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Reappointment process of National Human Rights Commission not transparent

Amnesty International is concerned that the independence and the credibility of the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) is under threat, with the proposed reappointment of its Chairperson.

The Presidential Office of South Korea announced that Chairperson Hyun Byung-chul will be reappointed for a three-year term. His confirmation hearing will be held on 16 July in the National Assembly.

The reappointment of the Chairperson is taking place without broad consultation with civil society groups and other relevant stakeholders.

The Chairperson has publicly stated that the NHRCK is part of the government, raising questions about the NHRCK's independence and impartiality. Under his leadership since 2009, the NHRCK has remained silent or failed to act decisively on key human rights issues such as the police handling of forced evictions in Yongsan in January 2009; police and prosecutors' controversial investigations of the TV Broadcaster MBC's programme PD Notebook for "spreading false rumours" on US beef imports; and the authorities' surveillance of Frank La Rue, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression in May 2010 during his official mission to South Korea.

National human rights institutions such as the NHRCK can play a key role in the protection and promotion of human rights. Since the establishment of the NHRCK in 2001, Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed concern over its independence in light of appointments of Commissioners which appeared to be politically motivated. Commissioners with little experience of human rights have been appointed without broad consultation with civil society groups and other relevant stakeholders.

It is essential that the NHRCK comprises people known for their integrity and impartiality of judgment who decide matters before them on the basis of facts and in accordance with the law.

Amnesty International calls upon the government of South Korea to ensure that members of the NHRCK are appointed through a transparent process and in consultation with civil society groups and other relevant stakeholders, and that those appointed have relevant human rights-based knowledge and expertise.

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