

To: Health professionals  
From: Medical office / East Asia subregional team  
Date: 4 February 1998

### **MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION**

**Shin In-young**  
**Republic of Korea (South Korea)**

#### **Summary**

Shin In-young, aged 70, has been a political prisoner in South Korea for 30 years following conviction for "espionage". Amnesty International has serious fears that he may have been convicted unfairly on the basis of a confession obtained under torture and that his conviction is based on his political views rather than on any real crime he has committed. In December 1997, Shin In-young was diagnosed as suffering from cancer and is reported to be extremely ill. He is currently receiving radiation treatment as an out-patient at a hospital close to Taejon Prison where he is held. In view of the doubts concerning his conviction, the extremely long period of imprisonment he has already served, the lack of response of the authorities to previous appeals in similar cases and the risks to his health of continued imprisonment, Amnesty International is calling for Shin In-young to be released promptly from prison and transferred to a hospital under the care of his family for whatever medical care he requires.

#### **Recommended Actions**

Letters are requested from medical professionals to the addresses below:

- o expressing serious concern about the ill health of Shin In-young, aged 70, a political prisoner who has been in prison for over 30 years;
- o asking for further information about Shin In-young's illness and the medical care he has received;
- o appealing for Shin In-young to be released to a hospital under the care of his family so that he can receive appropriate medical care for his illness;
- o seeking further information about medical provision in South Korean prisons and in particular Taejon prison;
- o expressing concern about the conditions in which long-term political prisoners are held; you could refer to the virtual isolation of prisoners from each other and from the outside world, the unheated cells and the continuing pressure from the prison authorities on some prisoners to "convert" (to sign a statement in which they renounce their real or alleged communist views).

**Addresses**

*Minister of Justice*  
 Kim Jong-koo  
 Minister of Justice  
 Ministry of Justice  
 1 Chungang-dong  
 Kwachon-myon  
 Shihung-gun, Kyonggi-do  
 REPUBLIC OF KOREA  
 Fax: +82 2 504 3337

*Prison Director*  
 Director, Taejon Prison  
 P O Box 36  
 Yusong Post Office  
 Taejon-shi 305-600  
 REPUBLIC OF KOREA

*President's address for letters sent before  
 25 February 1998*

President-elect Kim Dae-jung  
 25-1 Samcheong-dong, Chung-ku  
 Seoul 110-130  
 Republic of Korea  
 Fax: +82 2 722 6444 or +82 2 784 6070

*Address for letters sent after 25 February 1998*

President Kim Dae-jung  
 The Blue House  
 1 Selong-no, Chongno-ku  
 Seoul  
 Republic of Korea  
 Fax: +82 2 770 0253

**Copies**

Please send copies of your letters to:

Innuihyop  
 Physicians for Humanism  
 Youngchun-dong, 69-4, 2Fl  
 Sudaemoon-ku  
 Seoul 120-070  
 REPUBLIC OF KOREA  
 Fax: +82 2 362 0378

Minkahyop human rights group  
 592-7 Changsin-2-dong  
 Chongno-ku  
 Seoul 110-542  
 REPUBLIC OF KOREA  
 Fax: +82 2 745 5604

and to diplomatic representatives of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) accredited to your country

4 February 1998

**HEALTH CONCERN****Shin In-young  
Republic of Korea (South Korea)**

Shin In-young, aged 70, has been a political prisoner in South Korea for 30 years following conviction for "espionage". Amnesty International has serious fears that he may have been convicted unfairly on the basis of a confession obtained under torture and that his conviction is based on his political views rather than on any real crime he has committed. In December 1997, Shin In-young was diagnosed as suffering from a malignant bone cancer and is reported to be extremely ill. He is currently receiving radiation treatment as an out-patient at a hospital close to Taejon Prison where he is held. In view of the doubts concerning his conviction, the extremely long period of imprisonment he has already served, the lack of response of the authorities to previous appeals in similar cases and the risks to his health of continued imprisonment, Amnesty International is calling for Shin In-young to be released promptly from prison and transferred to a hospital under the care of his family for whatever medical care he requires.

