

# £SOUTH KOREA @LETTERS FROM PRISONERS

Amnesty International is concerned about some 100 political prisoners in South Korea. It considers many of them to be prisoners of conscience, detained for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association. It is asking for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience and is seeking further information about others whom it believes may be prisoners of conscience or may have been convicted after unfair trials.

Amnesty International groups working on these cases frequently enter into correspondence with prisoners. This document contains excerpts from letters received by Amnesty International groups between June and December 1991, showing the support and encouragement prisoners derive from such correspondence. Some of the prisoners remain in prison but others were recently released.

## **Park In-bae**

Park In-bae, a 38-year-old stage director, was arrested in April 1991 and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Amnesty International adopted him as a prisoner of conscience and called for his immediate and unconditional release. Park In-bae was released from prison following an appeal hearing in October 1991.

Park In-bae was accused of distributing four tape recordings mainly consisting of songs written for the labour movement and performed by a variety of artists. Around 50,000 copies of the tapes were produced and sold but nobody else involved in their manufacture or distribution was arrested. During his imprisonment Park In-bae was suffering from diabetes and tuberculosis and in September 1991 a doctor who examined him in prison recommended immediate hospitalization.

In December 1991 Park In-bae wrote to the International Secretariat of Amnesty International:

"Thank you very much for visiting South Korea during my imprisonment and for your deep concern. . . Many people, including yourselves, helped to secure my release and this gave me much spiritual support. I will soon recover my health and will continue to struggle for democracy, equality and justice."

## Reverend Hong Keun-soo

Reverend Hong Keun-soo, 54-year-old pastor of Hyang Rin Presbyterian Church in Seoul, is serving a one-and-a-half year prison term on charges under the National Security law. Amnesty International has adopted him as a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Reverend Hong Keun-soo was arrested on 20 February 1991. He was accused of praising North Korea in his sermons, of having spoken in favour of reunification during a television debate on KBS (Korea Broadcasting System) in September 1988, and of publishing a collection of his writings in 1989 which included an article about Reverend Hong Dong-keun, a lecturer in Christianity at Kim Il-sung University in North Korea. The authorities also charged him for his involvement in the establishment of the South Korean headquarters of *Pomminkyon* (Pan-National Alliance for Reunification of Korea).

In September 1991 Reverend Hong Keun-soo wrote to an Amnesty International group in Germany:

"Thank you for your postcard message wishing my health and my early release. A picture of an imprisoned dove of peace in a prison cell was very inspiring and impressive to me. I want you to know that I am very honoured and encouraged to be remembered by you. . . I am happy to tell you that my health is excellent, physically and mentally as well and that I have been well treated by the detention centre authority. So do not worry about my well-being. . .

Thank you again for your humanitarian concern and solidarity of friendship across the national boundary. Give my warm regards to everyone in the international Amnesty chapter in Germany."

## Park Soon-kyung

Park Soon-kyung, a 68-year-old theologian, was arrested in August 1991 under the National Security Law. Amnesty International adopted her as a prisoner of conscience and called for her immediate and unconditional release. Park Soon-kyung was released after her trial in November 1991.

Park Soon-kyung was charged for her involvement in the formation of the South Korean headquarters of *Pomminnyon* (Pan-National Alliance for Reunification of Korea). She was also accused of delivering a lecture at a Christian meeting in Japan in which she is reported to have made a comparison between the *Juche* ideology of North Korea and Christian theology and of saying that it is necessary for South Koreans to understand the *Juche* ideology in order to bring about reunification between the two countries.

In December 1991 Park Soon-kyung wrote to the International Secretariat of Amnesty International:

" First of all, may I apologise myself for sending all of you some words of my gratitude so belatedly, all of you who have been concerned and prayed for and helped toward my prompt release and have written letters of petition to the Korean Government or the special committee for my release. . . Sleepless nights in the prison evoked my sorrows and tears as I recall the sufferings and bloodshed of Korean people during the Japanese colonial rule and under the tragic situation of a divided Korea since 1945. Would it be really possible for humans to realize in history the righteousness and justice of God?

