

## NORTH KOREA

### Prisoners of Conscience: The Shibata Family

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*If he is still alive, Shibata Kozo is now 62 year-old. He has been imprisoned as a prisoner of conscience since October 1964. He was reportedly still held in a "re-education" camp in late 1990 but there has been no news about him since then. His wife, Shin Sung Suk, and their three children, may have been imprisoned as well, but there is no information about their fate. Amnesty International believes that Shibata Kozo is a prisoner of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally. Amnesty International also urges the North Korean authorities to account for the fate of Shin Sung Suk and her three children.*

*Shibata Kozo is Japanese and Shin Sung Suk was a Korean resident in Japan. They travelled to North Korea in 1960, with Shin Sung Suk's two children from a previous marriage and settled in Pyongyang. A third child was born to Shibata and Shin in 1961. The*

family remained in occasional contact by letter with their relatives in Japan.

According to former prisoners in North Korea, Shibata Kozo took employment as a Japanese-language editor in a publishing unit in Pyongyang. In 1962, some of the Japanese spouses of former Korean residents in Japan who had settled in North Korea demanded permission to return to Japan to visit their relatives. Shibata Kozo was apparently accused by the authorities of having encouraged these Japanese women to make a public protest about their demand. An official investigation was started against him which apparently established that, while working for the Japanese Ministry of Labour in Kagawa Prefecture in 1958 and 1959, Shibata Kozo had stayed at the home of an employee of the local police office.

Apparently on this sole basis and because he had allegedly encouraged the Japanese women's protest, Shibata Kozo was formally arrested on 7 October 1964, apparently convicted of "spying" and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment. A former prisoner in North Korea who was familiar with Shibata Kozo's case said:

*"Accused of spying, Shibata was forced by means of inhumane interrogation to make a confession... [He was] confined to a solitary cell about the size of a dog kennel in which he could not move freely or even lie down, and with insufficient food. [He was] unable to endure such conditions. Anybody would have confessed to anything the authorities might say. In the case of Shibata, because his Korean was not very good, even if he was shown a [confession] record he could not understand it. It seems that just about everything [in his confession] was extracted by force."*

Amnesty International believes that Shibata Kozo was arrested and detained solely for the non-violent exercise of his rights to freedom of opinion, expression and association.

From about 1966 to about 1970, Shibata Kozo was reportedly imprisoned in Pyonsan, south-east of Pyongyang. He was then transferred to Kaechon, North of Pyongyang, and later to Sungho Township, about 70 kilometres east of Pyongyang. He was made to work in a quarry or stone-cutting workshop for some years, although in later years he was not given work, apparently because of his deteriorating state of health.

In October 1984, Shibata Kozo's original 20-year sentence expired. However, he remained in detention. The detention centre authorities reportedly stated that Shibata Kozo would remain in detention because it was impossible to give him employment elsewhere.

In late 1990, while he was still detained, Shibata Kozo's health reportedly deteriorated. He could barely walk and could not eat all of his small food ration, according to the former detainees. They said he was emotionally withdrawn and "without normal responses or interest in life".

Shibata Kozo's relatives in Japan have received very little information about his fate. In a letter dated 5 October 1964 to his relatives in Japan Shibata Kozo wrote that he was in good health and mentioned his intention to visit Japan in the near future. That was the last letter his relatives received from him. In January 1965, Shin Sung Suk wrote to her relatives in Japan that on 7 October 1964, her husband had been taken to a "sanatorium" but did not specify why. She stated that she herself had become ill and had to stay at

home. She said she would write more later and specifically that she would write as soon as her husband came back. This was her last letter to reach Japan.

In 1973, following enquiries made by the relatives in Japan, an official of the General Association of Koreans in Japan told them that Shibata Kozo was "alive and safe" in North Korea.<sup>1</sup> For 19 years thereafter the relatives of Shibata Kozo and Shin Sung Suk in Japan had no further information.

In December 1992, the Japanese magazine *Bunshun Weekly* (*Shukan Bunshun*) published a report based on information provided by former prisoners in North Korea who had subsequently left the country. According to these former prisoners, Shibata Kozo was still detained in a detention centre for political prisoners in Sungho Township as of December 1990. There has been no news about the fate of Shibata Kozo since December 1990. There has also been no news about Shin Sung Suk and her three children and Amnesty International is concerned that they also may continue to be held in some form of detention. Attempts since December 1992 by Shibata Kozo and Shin Sung Suk's relatives in Japan to obtain further information from North Korean officials have remained fruitless.

For further information about Amnesty International's concerns in North Korea see: *North Korea, Summary of Amnesty International's Concerns (ASA 24/03/93)*, issued in October 1993.

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<sup>1</sup>The General Association of Koreans in Japan (*Chongryon*) groups the Korean residents in Japan who are North Korean nationals. It officially represents the positions of the North Korean Government. Some of its leading members are delegates to the Supreme People's Assembly in Pyongyang.

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