with Chunkyojo and have reportedly tried to restrict the organization's influence, by putting pressure on students and young teachers not to join the union.