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MEDIA ADVISORY

PUBLIC EXECUTIONS IN NORTH KOREA

In a report released today, Amnesty International today highlighted its concerns about public executions carried out in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea).

The human rights organization has received reports that at least 23 people, including one woman, were publicly executed in North Korea between 1970 and 1992. According to witnesses, those executed were usually killed by hanging or shooting.

The North Korean government has denied carrying out public executions. However, Amnesty International has gathered detailed eyewitness accounts of a number of these executions taking place in several locations in the country. Almost all the North Koreans who spoke to the organization had witnessed public executions.

Getting reliable information out of North Korea about human rights violations is extremely difficult, but given the number of witnesses and the diversity of locations mentioned, the organization fears that public executions could be widespread. The authorities have admitted that one execution took place in 1992, but denied that others have taken place.

The death penalty is usually handed down to those convicted of murder and other particularly serious offences. However, it is also mandatory for political offences, such as activities "in collusion with imperialists", aimed at "suppressing the national-liberation struggle" and for "acts of betraying the nation to imperialists".

In some cases, those executed had been convicted of non-lethal crimes, such as theft. Among the cases reported to Amnesty International were:

- Two brothers convicted of stealing rice from a train, executed in Hamhung City in 1982/3
- Four men convicted of banditry, executed in Chongjin City in 1970 and 1974/5
- Two men convicted of assaulting and raping several young women, executed in the O Bong San district of Pyongyang in 1980
- One woman convicted of embezzlement, executed in the Sama Dong district of the capital, Pyongyang in 1988

Amnesty International is particularly concerned at reports that some of those prisoners executed showed signs of beatings, which could point to ill-treatment and torture during detention. The organization is also gravely concerned about the fairness of trials in North Korea.

The organization is calling on the North Korean authorities to cease all executions and death sentences immediately, and to make public a complete list of all death sentences and executions carried out since 1970.

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