
amnesty international

£SOUTH KOREA

@Unfair Trial Concern: Long-Term Prisoner Lee Hon-chi

SEPTEMBER 1994

AI INDEX: ASA 25/28/94

DISTR: SC/CO/GR

Amnesty International is calling on the South Korean Government to review the case of Lee Hon-chi who has been in prison since 1981 on charges under the National Security Law. The organization is concerned at reports that he was tried unfairly, largely on the basis of a confession obtained under torture, and that he may be a prisoner of conscience.

At the time of his arrest Lee Hon-chi, now aged 42, was an electronics technician working for the South Korean company Samsung Electronics. He had been brought up in Japan, of Korean parents, and lived there until 1977 when he moved to South Korea to work for a Japanese electronics company. According to his family he had little interest in politics. However, former Korean residents of Japan who came to live in South Korea were sometimes suspected by the South Korean authorities of having links with the pro-North Korean community in Japan.

Lee Hon-chi was arrested on 9 October 1981 by South Korea's Military Security Command (MSC). He claims to have been tortured and forced to confess that he had spied for North

Korea, charges he later denied. The accusations against him included a charge that he had sent industrial and military information to a North Korean agent in Japan and that he had visited North Korea for espionage training. He is said to have been held without access to his lawyer or family members for over four months, until the date of his first trial on 16 February 1982.

Lee Hon-chi's case is similar to that of dozens of others who were sentenced to long prison terms under the National Security Law during the 1970s and 1980s, whose cases have been documented by Amnesty International. There are many reports that these prisoners were held incommunicado for lengthy periods and convicted on the basis of "confessions" obtained under torture. Amnesty International is calling on the South Korean Government to review the case of Lee Hon-chi and others like him.

Amnesty International is also concerned about Lee Hon-chi and other prisoners like him because of the very broad definition of "espionage" in South Korea's National Security Law. Under this law any unauthorized contact with a North Korean may be defined as "espionage" and any information deemed useful to North Korea may be defined as a "state secret". Many prisoners convicted of espionage have in fact been imprisoned for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association and adopted by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience. Amnesty International is concerned that Lee Hon-chi may also be a prisoner of conscience.

Lee Hon-chi's appeals to higher courts were rejected. The only recourse now available to him is to apply for a retrial. However this puts the onus on Lee Hon-chi himself to uncover substantial new evidence and submit it to the court in the hope that they would order a retrial. In practice this requirement has made it impossible for political prisoners in South Korea to obtain a retrial. In that context, Amnesty International believes that the South Korean Government should take the initiative to order a review of the case of Lee Hon-chi and others whose arrest, trial and conviction appear to have violated international human rights standards.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send letters and faxes:

- ◆ *expressing concern at reports that Lee Hon-chi was tried unfairly, on the basis of a confession extracted under torture and urging the authorities to review his case;*
- ◆ *urging the South Korean Government to review of the cases of all long-term prisoners where there are reports that trials did not conform to international standards.*

Appeals to:

◆ President Kim Young-sam
The Blue House
1 Sejong-no, Chongno-gu, Seoul
Republic of Korea Fax: +822 770 0253

◆ Mr Kim Doo-hee, Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
1 Chungang-dong

Kwachon-myon, Shihung-gun, Kyonggi Province
Republic of Korea Fax: +822 504 3337

◆ and to diplomatic representatives of South Korea in your country.

This is one of a series of appeals, sent to South Korea action file groups for action

KEYWORDS: CONFESSIONS / TORTURE/ILL-TREATMENT / TRIALS / INCOMMUNICADO
DETENTION / LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT / POLITICAL PRISONERS / TECHNICIANS /
ESPIONAGE / PHOTOGRAPHS /

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 8DJ, UNITED KINGDOM