

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 25/38/97

UA 344/97 Prisoner of conscience / Fear of ill-treatment 4 November 1997

REPUBLIC OF KOREA (SOUTH KOREA) Suh Jun-sik, human rights activist

Prominent human rights activist Suh Jun-sik was arrested at around 5pm Korean time on 4 November 1997 by the Seoul Police. He is currently being questioned by the Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP), South Korea's intelligence agency. According to the warrant of arrest, he was detained, under the National Security Law, for organizing a human rights film festival, for "praising" and "benefitting" North Korea and for failing to report regularly to police under the terms of his previous release (see below).

Amnesty International believes that Suh Jun-sik, who is director of Sarangbang human rights group, is a prisoner of conscience, and is concerned that his arrest may herald a crackdown on human rights and other activists in the run-up to December's Presidential election, as has happened in the past.

Amnesty International is also concerned that Suh Jun-sik may be ill-treated during interrogation by the ANSP and placed under pressure to sign a confession.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Suh Jun-sik's arrest came as politicians and presidential election candidates argued over the exact definition of a prisoner of conscience. The government claimed there were no prisoners of conscience in South Korea. In a recent open letter to candidates in the December presidential election, Amnesty International urged all candidates to commit themselves to human rights reform, including the release of prisoners of conscience and the protection of human rights defenders.

Sarangbang's Second Human Rights Film Festival opened in Seoul in October and is currently touring nine other cities. Five other people have been arrested during the festival after the organizers refused to submit their films for government censorship.

Suh Jun-sik was a prisoner of conscience from 1971 until his release in 1988. He was arrested again for a short period in 1991. His human rights organization, Sarangbang, is a well-respected human rights group which works on human rights education, promotion and documentation work.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, your own language or Korean or your own language:

- expressing concern about the arrest of Suh Jun-sik and calling for his immediate and unconditional release;
- urging the authorities to ensure that he is not subject to any form of ill-treatment during questioning;
- calling on the government not to arrest anyone for the non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association.

APPEALS TO:

1) President Kim Young-sam
The Blue House
1 Sejong-no, Chongno-gu
Seoul, Republic of Korea
Faxes: +82 2 770 0253

Telegrams: President, Seoul, South Korea
Salutation: Dear President

2) Minister of Justice

Mr Kim Jong-koo
1 Chungang-dong
Kwachon-myon
Shihung-gun
Kyonggi-do, Republic of Korea

Faxes: +822 504 3337

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Shihung-gun, Kyonggi Province, South Korea
Salutation: Dear Minister

3) Director, Agency for National Security Planning

Mr Kwon Young-hae
Segok-dong, Kangnam-ku
Seoul, Republic of Korea

Faxes: +82 2 770 0253 (c/o President's office)

Telegrams: Director ANSP, Seoul, Korea
Salutation: Dear Director

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Republic of Korea accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 December 1997.