

27 March 2002

AI Index ASA 17/013/2002 - News Service Nr. 56

China: Crackdown on "illegal immigrants" likely to target North Korean refugees

Amnesty International expressed concern today that the Chinese government's recent announcement of a renewed crackdown in April on "illegal immigrants" is aimed at North Koreans.

The announcement follows an incident earlier this month when 25 North Koreans stormed the Spanish embassy in Beijing demanding to be recognised as refugees.

Amnesty International has received recent reports of a massive round-up of North Koreans who are fleeing starvation and persecution . The Chinese government has repeatedly failed to take into account the plight of those in need of protection, continuing to insist that all North Koreans are "illegal immigrants".

Amnesty International has also received reports of a crackdown on religious and human rights groups assisting North Korean refugees. The UN refugee agency is barred from visiting border areas and providing appropriate assistance.

Amnesty International reiterates its appeal to the Chinese government to review its policy towards North Korean asylum seekers and ensure that they are given access to a fair and independent asylum procedure. Until then the authorities should cease detentions and forcible repatriations.

Background

Tens of thousands of starving North Koreans have fled their country over the past few years, crossing the border to China's northeastern provinces of Jilin and Liaoning. Some hide in the hills along the border and survive by scavenging, begging or stealing. Others have been given support by China's local ethnic Korean community and foreign aid organizations, or have found work in local farms and enterprises. Their illegal status makes them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and harassment. Various sources have reported that some North Korean women have been sold as brides.

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>