

# URGENT ACTION

## TWO SENTENCED FOR FERRY ACCIDENT PROTESTS

**Two human rights defenders received suspended prison sentences on 22 January for their role in protests calling for justice for the victims of the Sewol ferry accident and their families.**

Prominent human rights defenders **Park Rae-goon** and **Kim Hye-jin** were sentenced by the Seoul Central District Court on 22 January to three and two years' imprisonment respectively, suspended for four and three years. This means they would have to serve these terms if found guilty of any other crimes during this period. They were sentenced for several charges including "organizing illegal rallies" and "general obstruction of traffic", and are considering whether to appeal the decision.

Park Rae-goon and Kim Hye-jin were detained on 14 July 2015 for organizing and participating in demonstrations in April and May which called for justice for the victims of the Sewol ferry accident and their families. Kim Hye-jin was released on 16 July, while Park Rae-goon remained in detention until bail was granted on 2 November.

Since the Sewol ferry accident on 16 April 2014, which led to the deaths of 304 people, many of them students, victims' family members, civil society groups and activists have been organizing rallies and protests to call for an independent and transparent investigation. Park Rae-goon and Kim Hye-jin are co-chairs of the steering committee of the National Coalition on the Sewol Ferry Accident, and played a leading role in organizing the demonstrations.

The marches were overwhelmingly peaceful, but during a vigil walk on 16 April to mark the one-year anniversary of the accident, police blockaded the streets, and used unnecessary force against the participants, resulting in isolated violent clashes between protesters and police. According to their lawyers, there is no evidence that Park Rae-goon and Kim Hye-jin incited or took part in any violent actions during the marches.

Although it is positive that Park Rae-goon and Kim Hye-jin will not be imprisoned, they should not have faced charges in the first place. Their arrest and sentences are believed to be an attempt by the government to silence those seeking the truth about the Sewol ferry accident.

**Many thanks to all those that took action. No more action is required from the UA Network.**

This is the first update of UA 253/15. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa25/2826/2015/en/>

Name: Park Rae-goon (m), Kim Hye-jin (f)

Gender m/f: Both

Further information on UA: 253/15 Index: ASA 25/3304/2016 Issue Date: 3 February 2016

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