

# £SOUTH KOREA

## @Imprisoned Sanomaeng members

Amnesty International is concerned about the cases of some 100 members of *Sanomaeng* (Socialist Workers League) who are serving sentences up to life imprisonment under the National Security Law (NSL). It is concerned about reports that many of the prisoners were tortured and ill-treated during interrogation. The prisoners deny that *Sanomaeng* espoused an armed uprising and Amnesty International is seeking further information to establish whether they are prisoners of conscience.

*Sanomaeng* was established in 1989. Since September 1990 some 180 of its members have been arrested under the NSL, of whom some 100 remain in prison today, serving sentences ranging from one year to life imprisonment. Most of the arrests took place in several waves - between September and December 1990, in March/April 1991 and in mid-1992.

### ***Reports of Torture and Ill-Treatment***

Amnesty International is concerned about reports that many of the prisoners in this case were tortured and ill-treated during interrogation by the Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP). Most prisoners are said to have been denied access to their families for at least 10 days and some were also denied access to their lawyers. Families, supporters and the prisoners themselves reported that they were deprived of sleep and beaten during interrogation. Some examples of reports of ill-treatment include:

- Hyon Jong-dok, arrested in September 1990, told his lawyer that he had been stripped and beaten on several occasions. He is said to have tried to commit suicide several times as a result of these beatings.
- Park Kwan-oh, arrested in March 1991, was denied access to his lawyer for at least 22 days after his arrest. He said that he was beaten, kicked, threatened and forced to do repeated physical exercises. He was also deprived of sleep.
- Chon Hyon-son, also arrested in March 1991, was denied access to her lawyer for ten days after her arrest. During interrogation she claims that she was threatened, slapped, kicked and beaten by a group of about eight men. She was also deprived of sleep.
- Park No-hae, arrested in March 1991, was also denied access to his lawyer after his arrest. He met his lawyer just once during interrogation at the ANSP and told him that he had been beaten on three occasions by a group of about 13 people. He said he had been denied sleep completely for two days and then only allowed to sleep for a few hours each night. He is also said to have attempted suicide as a result of these beatings by cutting his wrist with a piece of broken mirror.

- Baik Tae-ung, arrested in May 1992, testified in court that he had been beaten and deprived of sleep during interrogation. He also claimed that a chemical had been put into his rice before interrogation sessions in order to weaken him. He said:

"During the 22 days of ANSP investigation I was subjected to various types of torture such as sleep deprivation, drug injection and mob beating. Going through these rounds of torture I prepared myself for death three times... Five days before my [being sent to the prosecution], interrogators had this look on their faces that they had had enough of it, taking me to a special torture chamber. In the middle of the night investigators beat me for hours. They took turns in beating. Their demand was that complete silence was unacceptable.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture raised the cases of Park No-hae and Hyon Jong-dok with the South Korean Government in August 1991. In its reply, dated 14 November 1991, the South Korean Government said that the court had rejected the complaint about Park No-hae's ill-treatment but did not give any information about the nature of the investigation (if any) carried out. In the same letter the government dismissed the complaint about Hyon Jong-dok's torture on the grounds that he had apparently told his mother soon after his arrest that he had not been ill-treated.

### ***Background Information about the Sanomaeng Case***

*Sanomaeng* is regarded by the authorities as an "anti-state" organization. The NSL defines an "anti-state" organization as "an association or group within the territory of the Republic of Korea or outside of it, which has the structure of command and control, as organized for the purpose of assuming a title of the government or disturbing the State". The law prescribes long sentences of imprisonment or the death penalty for "anti-state" activities and contacts with "anti-state" organizations. It has frequently been used to imprison those with socialist or communist political views and those who expressed support for North Korea or whose ideas were similar to those of the North Korean Government.

In May 1992, in an announcement about the case, the ANSP said that *Sanomaeng* was the second largest "revolutionary organization" in the country's history. It said that *Sanomaeng* members had worked on university campuses and in factories in order to prepare for an armed uprising to establish a "people's government". It also said that *Sanomaeng* had links with the North Korean Workers Party. *Sanomaeng* leaders are said by the ANSP to have masterminded a series of strikes throughout the country and to have taken control of *Chonminhangnyon* (National Students Democratic League), instructing it to carry out a series of firebomb attacks on university campuses. They are also alleged to have sought to control the *Minjung* Party (People's Party), a legal political party set up in 1990 and disbanded after it failed to gain sufficient votes in the March 1992 National Assembly election.

*Sanomaeng* is said by the authorities to be organized along the lines of a communist organization, with a central committee and five provincial organizations spread throughout the country. According to the ANSP, *Sanomaeng* had some 3,500 members, consisting of 300 full members, 500 supporters, 1,200 campus organizers and 1,500 collaborators. The authorities claim to have seized thousands of pieces of evidence since 1990, including computer disks, forged residence cards, publications, bankbooks and money. The ANSP claimed that since the arrests of members in March and April 1991, *Sanomaeng* had established several schools, an advertising agency and two publishing firms in order to raise funds.

*Sanomaeng* members and supporters claim that *Sanomaeng* is merely an organization with a socialist orientation seeking political representation for the working class. It aims to have a socialist government in South Korea and seeks to establish a legal political party in order to achieve this ultimate goal. Its other objectives include the reform of the electoral system, the implementation of a mixed economy and greater efforts towards realizing Korean reunification. They claim that *Sanomaeng* does not try to emulate the North Korean socialist system but to establish a new and unique South Korean socialism. To achieve its goals *Sanomaeng* organized mass rallies, distributed leaflets, and published magazines. It also sent its members to work with farmers and manual workers, to educate them about their political rights.

The alleged leader of *Sanomaeng*, Baik Tae-ung, was arrested in May 1992. At his trial, which opened at Seoul District Court in July 1992, he made a lengthy statement in which he defended *Sanomaeng*. He appealed to the authorities to revise the NSL and to permit the existence of *Sanomaeng* as a legal political organization, instead of forcing it to operate underground. He promised that *Sanomaeng's* activities would be peaceful and constructive if it were allowed to participate in the political process and compared it to communist parties in Western European countries where such parties are allowed to play an active role and are not considered to be a threat. Some of his words are quoted below:

"*Sanomaeng* has never assumed the title of government. It has never purported to disturb or overthrow the state. . . *Sanomaeng* is not an organization of armed struggle. *Sanomaeng* has a vision to transform our society, thoroughly, democratically, peacefully and in the manner guaranteed by the democratic institutions of our society. . . We have learned from history that we cannot achieve socialism by an armed coup d'etat of small minorities. . . Socialism is a future which will blossom only when an overwhelming majority of citizens voluntarily want and choose it. . . As long as legal and institutional improvement provides us with the legal right to engage ourselves in socialist activities, we will promote our socialism by expressing our ideas peacefully through

legally-sanctioned democratic channels such as laws, institutions, parliament and social associations."

### ***Amnesty International's Concerns about Sanomaeng Prisoners***

Amnesty International is concerned about numerous reports that *Sanomaeng* prisoners arrested between 1990 and 1992 were tortured and ill-treated during interrogation.

It believes that all reports of torture and ill-treatment of *Sanomaeng* prisoners should be investigated impartially and that any officials found responsible should be brought to justice.

Amnesty International is seeking further information about the aims and objectives of *Sanomaeng*, the charges against its members and the evidence used to convict them. It is concerned that some may be prisoners of conscience, held for the peaceful exercise of their rights of freedom of expression and freedom of association.