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RUSSIAN FEDERATION/DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA (NORTH KOREA): NORTH KOREAN SHOT DEAD AT RUSSIAN BORDER BY NORTH KOREAN OFFICIALS

Amnesty International is alarmed at reports that a North Korean "defector" was recently summarily executed by North Korean officials at the Russian-North Korean border.

The incident apparently took place in the presence of Russian border troops, immediately after the man was handed over to the North Korean side by Russian officials.

"It is appalling that this should be allowed to happen -- the execution is not only a gross violation of the right to life, but also raises serious concern about the fate of other North Koreans who were forcibly returned to their country of origin," Amnesty International said today.

The execution was mentioned by Yevgeny Nazdratenko, Governor of the Maritime Province of the Russian Federation, at an informal news conference on 27 May 1996. The Governor said that the North Korean man, whose name was not mentioned, had been arrested in December 1995 in Vladivostok when he and two other North Korean nationals tried to leave Russia for South Korea on forged passports. According to Nazdratenko, the two remaining North Koreans were brought back to a prison in Vladivostok after the execution took place.

"The current incident once again confirms Amnesty International's view that North Korean asylum seekers face serious consequences if forcibly returned to North Korea," the organization said. "The Russian authorities, however, continue to send back North Koreans."

Amnesty International expressed concern about the fate of several North Koreans who were forcibly returned by the Russian authorities last year. One of these North Koreans, Song Chang Keun, was reportedly executed by North Korean officials on Russian territory. The North Korean authorities have denied this and maintain that Song Chang Keun enjoys the same rights and freedoms in North Korea as other North Koreans. They also deny that other forcibly returned North Koreans have faced human rights violations. Due to the closed nature of North Korea, Amnesty International is not able to confirm the statements of the North Korean authorities.

Amnesty International calls on the North Korean authorities to carry out a full investigation into the reported execution of the North Korean man at the Russian-North Korean border and to bring those responsible to justice. It also calls on the Russian authorities to refrain from forcibly returning North Koreans to their country of origin where they may face serious human rights

violations, and to allow the two North Koreans currently detained in Vladivostok to seek asylum in Russia or any other country of their choice.

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For further information, please refer to Amnesty International reports:

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea): Human Rights Violations behind Closed Doors, ASA 24/12/95, issued in December 1995; and

Russian Federation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Refoulement of Lee Yen Sen/ Fear for Safety in North Korea, EUR 46/06/96, issued in February 1996.