Amnesty International has previously called for an improvement in the conditions of imprisonment for long-term political prisoners and for better medical provision in prisons. Like other long-term political prisoners, Shin In-young is held in virtual isolation in a small single cell without heating. In early 1997 he is reported by his family to have complained of severe pain and swelling in the area around his collarbone. He was not taken for examination at a hospital until November 1997 when he was diagnosed as suffering from cancer.

In January 1998 the Taejon Prison authorities are reported to have urged the Ministry of Justice to suspend Shin In-young's prison sentence and allow his temporary release on medical grounds. This request was apparently rejected.

Most political prisoners are held in single cells and some have little or no contact with other prisoners. Some of the very long-term political prisoners are reported to be suffering from psychological problems as a result of prolonged isolation. Some suffer from digestive ailments, rheumatism, high blood pressure and other illnesses resulting from long imprisonment in poor conditions.

Medical facilities in South Korean prisons are generally poor. Most prisons have only one doctor, who generally has his own practice outside the prison and only visits the prison on one or two days each week. Amnesty International knows of other cases where prisoners have had great difficulty in obtaining appropriate medical treatment for their illnesses. Medication and hospital treatment are paid for by prisoners' families.

**Background**

After the Korean War (1950-53) Shin In-young went to North Korea and thereafter he was cut off from his family who remained in South Korea. Since the Korean War the governments of North Korea and South Korea have prohibited almost all contact between citizens of the two countries. In South Korea, unauthorized contacts have often resulted in imprisonment under the National Security Law.

In March 1967 Shin In-young entered South Korea and was arrested. He said he had come to visit his family, but the authorities accused him of espionage and "anti-state" activities on behalf of North Korea and he was charged under the National Security Law and the Anti-Communist Law (now repealed). Shin In-young was questioned for five months of questioning by the KCIA (the South Korean intelligence agency, later renamed the Agency for National Security Planning) during which time he said he was subjected to electric shock and water torture, beaten and forced to sign a "confession". During this time he did not see a lawyer. His father and mother were also detained for not reporting his visit and his father was sentenced to several months' imprisonment. Shin In-young was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment.

At the time of Shin In-young's arrest, the country was ruled by a military government led by General Park Chang-hee who seized power in 1961 and held the office of President until his assassination in 1979. During this period human rights violations were severe and widespread.

Since the early 1990s South Korea has been run by a civilian president and in December 1997 South Korean voters elected former dissident and political prisoner Kim Dae-jung as the next president. The human rights situation is much improved in comparison with past decades, but human rights problems remain. For example, several dozen political prisoners who were convicted unfairly in past decades remain in prison and the National Security Law is still used to arrest prisoners of conscience for the non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association. This law provides long prison terms for unauthorized contacts with North Koreans, for "praising" and "benefitting" North Korea and forming or joining organizations alleged to be pro-North Korean. It also provides long sentences or the death penalty for the vaguely-defined offences of "espionage" and passing "state secrets" to North Korea.

Shin In-young has been refused the possibility of release on parole because of his refusal to "convert", meaning to sign a statement renouncing his real or alleged communist views. In past decades political prisoners who refused to "convert" were often tortured. Today those who refuse to "convert" are not considered for release on parole and generally have fewer rights and privileges than other prisoners. For example, visits and reading material may be restricted. There are at least 21 other political prisoners who have also spent 30 or more years in prison in similar circumstances to Shin In-young. All are in their late 60s or 70s. At least two, aged in their 70s, have spent 40 years in prison.

For many years Amnesty International has appealed for the release or review of the cases of long-term political prisoners who are believed to have been convicted unfairly in past decades. Amnesty International has also called for the National Security Law to be amended in accordance with international standards, for conditions of imprisonment to be improved and for an end to the forced "conversion" of political prisoners.