

£SOUTH KOREA

@Imprisoned writer Hwang Sok-yong

Hwang Sok-yong, a 50-year-old writer from South Korea, is one of many prisoners who have been arrested and imprisoned under the National Security Law for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association. Amnesty International has adopted him as a prisoner of conscience and his calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Amnesty International has long campaigned for the amendment of the National Security Law which punishes "anti-state" (pro-North Korean) activities. The loose definition of "anti-state" activities and other provisions of this law means that it may easily be abused by the authorities. In fact, it has been often used to imprison people who visited North Korea without government permission or met north Koreans or alleged agents abroad, people who held socialist views or whose views were considered similar to those of the North Korean Government.

Background about Hwang Sok-yong

Hwang Sok-yong is a well-known and popular writer who has written over 20 novels and essays. Many have been translated and published in Japan, China, Germany and France and two have also been published in North Korea. His best-known work is a 10 volume epic called *Jangkilsan* which was completed in 1984. It has sold over three million copies in South Korea and remains a best seller today. Hwang Sok-yong has written numerous short stories and essays including *The Shadow of Arms* (on the Vietnam War) and *Strange Land* (an anthology of short works). He has received several literary awards.

In 1987 Hwang Sok-yong established and became Executive Director of the Association of Writers for National Literature and one year later he founded the Korean Nationalistic Artists Federation. Under his guidance both organizations set up committees to prepare for talks between writers and artists in North and South Korea.

In 1989 Hwang Sok-yong made an unauthorized visit to North Korea where he met the North Korean President Kim Il-sung and other officials. His trip was conducted publicly and received wide media coverage. He later justified the visit as an attempt to overcome the division between North and South Korea. Several other people made unauthorized visits to North Korea in 1989 and were imprisoned under the National Security Law when they returned to the South. In order to escape a similar fate, Hwang Sok-yong was forced to live in exile abroad, first in Germany and later in the USA.

Arrest under the National Security Law

In February 1993 Kim Young-sam was elected President of South Korea. A new government took office, promising a "new Korea" which would be freer and more democratic. Hwang Sok-yong decided to return to his own country in order to take part in the movement for reform. He knew that he faced possible imprisonment, and before leaving the USA he made a public statement saying:

"Though I myself do not recognize the National Security Law in my mind, I hope that I will be the last victim to be punished under the law and that this will bring about the justification to the people for its abolition."

Hwang Sok-yong arrived at Kimpo Airport in Seoul on 27 April and was immediately arrested by the Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP) which held him for 20 days. During this time he was subjected to lengthy interrogation, threats and sleep deprivation. He was then transferred to Seoul Detention Centre under the care of the prosecution who interrogated him for a further 30 days before charges were brought. Prisoners detained under the National Security Law may be interrogated for up to 50 days before they are charged, a period which Amnesty International considers to be excessive and in breach of international standards.

ANSP releases information to the media

On 14 May the ANSP announced to the media the results of its investigation of Hwang Sok-yong. It said that he had visited North Korea and met North Korean officials on five occasions and that he had been "brain washed" by them. The ANSP also said that he had praised North Korea while abroad and supported North Korea policies. It said that he had received US\$250,000 from North Korea as "operational funds" and used the money to found the Institute for East Asian Culture which would be used for pro-North Korean activities in the USA.

These accusations, published widely in the media, were levelled by the ANSP before Hwang Sok-yong had been charged and, more importantly, before his trial. The ANSP often appears to disregard the right to presumption of innocence, especially in political cases. Amnesty International is concerned that such public statements are damaging to prisoners and deny them their right to a fair trial.

Summary of charges

Hwang Sok-yong was charged under several articles of the National Security Law for forming and participating in an "anti-state" organization, for visiting North Korea and for receiving instructions from North Korea. The most serious charge was that he received US\$250,000 from North Korea as an "operational" fee. He was also accused of forming and participating in *Pomminnyon* (Pan National Alliance for the Reunification of Korea).

Amnesty International believes that Hwang Sok-yong is held for the non-violent exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association. Hwang Sok-yong has pointed out that the money he received from North Korea was a copyright fee for the permission to make a film of his book *Jankilsan*. He denied receiving "instructions" from North Korea. He stated that his meetings with North Korean officials were all conducted in public and were justified as an attempt to bring together the peoples of a divided nation.

Hwang Sok-yong's trial in Seoul

Hwang Sok-yong's trial started on 12 July 1993. He made a lengthy statement defending his visit to North Korea and his other activities as those of a writer seeking the reunification of a divided nation. He said:

"The purpose of my visit to North Korea in March 1989 came out of a sense of moral obligation as a Korean writer living in a divided system to get to know the other half of our nation. It did not come as a result of instructions from North Korea as the ANSP and the prosecution contends.

The National Security Law must be abolished since it is a relic left over from the Cold War era that obstructs the reunification of our people. This same law not only oppresses our citizens' basic rights, as well as the right to freedom of expression, it also turns people of the same nationality into enemies".

Hwang Sok-yong is held in Seoul Prison. Like other imprisoned writers, he has not been permitted to write since his arrest. He has not yet been sentenced but he faces a lengthy prison term.

Help secure the release of writer Hwang Sok-yong

- Write to the Minister of Justice and the President seeking the immediate and unconditional release of Hwang Sok-yong;

- Encourage others to write appeals.

Send your appeals to:

Mr Kim Doo-hee
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Ministry of Justice
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Kwachon-myon, Shihung-gun
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