Could we really hope, against the unjust streams of world political manipulations, for the fulfilment of divine righteousness and justice in history? Yes, against hope, against the course of the world, we must hope for the fulfilment. Otherwise, history or the existence of the peoples in the world would be meaningless. . .

In the rest of my old life, I will continue to work out theology toward a right reunification of Korea and a realization of an egalitarian, new social order, not only for Korean people but also for a better world order. That would be my reply to you."

## Kim Keun-tae

Kim Keun-tae, 44-year-old co-chairperson of *Chonminnyon* (National Democratic Alliance of Korea) is serving a two year prison term and has been adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience.

Kim Keun-tae was arrested in May 1990 and accused of making anti-government statements at a number of public meetings and with producing and distributing anti-government documents. He was also charged with organizing five demonstrations without informing the police in advance, and for the injuries to police officers and damage to property which took place at three demonstrations. Amnesty International has concluded that there is no evidence to suggest that Kim Keun-tae organized or incited violence during these rallies.

Kim Keun-tae was also adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience during his detention from 1985 to 1988. In January 1991 four policemen were sentenced to prison terms ranging from two to five years for torturing Kim Keun-tae after his arrest in 1985.

In November 1991 Kim Keun-tae's wife, In Jae-keun, visited the International Secretariat of Amnesty International and the Amnesty International group in England working on her husband's case. In December 1991 Kim Keun-tae wrote to a staff member at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International:

"You seem to be a friend. My wife also feels this. I saw you for the first time in July 1988 when you visited me in hospital. It was like meeting a long-standing friend after a long absence. . .

I have these feelings of friendship towards you and also towards Amnesty International. For more than 20 years I am sure that many Korean prisoners of conscience, their families and the Korean public have felt your warm concern and assistance and that they too have these feelings. In this sense, Amnesty International has already become a close friend of people here.

Now 1991 has passed and it will soon be the new year. In the new year I hope you and members of Amnesty International will be able to accomplish more. I would especially extend my greetings of the new year to the friends in Bristol who take such pains for me."

## **Lee Pyong-sol**

Lee Pyong-sol, a 53-year-old professor at Seoul National University, is serving a 12-year-prison term under the National Security Law. Amnesty International is investigating the case of Lee Pyong-sol as it believes he may have been convicted after an unfair trial. It is seeking further information about the charges and evidence against him.

Lee Pyong-sol was arrested in July 1986 and accused of espionage on behalf of North Korea. The authorities said he had been recruited by a North Korean agent based in Tokyo and that he had visited Japan on five occasions between 1980 and 1986 when he is alleged to have passed on "military and social information" about South Korea to North Korean agents. Other sources told Amnesty International that Lee Pyong-sol contacted a pro-North Korean organization in Japan to help him trace his brother in North Korea. Lee Pyong-sol denied the accusations against him and claims he was tortured into making a false confession.

Lee Pyong-sol has established a regular correspondence with an Amnesty International group in Japan. In July 1991 he wrote to the group:

"Thank you very much for your letter. I am now quite used to life inside the cell and my sole joy is to play tennis every day during exercise hour. I do not like it when it rains or when it is a holiday because then we do not get to play tennis. . . . I have visited Hiroshima Peace Park myself, but the disaster resulting from the atomic bomb is really very horrible, isn't it? Human beings think they are wise, but I think perhaps they are the most stupid. I feel I am here as a result of such stupidity".

In December 1991 Lee Pyong-sol wrote a further letter to the group:

"Thank you very much for your kind support. I am in good health. So please do not worry about it. I heard that Japan received great damage from a typhoon this year. Here in Korea, autumn is very wonderful. You cannot see such a beautiful blue sky anywhere else.

I was moved to read your letter which said that we all must try to do something to realise a society which respects human rights highly. Some say that it is a duty of human beings to love each other. I think that the greed of mankind is the root of evil in the world.

I expected a change of my situation through the simultaneous admission of both South and North Korea to the United Nations. But nothing was changed".

