

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on UA 189/90 (ASA 25/32/90, 14 May, and follow-ups ASA 25/33/90, 16 May, and ASA 25/34/90, 23 May) - Hunger-Strike/Ill-treatment

SOUTH KOREA: Choi Chol-kyu
Chu Sang-joon
Kim Sam-sun

On 21 May 1990 prisoner of conscience Choi Chol-kyu was freed under a presidential amnesty which benefitted around 20 long-term political prisoners. He had been on hunger-strike in Taegu Prison since 7 May in protest at the reported beating by prison officers of another political prisoner held in the same prison. Choi Chol-kyu had been imprisoned since April 1974. The Ministry of Justice in South Korea has written to Amnesty International in response to appeals from Urgent Action participants.

Amnesty International launched an Urgent Action after it received reports that prisoners in Taegu Prison had started a hunger-strike followed the reported beating on 1 May 1990 of a political prisoner held in Taegu Prison. Several other political prisoners protested against the beatings to the prison authorities who, the prisoners claim, assured them that there would be no further ill-treatment of detainees. However, on 2 May more political prisoners were allegedly beaten by prison guards, reportedly in the presence of the prison director. That day over 50 political prisoners started a hunger-strike protesting against the beatings and demanding the protection of prisoners' rights, improved prison conditions, the release of all political prisoners, abolition of the National Security Law and the resignation of the prison director.

Choi Chol-kyu, a prisoner of conscience serving a 20-year sentence following his conviction in 1974, joined the hunger-strike on 7 May and reportedly continued until his release on 21 May. Amnesty International has no further information on the other prisoners who took part in the hunger-protest or who were allegedly beaten by prison officials.

On 28 August 1990 in response to appeals from Urgent Action participants, the Ministry of Justice wrote to the International Secretariat of Amnesty International about the incident at Taegu Prison. The Ministry acknowledged that a prisoner held on charges related to a labour dispute had begun to chant slogans such as "stop the oppression of the labour movement". Prison officials were called to the scene and ordered to restrain the prisoner, following prison regulations. The Ministry said that 18 other prisoners, including Choi Chol-kyu, began a hunger-strike to protest the incident, but had suffered no medical problems as a result. The Ministry however denied that the prisoners had been physically assaulted by prison guards.

No further action is required. Thank you to all participants who sent appeals.