

URGENT ACTION

FAMILIES FORCIBLY RETURNED TO NORTH KOREA

A group of around 29 people, including a one-year-old baby, were forcibly returned to North Korea in early August after being detained in China. It is not known what has happened to them since, but illegal border-crossers often face imprisonment, torture and other ill-treatment, including forced labour.

Four North Korean families were detained by Chinese authorities in Shandong and Yunnan provinces between 15 and 17 July, along with six people who were assisting them. They were discovered on an established route to South-East Asia. The North Koreans are believed to be family members of senior military officials in North Korea. Six people assisting the group, reportedly Chinese nationals and a North Korean who has resettled in South Korea and holds a South Korean passport, were also detained and will now face charges in China.

North Koreans are not allowed to travel abroad without state permission. Facing significant risks, hundreds, possibly thousands, nonetheless cross the border into China every year without permission. China considers all undocumented North Koreans to be economic migrants, rather than asylum-seekers, and returns them to North Korea if they are caught. However, international law prohibits the forcible return either directly or indirectly of any individuals to a country where they are at risk of persecution, torture or other ill-treatment, or death.

Although China is a state party to the UN Refugee Convention, it has prevented the UN refugee agency, the UNHCR, from having access to North Koreans in China. Amnesty International believes that all North Koreans in China are entitled to refugee status because of the threat of these human rights violations if they were to be returned.

Many thanks to all those who took action. Amnesty International will continue campaigning on the issue of forcible return of North Koreans, but no more action is required from the Urgent Action Network at this time.

This is the first update of UA 190/14. Further information: <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA17/039/2014/en>

Name: A group of around 35 people

Gender m/f: Both

Further information on UA: 190/14 Index: ASA 17/048/2014 Issue Date: 11 September 2014

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**

