

# £SOUTH KOREA

## @Letters from Prisoners and their Families

Amnesty International groups throughout the world are campaigning on behalf of political prisoners in South Korea. At the time of writing there are some 370 political prisoners, many held under the National Security Law which prohibits "anti-state" activities and contacts with "anti-state" organizations (including North Korea). They include prisoners convicted of the broadly defined offence of "espionage" for visiting North Korea, making unauthorized contacts with North Koreans or alleged North Korean agents in third countries, or expressing support for North Korean or socialist positions.

Amnesty International groups are campaigning for the unconditional release of a number of prisoners of conscience, held for the peaceful exercise of their rights of freedom of expression and association. Amnesty International members are also expressing concern to the government about other prisoners about whom they have less information but who they believe may be prisoners of conscience. Some of the prisoners were tortured and ill-treated and some may have been convicted after an unfair trial.

Prisoners, their families and Amnesty International groups frequently enter into correspondence, although some prison authorities are believed to restrict prisoners' mail to and from other countries. This document contains excerpts from letters received by Amnesty International groups during 1992 and early 1993 from prisoners and their families. They show the encouragement and support prisoners and their families derive from such correspondence.

Some of the prisoners whose cases are described in this document remain in prison. Others were recently released.

### *Long-term prisoners Kim Song-man and Hwang Tae-kwon*

Kim Song-man, aged 35 and Hwang Tae-kwon, aged 37, are serving lengthy prison terms under the National Security Law. In the 1980s the two men studied together at Western Illinois University in the USA where they are said to have read widely about the political system in North Korea. They both met the publisher of an overseas Korean publication who is alleged by the South Korean authorities to be a North Korean agent. Kim Song-man visited Europe on several occasions and met North Korean diplomats in Hungary and East Germany.

Kim Song-man and Hwang Tae-kwon were arrested under the National Security Law in June 1985 when they returned to South Korea. They were accused of passing state secrets to North Korean officials and encouraging South Korean students to engage in "anti-state"

activities. Both were held incommunicado during their interrogation by the Agency for National Security Planning and claim to have been tortured. In 1986 Kim Song-man was sentenced to death and Hwang Tae-kwon to life imprisonment. In a presidential amnesty in 1988 Kim Song-man's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment and Hwang Tae-kwon's to 20 years.

Amnesty International believes that there is no evidence that Kim Song-man and Hwang Tae-kwon carried out espionage activities. It has adopted them as prisoners of conscience and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release. It is also calling for an inquiry into reports that they were tortured.

Amnesty International groups in Norway, France and the UK have been campaigning for the release of Hwang Tae-kwon. In January 1993 Hwang Tae-kwon received his first letter from an Amnesty International group in Arendal, Norway for three years. He replied:

*"Arendal! It has been a dream town in my memory. Three years ago I received a photo book entitled "Arendal" but I never knew who sent it to me. They just showed me the book for a second and didn't allow me to keep it. . . Since then Arendal has remained in my imagination as a place in a fairy tale. Maybe this beautiful imagination was exaggerated by the contrast between my grey concrete cell and the colourful landscape of your home town. Anyway the book gave a fresh stimulus to my monotonous prison life. . . Thank you very much for your warm concern and efforts for my release. I am not lonely as long as there are people like you. The fact that there are friends who worry about me on the opposite side of the globe inspires me with redoubled courage and hope."*

Amnesty International groups in Belgium, the USA, Sweden and France are among those who have campaigned for the release of Kim Song-man. In 1991 the French Section of Amnesty International released a short film featuring 30 prisoners of conscience from around the world. In July 1992 Kim Song-man's mother wrote to the French Section:

*"I am writing this letter to express my deepest appreciation for your kindness. I have received a copy of the video tape about my son. I really admire all your efforts for human rights and special consideration on my son's case. It's my son's great fortune to be selected as [one of] 30 prisoners of conscience and he is very pleased. Because he is not allowed to write a letter abroad, I'm writing this thank you letter on*

*behalf of my son. . . We are convinced that truth and justice overcomes everything always. You are the people who helped to prove his truth."*

### *Long-term prisoner Ham Ju-myong*

Ham Ju-myong was born in the 1930s in what is now North Korea and came to South Korea in 1952 during the Korean War. He was arrested in 1983, charged under the National Security Law with passing state secrets to a North Korean agent and sentenced to life imprisonment. Ham Ju-myong denied the charges against him. He claims that he was tortured for some 60 days after his arrest and forced to sign a false confession. Amnesty International believes that Ham Ju-myong may have been convicted after an unfair trial, on the basis of a confession obtained under torture. It is urging the South Korean authorities to review his case.

