

£SOUTH KOREA/TAIWAN

@LETTERS FROM PRISON

South Korea

Amnesty International groups working on behalf of prisoners of conscience in South Korea frequently receive letters from prisoners, and in some cases establish a regular correspondence. The following are excerpts from a selection of letters sent to Amnesty International groups. They show the encouragement and support prisoners gain through correspondence with Amnesty International members. Some of the prisoners remain in prison but others were recently released.

Kim Song-man and Hwang Tae-kwon

Kim Song-man and Hwang Tae-kwon were arrested in June 1985 and charged under the National Security Law with espionage on behalf of North Korea. Kim Song-man was sentenced to death and his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in December 1988. Hwang Tae-kwon was sentenced to life imprisonment which was commuted to 20 years in December 1988.

In September 1985 20 people were arrested on charges of being North Korean agents. The three main defendants, Yang Dong-hwa, Kim Song-man and Hwang Tae-kwon, had studied at Western Illinois University in the United States of America in 1982-83 and are said to have met there. During their stay in the USA they are said to have read widely about political science and the political system of North Korea. The authorities accused them of having been influenced by the publisher of a Korean language newspaper in New York whom the authorities described as a North Korean "collaborator". The publisher allegedly showed them video films about North Korea and arranged for Kim Song-man to meet North Korean officials in Hungary and East Berlin. Kim Song-man is also alleged to have set up small study circles and to have supplied North Korean literature to students. Hwang Tae-kwon was accused of having received "espionage" training from the New York publisher. Amnesty International has adopted both men as prisoners of conscience as it believes that there is no evidence of them having carried out espionage activities or having used or advocated the use of violence.

In August 1991 Kim Song-man wrote to a group member in Scotland:

"When I was writing the last letter, the season was the lively spring when all the creatures were gaining life and all the plants were sending their shoots, yet now the sumptuous summer is almost passing away, turning into the threshold of the beautifully coloured autumn. The fall season will soon be beginning. At that time, when trees are dropping their coloured leaves, I anxiously wish that I will be able to read your letters".

He goes on to say: *"I thank you again for remembering me and I hope to hear from you again soon".*

Hwang Tae-kwon also wrote to a group member in England in August 1990 saying:

"I'm very sorry for my late reply. I have been so busy preparing the term paper for the last few weeks. (I enrolled on a correspondence course of Catholic Bible studies). First of all, I have to say that I have received the book you sent (about Humanist Economics) with great joy."

The following are excerpts from a later letter:

"First of all, please accept my sincere congratulations upon the birth of your grand-daughter, Josephine. Here I send a Korean butterfly to the new-born baby as a symbol of good luck."

"Since I moved to my solitary cell at the end of last month, I read and read the books you sent late at night everyday. I couldn't read and write much for over 15 months because of my religious activity. Now I have plenty of time to do so."

Kim Chin-yop

Kim Chin-yop is a dentist and an Australian citizen. In April 1989 he was sent to South Korea by the World Mission Committee of the Uniting Church in Australia and took up the post of head of the dental clinic of the Comprehensive Maternal-Child Health Centre at the Ilshin Christian Hospital in Pusan. He was arrested on 2 September 1989 and charged under the National Security Law with helping a representative of *Chondaehyop* (National Council of Student Representatives) illegally enter North Korea to attend a youth festival. On 16 June 1990. He was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment. Amnesty International adopted Kim Chin-yop as a prisoner of conscience. Shortly before his release in February 1991 Kim Chin-yop wrote to a group in the Netherlands who were working on his case:

"Many thanks for the presents that you have sent me, and most of all the encouragement and support. The last thing I can be in this tiny cell is lonely with all the friends out there! Please give my regards to the enthusiastic friends at Amnesty International. Happy New Year!!"

