

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **China: Crackdown on North Koreans must end**

Recent diplomatic incidents in embassies and consulates in China are an end result of the Chinese authorities' continuing crackdown on North Korean asylum seekers, Amnesty International said today. Since April, hundreds of North Koreans have been rounded up in northeast China and forcibly repatriated without being given access to a refugee determination procedure.

According to reports, in Jilin Province, up to 900 North Koreans were forcibly repatriated from Longjing in April and up to 500 others from Tumen in May. In Tumen, witnesses have reported seeing groups of North Koreans being taken back across the border in open trucks every two or three days. Those detained and forcibly returned are reported to include both orphan children and women married to Chinese nationals who had settled in northeast China for a long time, as well as recently arrived asylum seekers.

"Those pushed back over the border meet an uncertain fate. This could include imprisonment, torture and in some cases summary execution or death in detention from starvation and disease," Amnesty International said. "Seeking asylum in embassies and consulates in China is virtually the last recourse left to the asylum seekers."

The renewed crackdown in northeast China has also extended to people suspected of helping North Koreans, including members of foreign aid and religious organizations and ethnic Koreans living in the area, many of whom were rounded up for interrogation. Some remain in detention.

The Chinese authorities claim that all North Koreans who illegally come to China are economic migrants, and have consistently denied them access to any refugee determination procedure, despite evidence that many among them have genuine claims to asylum.

Over the past two months several dozen North Koreans have sought refuge in embassies and consulates in China, in desperate attempts to seek asylum in foreign countries. The Chinese government has issued a notice to all embassies and consulates in Beijing asking them to hand over any further North Korean "trespassers". A government spokesman stated on 13 June that the incidents were "a provocation of Chinese law".

The international community should urge the Chinese government to allow North Koreans to claim asylum and have their claims examined through a fair and independent procedure, thereby avoiding future diplomatic incidents involving North Koreans in consulates and embassies in China.

Amnesty International has written to the Premier Zhu Rongji asking for protection of North Korean refugees and asylum seekers and an end to forced repatriations. The organization expressed concern about six individuals, including a two-and-a-half-year-old boy, who were detained at the end of May in South China and whose whereabouts is unknown.

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