Amnesty International groups in Canada and Denmark have been campaigning on behalf of Ham Ju-myong. In late 1992 the Amnesty International group in Canada wrote to Ham Ju-myong's family and in December 1992 his sister replied to the group:

*"I could not help crying with joy and thankfulness because your letter was the first one we received from human rights advocates abroad. My brother has not received a single one of the many letters you have sent him during the last two years... I was very much moved to cry because of your deep love and concern for humanity. I will give him your messages soon. I am sure that he will be very encouraged and thankful to you. . ."*

### *Student Im Su-kyong*

Im Su-kyong was a 22-year-old student of French literature before her arrest in 1989 under the National Security Law. She was sentenced to five years' imprisonment under the National Security Law for making an unauthorized visit to North Korea to attend the 13th World Festival of Youth and Students on behalf of Chondaehyop (National Council of Student Representatives). Amnesty International adopted Im Su-kyong as a prisoner of conscience until her release in December 1992 under a presidential amnesty.

Im Su-kyong's family were in regular correspondence with an Amnesty International group in France. In May 1992 her mother wrote to the group:

*"Thank you for your efforts to release my daughter Su-kyong. On 3 May I visited Su-kyong and found her healthy. You and your friends' passionate support encourages my family. She does not want any special gift from Paris but your warm heart. . . I'm very happy to*

*inform you that your friends of Amnesty International are sending letters and leaflets constantly and they have strengthened my family's exhausted mind."*

### *Parliamentarian Suh Kyung-won and his secretary Pang Yang-kyun*

Suh Kyung-won, aged 55, was an opposition member of the National Assembly in 1988 when he visited North Korea and met several North Korean Government officials. He was arrested in June 1989 and charged under the National Security Law with making an unauthorized visit to North Korea and passing on state secrets. He was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment, later reduced to ten years. Suh Kyung-won's secretary, 38-year-old Pang Yang-kyun, was arrested in July 1989 and charged with failing to report Suh Kyung-won's visit to North Korea and passing state secrets to a North Korean agent. Both men denied the accusations of espionage and claim to have been tortured during interrogation by the Agency for National Security Planning.

Amnesty International believes there is no evidence to suggest that Suh Kyung-won and Pang Yang-kyun conducted espionage on behalf of North Korea. It believes that the mere fact of travelling to North Korea and talking to North Korean officials without evidence of espionage activity or the use or advocacy of violence does not justify imprisonment. It has adopted the two men as prisoners of conscience and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release. It is also urging an inquiry into reports that they were tortured.

Amnesty International groups in France, Norway and the USA are among those who have campaigned for the release of Suh Kyung-won. In May 1992 Suh Kyung-won's wife wrote to the group in France:

*"Thank you very much for your warmest letter and merry presents. . . Repeatedly thank you very much for Amnesty International's interest in our family. . . I respect Amnesty International's work for justice."*

In October 1992 Suh Kyung-won also wrote to the group in France:

*"I am proud of my action and think most people know this. . . Now we must all help to solve ecological and political problems and strive for peace because we are one people who must live together on this earth. . . I received the parcel you sent: one pair of socks, seven photos, biscuits and a jacket. Thank you very much. Looking at the photos, I pray for you and your families."*

Amnesty International groups in Norway, Zambia, Taiwan and the USA have been campaigning on behalf of Pang Yang-kyun and the group in Taiwan have established a regular correspondence with Pang Yang-kyun and his wife. In July 1992 Pang Yang-kyun wrote to the group in Taiwan:

*"I and all my family are fine, thanks to God's patronage and your support. I thank you very much for the vitamins and cakes you gave to my children. Seven days ago, my wife and children came to see me. We had a very pleasant time together. Although you are busy, I thank you very much for helping both materially and morally."*

### *Political activist Kang Ki-hun*

Kang Ki-hun, a 27-year-old political activist, was arrested in June 1991 and charged with aiding and abetting the protest suicide of a colleague in May 1991. At that time, he was an active member of the dissident group Chonminnyon which was at the centre of a series of protests and demonstrations. Dissidents and human rights groups claimed that the authorities had fabricated a case against Kang Ki-hun in order to damage the moral standing of Chonminnyon at a time of social unrest.

Kang Ki-hun was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. The evidence against him consisted exclusively of an analysis of the handwriting in the suicide note, which the prosecution claimed he had written. Amnesty International found this evidence to be both inconclusive and unconvincing and does not believe that Kang Ki-hun can be held responsible for writing the suicide note or for aiding and abetting the suicide. It has adopted him as a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Amnesty International groups in Sweden, France and Germany are campaigning for the release of Kang Ki-hun. In December 1992 Kang Ki-hun's mother wrote to an Amnesty International group in Sweden:

*"Thank you for your concern about my son's case. . . My family all appreciate you concern and encouragement. About once a week, I go to the jail where Ki-hun is confined to meet him. He is well. I told him about you and gave him your letters. It may happen that he will be released next year by the new government of my country. I hope so. We will never give up. Thank you again for your concern."*

### *Teacher and trade unionist Lee Bu-yong*

At the time of his arrest in June 1991, 47-year-old Lee Bu-yong was acting President of *Chunkyojo* (Korean Teachers' and Educational Workers' Union). He was sentenced to one year's imprisonment for organizing a rally which was held in May 1990 to mark *Chunkyojo's* first anniversary. He remained in prison at the end of this term to serve a further 18-month sentence from a previous arrest, also for his activities on behalf of *Chunkyojo*. Amnesty International adopted Lee Bu-yong as a prisoner of conscience until his release in March 1993, in a presidential amnesty.

