
amnesty international

Republic of Korea (South Korea)

@Supporters of former prisoner arrested under National Security Law

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Ki Seh-moon and Lee Kyung-ryol were arrested on 11 and 12 March under South Korea's National Security Law and appear to be held for the non-violent exercise of their right to freedom of expression. The two men are accused of issuing a pamphlet condoning the activities of a former long-term political prisoner, Yoon Ki-nam, who died in February. If held on these charges alone, they are prisoners of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally.

After their arrest Ki Seh-moon and Lee Kyung-ryol were both taken to Chonnam Police Station for questioning. According to a human rights group in South Korea, they are accused under Article 7 of the National Security Law of preparing a pamphlet about Yoon Ki-nam, for distribution at his funeral which was held on 26 February in Kwangju city. The two men were leaders of a committee established to organize Yoon Ki-nam's funeral ceremony.

The pamphlet in question is alleged to have called Yoon Ki-nam a "patriotic fighter" and a "fighter for national reunification". This, according to the authorities, glorified the activities of a former pro-North Korean prisoner and thus violated Article 7 of the National Security Law which punishes the act of "praising", "encouraging" or "benefitting" North Korea. Supporters of the two detained men maintain that the pamphlet merely expressed sorrow for the death of an elderly prisoner who had endured many years of hardship in prison and had died without seeing the reunification of Korea.

Yoon Ki-nam fought for North Korea during the Korean War (1950 to 1953) and was captured and imprisoned in 1953. He spent a total of 28 years in South Korean prisons and always refused to "convert" (in South Korea political prisoners are sometimes under

pressure from the authorities to sign a statement of "conversion" renouncing their alleged communist views). His last term or imprisonment ended in 1989. On 24 February 1995 he died of cancer.

During 1994 dozens of people were arrested under Article 7 of the National Security Law, mostly on charges of forming or belonging to left-wing groups and of disseminating material alleged to be pro-North Korean. Many were considered by Amnesty International to be prisoners of conscience, held in violation of their rights to freedom of expression and association.

Several provisions of National Security Law violate the rights to freedom of expression and association, rights which are guaranteed by international human rights standards to which the South Korean Government have publicly committed themselves. Amnesty International has expressed concern that the tension between North and South Korea should not be used as justification for curbing these fundamental rights.

Ki Seh-moon is himself a former political prisoner who has already spent 15 years in prison under the National Security Law. He currently practices traditional medicine which he learnt during his years in prison. Lee Kyung-ryol is Vice President of the Korean Youth Federation.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send letters and faxes:

- ◆ Expressing concern about the arrests of Ki Seh-moon and Lee Kyungryol under the National Security Law;
- ◆ Calling for their release, if they are held solely for the non-violent exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

Appeals to:

- ◆ President Kim Youngsam

The Blue House, 1 Sejong-no, Chongno-gu, Seoul

Republic of Korea

Fax: +822 770 0253

- ◆ Mr Ahn Woo-man, Minister of Justice

Ministry of Justice

1 Chungang-dong, Kwachon-myon, Shihung-gun, Kyonggi Province

Republic of Korea

Fax: +822 504 3337

- ◆ and to diplomatic representatives of South Korea in your country.

This is a quick KOTARAN action, send to selected groups for action

KEYWORDS: CENSORSHIP / REARREST / POLITICAL PRISONERS / TRADITIONAL HEALERS / PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE /

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