

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

AI Index: PRE 01/113/2009
24 March 2009

South Korea: Journalists' arrests threaten press freedom

Amnesty International today called on the South Korean government to immediately release television journalist Roh Jong-myeon, who was arrested for “interfering with business” along with three other colleagues on the eve of a strike over wage disputes and unfair dismissals.

The four had been protesting the appointment of a former aide of the current president as head of YTN, a leading 24-hour news channel.

On 22 March, South Korean police arrested Roh Jong-myeon, head of the YTN workers' union, along with his colleagues and fellow trade union activists, Hyun Duck-soo, Cho Seung-ho and Lim Jang-hyuk, in their homes. The Seoul Central District Court issued an arrest warrant to detain Mr Roh beyond 48 hours. His colleagues have been released.

Several union members staged a walk-out on Monday in support of their detained colleagues.

Police said the four were arrested because they had not presented themselves at Namdaemun police station at a designated time. The journalists said that they had only received the summons the day after they were supposed to appear at the police station.

“Mr Roh and his colleagues appear to have been arrested solely for their peaceful union activities – an ominous expansion of what appears to be an increasingly concerted effort by the government to control South Korea's media,” said Roseann Rife, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Programme Deputy Director.

YTN journalists and union members have been protesting curbs on press freedom since last year, calling for guarantees of editorial independence in light of the appointment of Ku Bon-hong as YTN president. Ku previously worked as an aide to South Korean President Lee Myung-bak.

“It's been a long time since the South Korean media has faced this type of unwarranted government interference and harassment,” said Roseann Rife.

“These arrests violate the right to freedom of assembly and the freedom of the press and constitute a very worrying development for the South Korean media.”

Notes to editors:

- Ku Bon-hong sued 12 trade union journalists and fired six journalists for “interfering with business” after protests against his appointment as head of YTN.

- In November 2008, an Amnesty International researcher met with Roh Jong-myeon and his colleagues to review claims of interference in editorial independence.
- In 2008, the chief executives and presidents of the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS), Korean Broadcasting Advertising Corporation, Arirang TV and Sky Life were also replaced by supporters of the Lee government.