*Chunkyojo* was inaugurated in May 1989 but was declared to be illegal as both public and private school teachers are prohibited from establishing or joining trade unions. Since 1989 some 1,500 teachers have been dismissed because of their union membership and over 60 have been arrested. Because *Chunkyojo* is seen as illegal it rarely receives authorization to hold demonstrations.

Lee Bu-yong and his wife corresponded with Amnesty International groups in Greece and Sweden. In December 1992 his wife wrote to the group in Sweden:

*"I'm very glad to receive your letter. You're very kind. . . My daily life is a bit hard, sometimes blue, but I'm all right because my husband is right and people like you encourage me. Don't worry about me, I'm strong. I have to take care of my husband and children. I can't help being strong. And I believe my husband to victory. Thanks very much again. Your work is wonderful."*

### *Army conscript Park Kil-nam*

At the time of his arrest in June 1989, Park Kil-nam was an army conscript in the 35th Division. In late 1988 he deserted from the military in order to make a "declaration of conscience" in which he expressed his views about the treatment of army conscripts, and about the current government and political system. He was later arrested and sentenced to five years' imprisonment for desertion and for "anti-state" activities. Amnesty International believes Park Kil-nam may be a prisoner of conscience, held for the peaceful expression of his views. It is also calling for an inquiry into reports that he was ill-treated during interrogation.

Since 1987 over 40 army conscripts have deserted from the military in order to make a "declaration of conscience". Some were arrested and sentenced and others remain in hiding.

Amnesty International groups in France and the UK have been campaigning on behalf of Park Kil-nam. In June 1992 Park Kil-nam wrote to the group in France:

"I thank you for your sincerity. Your parcel and message give me courage and energy. .. I think that France is a beautiful country. Seeing the picture-album (sent by the group) I thought the following: how much blood and sweat have many people shed to build such a wonderful society? But this world needs yet more sweat and blood from many people. The peoples of Africa, Asia and South America don't live a rich life and the proletariat of this world live a life of agony. . . Though I am in prison, I try to live a busy and vigorous life because the human being must labour and laziness hasn't contributed to the world up to now."

### *Reverend Hong Keun-soo*

Reverend Hong Keun-soo, 54-year-old pastor of Hyang Rim Presbyterian Church in Seoul, was arrested in February 1991 under the National Security Law. Among other things he was accused of praising North Korea in his sermons, speaking in favour of reunification during a television debate on KBS (Korea Broadcasting System) and publishing a collection of writings which included an article about a North Korean lecturer in Christianity at Kim Il-sung University in North Korea. Reverend Hong Keun-soo was adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience until his release from prison in August 1992. In November 1992 he wrote to the Amnesty International group in Germany who had campaigned for his release:

"I want to let you know how much I am indebted to you and your organization for helping me during the most difficult time of my life. Particularly I am grateful for your adopting me as a prisoner of conscience during a time when I was discouraged and frustrated. Thank you for your petitioning on my behalf, informing the public, and all your other efforts. Your international support and solidarity greatly alleviated my sense of loneliness and isolation."

### *Socialist student Im Bong-kyun*

Im Bong-kyun was one of over 50 student activists arrested in December 1990 under the National Security Law and accused of belonging to Chonminhangnyon (National Students Democratic League). The authorities claimed that Chonminhangnyon was linked to Sanomaeng (Socialist Workers' League). Both were said to be "anti-state" groups which sympathised with North Korea and sought to overthrow the government by means of a violent revolution. Since 1990 at least 100 Sanomaeng and Chonminhangnyon members have been sentenced to prison terms of between one year and life imprisonment. Amnesty International is concerned at reports that many were ill-treated during interrogation and believes that they may have been imprisoned for their non-violent political activities. Im Bong-kyun was

sentenced to two-and-a-half years' imprisonment and his case was taken up by Amnesty International as a possible prisoner of conscience.

Amnesty International groups in Germany, Norway, the USA and the Netherlands knew little about Im Bong-kyun but sent many letters of inquiry to the South Korean authorities and to the prisoner himself. On 1 January 1993 Im Bong-kyun replied to a Christmas card he had received from an Amnesty International group in the Netherlands:

*"I received your card. Thank you and your friends. Now it is the peak of winter in Korea [but] all Koreans greet the new year with hopes and expectations. I will also have a happy new year with the help of kind people like you. I hope that you stay in good health and have good luck in the new year".*

On 8 January he wrote again:

*"Thank you very much for your card. I had a happy new year because of your help. I will be able to do many good things this year because I received a card from overseas. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to you and your friends. Happy New Year!"*