## In Su-kyong

Im Su-kyong, a 24-year-old student of French literature, is serving a five year prison term on charges under the National Security Law. Amnesty International has adopted her as a prisoner of conscience and is calling for her immediate and unconditional release.

Im Su-kyong was charged with making an unauthorized visit to Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, in 1989 as the representative of *Chondaehyop* (National Council of Student Representatives) to participate in the 13th World Festival of Youth and Students. Im Su-kyong's visit was well-publicised and was seen by many as a symbol of the Korean people's desire for reunification. She was arrested upon her return to South Korea.

In Su-kyong has established a regular correspondence with an Amnesty International group in France. In July she wrote to the group:

"Have you been well? I feel I must say thanks first of all. I wore the big ivory wool sweater through almost all last winter. It was so nice, comfortable and warm..

Some of my friends are now in Paris for their studies. The fields of their studies vary: literature, advertising, art, philosophy and so on. If I had been born in a time when I could devote myself to study, I might have gone abroad to study and possibly I might find myself studying there. Here in this country, however, there are many things for me to do, so I don't think I can leave this land. . .

It will be one year, in a couple of days' time, since I came here to Chonju [prison]. When I was at Seoul Prison there were many other political prisoners and it was not so bad, but here I feel lonesome. Sleeping alone, eating alone, and so forth, especially when sick, adds to the feeling of loneliness. . .

I always take so much heart from your words of encouragement and comfort in leading my life here in good spirits. . . "

### **Father Moon Kyu-hyun**

Father Moon Kyu-hyun, a 46-year-old Catholic priest, is serving a five year prison term on charges under the National Security Law. Amnesty International has adopted him as a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Father Moon Kyu-hyun was charged with making an unauthorized visit to North Korea in 1989 as representative of the Catholic Priests Association for Justice. The purpose of his visit was to accompany Im Su-kyong back to South Korea through Panmunjom in order to "show support for the cause of patriotic students yearning for reunification of their fatherland" (see above). Father Moon Kyu-hyun was arrested as he re-entered South Korea.

In December 1991 Father Moon Kyu-hyun wrote to an Amnesty International group in France:

"Thank you for your friendship and solidarity. I recall Ephesus 2,14 in the New Testament: 'for He is our peace who has made us both one' and I look forward to celebrating a reunification of this country. It will be a world festival because this miserable division resulting from the cold war is the last one in the world. There is no peace in the world without Korean reunification. Please keep up your solidarity with us who work for peace. Your solidarity really encourages us to stay with the struggle."

### **Kim Song-man**

Kim Song-man, a 34-year-old former student, is serving a term of life imprisonment on charges under the National Security Law. Amnesty International has adopted him as a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Kim Song-man studied political science at Western Illinois University in the USA where he is said to have read widely about the political system in North Korea. He visited Europe on several occasions and met North Korean diplomats in Hungary and East Germany. Kim Song-man was arrested in June 1985 and accused of passing state secrets to North Korean officials and of encouraging South Korean students to engage in anti-government activities. Kim Song-man claims that he was tortured in order to force him to confess to the charges against him. He was sentenced to death, but this sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in a presidential amnesty in 1988.

An Amnesty International group in Belgium have established a regular correspondence with Kim Song-man's mother who writes on behalf of her son. In June 1991 she wrote to the group:

"First of all, as the mother of Kim Song-man, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for your kindness and attention. . . Amnesty International's attention and efforts for my son, such as regarding him as a prisoner of conscience and campaigning for his release is a great help to him."

In October 1991 Kim Song-man's mother wrote to the group again:

"Thank you very much for your letter and continuous attention to my son Kim Song-man. . . My son appreciates very much your kindness and asked me to give his thanks to you for sending the magazines on physics. He is very interested in reading the magazines and enjoying it very much. . . Currently his health condition is generally fine and he spends most of his time on reading books.

Even though Korea is experiencing dramatic changes in the diplomatic area, we can't notice any positive changes for my son. But I am convinced that he will be free someday in the future through your kindness and help."