

amnesty international

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Amnesty International's information on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) continues to be very limited. In a document it published in May 1989 entitled *Background to Human Rights Concerns in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)* Amnesty International expressed concern about reports that suspected dissidents are subjected to long terms of imprisonment in corrective labour camps, either without trial or after trials which bar a defence plea of innocence, and that the death penalty may be used.

Beniko Isamu and Kuriura Yoshio, two Japanese seafarers whose cases were mentioned in the document, were released in October 1990. Both men had been held since 1983, accused of spying and helping a North Korean soldier defect to Japan aboard their ship. On their return to Japan, Beniko Isamu told reporters that they had neither been formally charged nor tried, although the authorities had previously announced that they had been tried and sentenced to 15 years of "reformation through labour" in December 1987.

In the last year there has also been concern that a number of students who were recalled from their studies in Eastern Europe at the end of 1989 might have been detained on suspicion of criticizing their government while abroad, but this could not be confirmed. On several occasions, however, the ruling Korean Workers' Party called on its members to intensify ideological indoctrination in the advantages of socialism over capitalism, apparently as a reaction to political changes in Eastern Europe, and some sources suggested that returning students were made to attend ideological "re-education" sessions.

Amnesty International continues to seek information on the country's legal system, in particular its inclusion of formal protection for the human rights guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which the Democratic People's Republic of Korea acceded to in 1981, as well as on reports of political arrests, trials and executions.