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South Korea: Arrest of two Human Rights Defenders for organizing demonstrations

The arrests of two prominent South Korean human rights defenders this month for their role during the Sewol ferry anniversary protests earlier in the year are a threat to the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, said Amnesty International.

Park Rae-goon and **Kim Hye-jin** were detained by police on 14 July 2015 for organizing demonstrations in April and May this year seeking additional action from the government in response to the Sewol ferry accident.

Park and Kim are both members of the standing committee for the group 'April 16 Alliance' that is calling for an investigation into the 2014 Sewol ferry tragedy, and had been under investigation for three months on charges which include violation of the "Assembly and Demonstration Act", and obstructing police in relation to the rallies. The police claim that some of these protests were illegal.

On 15 July, a court accepted Park Rae-goon's detention warrant while rejecting Kim Hye-jin's. Seven human rights defenders including Park are currently detained for either organizing or participating in the protests related to the Sewol ferry accident.

Everyone has the right to express their views and participate in peaceful protests, and no one should be detained solely for peacefully exercising the right to freedom of expression and assembly.

Amnesty International calls on the South Korean authorities to cease unwarranted and illegal interference in the right to peaceful protests and that Park Rae-gun should be immediately released if he has been detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and assembly.

Amnesty International further calls for Park Rae-gun and other human rights defenders to be able to carry out their peaceful human rights activities without fear of arbitrary detention, harassment and intimidation in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and international law.

Background

Park Rae-gun is one of the most prominent human rights defenders in South Korea. He has been an activist since the early 1980s and has worked to defend the rights of people on issues of forced evictions, labour rights, migration and freedom of expression. He was arrested and detained in 2006 for peacefully demonstrating for the rights of farmers being

evicted from their land to make room for the expansion of US army base Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi province, south of Seoul. In 2010, he was again detained for seeking justice and reparations for the families of victims who died in a fire while protesting evictions from their homes and businesses in Seoul's central Yongsan district.