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SOUTH KOREA

Appeal for the Release of Hwang Tae-kwon

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Amnesty International is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Hwang Tae-kwon who is serving a 20-year prison sentence under the National Security Law. Hwang Tae-kwon is aged 37 and has been in prison since 1985. Amnesty International has adopted him as a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the non-violent exercise of his rights of freedom of expression and association.

In the early 1980s Hwang Tae-kwon studied political science at Western Illinois University in the USA. While there he met the publisher of an overseas Korean publication who is alleged by the South Korean authorities to be a North Korean agent. He is also believed to have read widely about the political system in North Korea. Hwang Tae-kwon and several colleagues were arrested when they returned to South Korea in June 1985 and held *incommunicado* until early August while under interrogation by the Agency for National Security Planning.

Hwang Tae-kwon was accused of passing state secrets to North Korean agents. He was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment, reduced to 20 years' imprisonment under a presidential amnesty in 1988. The main evidence to support charges of "espionage" was a confession made by Hwang Tae-kwon during interrogation. He later denied the accusations and claimed that his 'confession' was extracted from him under torture.

In 1988 Hwang Tae-kwon wrote his story from Andong prison. He said:

" . . . after 60 days of torture and beatings in the basement of the Agency for National Security Planning and after three years of imprisonment for a crime I did not commit, having been silenced all those years, I hope my story will expose the crimes that were committed against me by the powers-that-be in order to extract my 'confession'. I am also hoping to restore my own human dignity which has been ruthlessly trampled upon during the interrogation and imprisonment."

Amnesty International has repeatedly urged the South Korean Government to amend the National Security Law which provides the authorities with wide powers to punish "anti-state" activities and contacts with "anti-state" organizations (including North Korea) and the very broadly defined crime of "espionage". The law has often been used to imprison those who disagreed with government policy or who expressed support for North Korean or communist/socialist views. Amnesty International has also called on the authorities to review the cases of a number of political prisoners arrested under the National Security Law during the 1970s and 1980s and sentenced to lengthy prison terms on the basis of confessions which appear to have been extracted under torture.

Amnesty International was disappointed to learn that Hwang Tae-kwon was not included in an amnesty announced by Kim Young-sam in February 1993 on the occasion of his inauguration as President of the Republic of Korea.

The campaign for the release of Hwang Tae-kwon has given him a measure of hope and encouragement. In January 1993 he wrote to an Amnesty International group in Norway:

"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 other side of the globe inspires me with redoubled courage and hope".

Please send appeals to The South Korean Minister of Justice seeking:

- The immediate and unconditional release of Hwang Tae-kwon;
- The amendment of the National Security Law, removing provisions which punish non-violent political activities;
- A review of the cases of long-term political prisoners whose convictions are said to be based on confessions obtained under torture.

Addresss for appeals: Mr Kim Doo-hee, Minister of Justice, Ministry of Justice, 1 Chungang-dong, Kwachon-myon, Shihung-gun, Kyonggi Province, Republic of Korea. Fax No: +82 2 504 3337.



KEYWORDS: PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE1 / LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT / STUDENTS /
ESPIONAGE / PRISONERS' TESTIMONIES / CONFESSIONS / TORTURE/ILL-TREATMENT /
PHOTOGRAPHS /

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