
£SOUTH KOREA

@Detention of Pomminnyon Members

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Amnesty International is calling for the release of four members of the dissident organization *Pomminnyon* (Pan-National Alliance for the Reunification of Korea).

Cho Song-woo, Lee Hae-hak, Lee Chang-bok and Kim Hi-taek have been convicted of making illegal contact with North Koreans and attempting to establish an anti-state organization. Amnesty International has adopted the four men as prisoners of conscience as it believes that they are imprisoned for their peaceful attempts to bring about reunification between North and South Korea. It is calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

The Korean peninsula was divided into two states after World War II. Talks between the two governments about reunification have been intermittent and contacts between citizens of the two countries are not normally allowed. In recent years dissident groups in South Korea have openly sought to meet North Koreans to discuss reunification issues, leading in most cases to their imprisonment. At its inauguration meeting in January 1989, leaders of the dissident organization *Chonminnyon* (National Alliance for Democratic Movement) proposed a "Pan-National Conference for Peace and Reunification of Korea" to be attended by representatives of all walks of life from both the south and the north. In the following months, several members of *Chonminnyon* were briefly detained for seeking to meet North Koreans in Panmunjom to discuss the Pan-National Conference.

In November 1990 the South Korean Government refused to allow South Korean dissidents to meet representatives from North Korea at Panmunjom in the demilitarized zone separating North and South Korea. The South Korean National Unification Board, a government agency, is reported to have rejected the request saying:

"The dissident body's plan to contact North Korean authorities will only fan confusion and will be of no help in the improvement of Seoul-Pyongyang relationships".

The Board also rejected a subsequent request for dissidents to attend a conference in Berlin in November 1990, warning that those who attended the Berlin meeting would be punished according to pertinent laws.

Cho Song-woo, Lee Hae-hak and Reverend Cho Yong-sul, staff members of *Chonminnyon*, travelled to the meeting in Berlin where the organization *Pomminnyon* was inaugurated. Participants at the meeting included a North Korean official, Chon Kum-chol, who is Vice-Chairman of the Committee for Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland, and also representatives of Koreans living in other countries. At the meeting, *Pomminnyon* made a declaration stating as its main objectives the achievement of peaceful national reunification, independence and national unity. The organization also stated that it aimed to do the following:

- Establish a headquarters for the organization in North and South Korea in 1991;
- Secure the peaceful reunification of North and South Korea by 1995;
- Replace the current armistice (signed in 1953 at the end of the Korean War) by a peace agreement;
- Secure the withdrawal of foreign (US) troops from South Korea;
- Seek the abolition of the National Security Law and free travel between North and South Korea.

Cho Song-woo, Lee Hae-hak and Reverend Cho Yong-sul were arrested at Kimpo International Airport on 30 November 1990 as they returned from Berlin and were charged under the National Security Law with making unauthorized contact with North Korean officials.

During their trial at Seoul District Court in April 1991, defence counsel for Cho Song-woo, Lee Hae-hak and Cho Yong-sul sought permission from the court to call North Korean Chon Kum-chol to testify at the trial. Chon Kum-chol agreed to testify but the South Korean authorities would not grant him a safe conduct to attend the trial. At a press conference held on 14 April in North Korea Chon Kum-chol denied that *Pomminnyon* was an organization which was controlled by North Korea. He also denied that the three men had made statements praising the North Korean Government and North Korean *Juche* ideology.

In May 1991 Cho Song-woo and Lee Hae-hak were sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment. Reverend Cho Yong-sul was given a suspended sentence of one year's imprisonment and released.

On 25 January 1991 the North Korean headquarters of *Pomminnyon* was established. In South Korea a preparatory committee was organized on 23 January 1991 at Hyangrin church in Seoul. Over 80 committee members attended this meeting which decided to form the South Korean headquarters of *Pomminnyon* and to organize a pan-national rally in August 1991 in Seoul. On 24 January two of the preparatory committee's leading members, Lee Chang-bok and Kim Hi-taek, were arrested and charged under the National Security Law with forming an anti-government organization and making illegal contact with North Koreans. In July 1991 Lee Chang-bok and Kim Hi-taek were each sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

Lee Hae-hak was imprisoned from 1974 to 1979 under Emergency Regulation No 1 for criticizing the Constitution which had been amended in 1972 to strengthen presidential powers.

Cho Song-woo has been adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience on three previous occasions: from June 1975 to May 1978 when he was detained under Emergency Regulation No 9 for attempting to organize anti-government student demonstrations and distributing anti-government documents; from June 1980 to December 1982 when he was held under Martial Law Regulations for organizing anti-government demonstrations and from April 1989 to May 1990 under the National Security Law for unauthorized possession of North Korean publications.

Lee Chang-bok was previously adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience from May 1974 to March 1982 when he was serving a sentence of 20 years' imprisonment under the National Security Law and Emergency Regulations for his involvement in the National Democratic Youth and Students Federation. He was released under presidential amnesty in March 1982. He was again adopted as a prisoner of conscience in May 1989 when he was charged with belonging to a seditious organization and organizing an anti-government demonstration. He was released in 1990.

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