

# URGENT ACTION

## MOTHER AND SON RISK BEING SENT TO PRISON CAMP

**A woman who was identified as Lee Su-jung in China (aged 24) and her son (aged 4) were forcibly returned to North Korea on 17 November after nearly two weeks of detention in China and are at risk of arbitrary detention, torture or other ill-treatment and possible execution.**

**Lee Su-jung** and her son are currently detained in a detention centre in Sinuiju operated by the Ministry of State Security (previously the State Security Department) of North Korea along with eight other North Koreans who were forcibly returned from China. The authorities have been in contact with Lee Su-jung's family, and claim that she has committed treason by leaving her country.

**Lee Tae-won**, the husband of Lee Su-jung, also received information from a friend reporting that his wife and son were returned to Sinuiju, a city located on the Korean-Chinese border, on 17 November after 13 days of detention in Shenyang and possibly in Dandong in China. The same source also mentioned that Lee Su-jung is currently in poor health, and that she and her son may be transferred in early December to another city in North Korea together with the group of 8 individuals.

Treason is considered a crime against the state in North Korea, and falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of State Security, which also operates the political prison camp system. There is a high chance that Lee Su-jung, her son and the other returned North Koreans will be sent to one of these camps without a fair trial, and may be subjected to forced labour, torture, or other ill-treatment. Lee Su-jung is also at risk of execution, as the death penalty can be applied to persons aged 18 or above charged with treason.

### **Please write immediately in Korean, English or your own language:**

- Calling on the authorities to immediately provide official notification regarding the whereabouts of Lee Su-jung, her son and the other eight North Koreans who were forcibly returned from China;
- Urging them to ensure that Lee Su-jung and the rest of the group are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and have regular access to appropriate medical care during detention;
- Asking the authorities to release Lee Su-jung and the rest of the group, unless they are charged with an internationally recognizable criminal offense and promptly tried in proceedings which meet international fair trial standards, without recourse to the death penalty.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 16 JANUARY 2018 TO:**

Minister of State Security

Kim Won-hung  
Ministry of State Security  
Pyongyang  
Democratic People's Republic of Korea

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Ri Yong-ho  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Pyongyang  
Democratic Republic of Korea  
Twitter: @uriminzok (North Korean  
official twitter account)

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**And copies to:**

Ambassador of the Permanent Mission  
of the Democratic People's Republic of  
Korea to the Office of the United Nations  
in New York

Mr Ja Song-nam  
820 Second Ave, 13th Floor  
New York, NY 10017, USA  
Fax: +1 212 972 3154

Email: dpr.korea@verizon.net

**Salutation: Dear Ambassador**

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.** HIS EXCELLENCY MR IL CHOE, Embassy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 73 Gunnersbury Avenue W5 4LP tel: 020 8992 4965 Fax 020 8992 2053 [prkinfo@yahoo.com](mailto:prkinfo@yahoo.com), salutation: Your Excellency

**Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.** This is the first update of UA 253/17. Further information:

[www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/7454/2017/en/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/7454/2017/en/)

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INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In February 2014 the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) released its *Report of the detailed findings of the Commission of Inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea* (Also known as the COI Report). The report documents the systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights in the country. Individuals or families in North Korea have fled the country to escape persecution for political or religious reasons. They also often have no choice but to cross the China-North Korea border illegally due to the desperate need for food and work.

The Chinese government considers North Koreans crossing the border without prior permission not as asylum seekers, but as irregular, economic migrants. If caught, they would be forcibly returned to North Korea. According to combined sources including Human Rights Watch, China has detained at least 51 refugees since July 2017, and has forcibly returned at least 47 North Koreans, out of an estimated minimum of 102 detained since July 2016 (this include the 10 referred to in this document).

Lee Su-jung is currently charged with treason, according to reports from her husband. According to Criminal Code of North Korea, persons convicted of treason can be punished by hard labour or death. As a crime against the state, treason falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of State Security, rather than the Ministry of People's Security, which deals with ordinary crimes, and maintains the basic police functions and the ordinary prison system. The Ministry of State Security (called the State Security Department until June 2016), on the other hand, is an autonomous agency of the North Korean government that is believed to report directly to Kim Jong-un. It operates the political prison camp system, and maintains a border security bureau which is charged with identifying individuals trying to flee the country.

Up to 120,000 people remain detained in the four known political prison camps, and are subjected to forced labour, torture, deliberate starvation and other ill-treatment. Some of the violations amounted to crimes against humanity according to the COI report, but no action to ensure accountability was known to have been taken since its release. Many of those living in the camps had not been convicted of any internationally recognized criminal offence, but were detained arbitrarily for being related to individuals deemed threatening to the state, or "guilt-by-association".

The North Korean government denies the existence of political prison camps, despite testimonies by those who have suffered human rights violations in these camps, and satellite images showing that the camps remain in working order.

Further information on UA: 253/17 Index: ASA 24/7534/2017 Issue Date: 5 December 2017