Kim

Chin-yop

Mun Pu-shik

On 30 January 1989 the Agency for National Security Planning announced that it had arrested three activists, Koh Hyon-ju, Mun Pu-sik and Kim Yun-tae. Two others were arrested in August 1989. The five prisoners were accused of having in April 1989 initiated a project to set up the "Korea-US Research Institute (KURI). The authorities claimed that KURI's aims were to publish materials which would "incite anti-American sentiment" and support North Korea. Mun Pu-shik was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment and was adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience. In early 1991 Mun Pu-shik wrote to a group in France who were working on his case. The following are excerpts from his letter:

"I was very happy and surprised when I received your letter and hearty present. It would have been abandoned in the warehouse of the prison before it reached me two or three years ago. Ah, there is a person at the other side of the globe who feels the pain of my imprisonment and who is trying to participate in the procession towards the truth!"

"Prison is not a place which provides one with pain only. I have spent more than eight years in a single cell, if I count my first and second imprisonment. . . Prison truly made me realize so many things; needless to say the prison taught me how precious freedom is, but it also taught me how much a human being could strongly train oneself in front of the truth. Prison taught me to be humble enough to appreciate a piece of sunbeam which comes through the bars of a prison window."

He ends his letter:

"Again, I want to tell you how much I appreciate your love which has come across borders.

At the prison in a small city, far away in the south-west end of the Korean peninsula, with dreams of hopes."

Pang Yang-kyun

Pang Yang-kyun, political aide to an opposition member of the National Assembly, Suh Kyung-won, was arrested on 2 July 1989 and charged under the National Security Law. Suh Kyung-won was also arrested in June 1989 and in December 1989 was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for illegally visiting North Korea and allegedly spying for it. Pang Yang-kyun was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for contacting alleged North Korean agents on orders from Suh Kyung-won. When delivering its verdict the court said that there was no evidence that Suh Kyung-won had revealed state secrets to North Korean officials but found him guilty of accepting money from North Korea. Suh Kyung-won said that the money he received from overseas had been raised by supporters and was not from North Korea. Pang Yang-kyun was found guilty of accepting the money on Suh Kyung-won's behalf. Amnesty International has adopted both men as prisoners of conscience.

In February 1991 a friend of Pang Yang-kyun's wife wrote a letter on her behalf to an American group working on his case. She said Mrs Pang was able to visit her husband twice a month and added:

"Mr Pang is just fine in Wonju [prison]. He has breakfast at 8.30 am, lunch at noon and supper at 3.30 pm. After supper, if the sound of the door opening is heard, then it means he has some letters from outside. So he looks forward to hearing the sound everyday".

Lee Byung-gyu

Lee Byung-gyu was a 19-year-old fisherman when he was kidnapped to North Korea for six months in 1969. In 1979 he took on a job as a coal miner and was active in promoting the formation of an independent trade union. He was arrested on 17 March 1985 after over five thousand miners went on strike over the dismissal of a trade union organiser. He was accused of manipulating the strike as part of instructions he had received in North Korea. He was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for his alleged espionage activities. Amnesty International has not adopted Lee Byung-gyu as a prisoner of conscience but is seeking further information about his case because it is concerned that he may have been wrongly convicted after an unfair trial.

In January 1991 Lee Byung-gyu wrote to the French group working on his case:

"How do you do? I'm very glad to make your acquaintance and I was very happy to get a letter and presents. Thank you for your help. While there's life, there's hope. I wish you a happy new year."

Taiwan

Amnesty International groups have also established regular contact over the years with prisoners in Taiwan. The following case is one example of a long-term correspondence between a prisoner and Amnesty International members.

Cheung Ki-lok

Cheung Ki-lok is a Hong Kong citizen who was arrested on 22 January 1988 and charged under the Statute for the Punishment of Sedition. He is accused of having been involved in the early 1970s with the Hong Kong student magazine *Hong Sang Goh*, which the prosecution authorities allege was pro-communist, and of having joined the Chinese Communist Youth League in 1977. He denies the charges and the Taiwan High Court has already acquitted him three times. He has now been allowed to return to his home in Hong Kong but the prosecution authorities have

Cheung Ki-lok

appealed once again against his acquittal. Amnesty International has adopted him as a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his unconditional release. In December 1990 Cheung Ki-lok sent the following message to several groups and members who have appealed on his behalf: