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## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION VISITS NORTH KOREA, DISCUSSES LEGAL REFORMS AND PRISONER CASES

An Amnesty International delegation returned on 3 May from a week-long visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) to discuss legal reforms and prisoner cases, only the second time the organization was allowed into the country.

The visit, at the invitation of the Institute for the Research of Human Rights, involved extensive discussions on human rights matters in Pyongyang and Wonsan with members of the Institute. The delegation also met the Director of Judicial Affairs of the Central People's Committee; officials of the Legislative Affairs Bureau of the Secretariat of the Supreme People's Assembly and of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; officials of the Ministry of Public Security in charge of detention and criminal investigation; and members of the judiciary, prosecution and Bar Association.

The Amnesty International delegates also visited a "rehabilitation centre" (prison) near Sariwon, capital of North Hwanghae Province, and discussed disciplinary measures, complaints procedures and other matters relating to the inmates with the commander and other officials of the centre. Amnesty International was told that the Sariwon centre currently holds about 230 inmates and is one of three such centres in the country, holding a total of 800 to 1,000 inmates. These include some 240 people held for "anti-state" activities. The authorities stated that all "anti-state" offenders are held in the Hyongsan re-education centre in the capital Pyongyang and that there is no place of detention for convicted prisoners in the DPRK other than the three centres named to Amnesty International.

The Amnesty International delegates learned of several amendments to the Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure Law which were recently introduced to bring legislative provisions in line with international human rights standards. The delegates were told, for example, that the minimum age for imposition of the death penalty was raised from 17 to 18 years and that articles punishing "crimes against the state" had been amended to restrict their scope. In 1992, Amnesty International had expressed concern that several such articles were vaguely worded and may lead to the imprisonment of people solely for the peaceful expression of their political beliefs. The organization will comment in detail on the recent amendments and other legislation it requested when it receives the full texts.

Amnesty International was given new information on individual cases of reported prisoners of conscience and political prisoners. An official of the Ministry of Public Security who met the organization's delegates said that many of the reported prisoners had never been detained. He added that the information provided by Amnesty International in other cases had not been sufficient to identify the relevant individuals and investigate their whereabouts.

Among the cases raised by Amnesty International were those of Shibata Kozo and Cho Ho Pyong, two men who left Japan for the DPRK with their families in the 1960s and had been reportedly detained, possibly as prisoners of conscience. The Public Security official confirmed information given earlier to Amnesty International that Shibata Kozo had died together with all his relatives in a train accident in March 1990, a few weeks after his release from 26 years'

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imprisonment for espionage, and said that Cho Ho Pyong had also been imprisoned for espionage in 1967 but escaped from detention in October 1974. According to the official, Cho Ho Pyong was killed in October 1974, together with his wife and three children, while they were trying to leave the DPRK using a military boat he had taken control of after killing a soldier. The official said that the boat was pursued and destroyed and that none of the bodies were found. Amnesty international requested clarification of several aspects of these cases and will continue to follow them up.

DPRK officials said that the first periodic report to the Human Rights Committee on the implementation by the DPRK of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, overdue since 1987, is nearing completion.

Amnesty International welcomes the information received on legal reforms and the opportunity it was given to discuss extensively aspects the DPRK legal system. It also welcomes the new information received on individual cases. However, it remains concerned about a number of these cases and is seeking further information. Amnesty International is also urging the DPRK to accede without delay to the Convention against Torture an Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Throughout the discussions with Amnesty International, DPRK officials said they were concerned about misinformation being circulated on the human rights situation in the country. Amnesty International pointed out that openness, international accountability and regular access to the country by independent observers, including international human rights organizations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, were among the best safeguards against any misinformation. "We look forward to further openness and to the development of dialogue with the DPRK in the interest of human rights", Amnesty International said.

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