

March 2004

APPEAL: Lim Taehoon

Lim Taehoon (28), a South Korean gay rights activist was arrested on 26 February 2004 for refusing to serve mandatory military service. Lim has refused to serve in Korea due to his convictions of non-violence and peace. He reportedly declared that he was a conscientious objector a few months ago. Lim is also calling for an expansion of the civilian alternative to military service to include people who object to military service due to their convictions, beliefs or faith.

Amnesty International considers Lim to be a prisoner of conscience as he is detained for the peaceful exercise of his human rights.

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Lim Taehoon at demonstration. He applied make-up and wore a women's dress as a form of protest.

South Korea has a compulsory military conscription. It does not recognise the right of conscientious objection therefore anyone who refuses to serve in the military due to pacifist or religious convictions is imprisoned. Currently there are over 800 conscientious objectors detained in South Korea – most of them are Jehovah's Witnesses.

FACTS: Lim's first hearing is scheduled for 26 March 2004.

Lim is currently detained at Seoul Detention Centre and has been on hunger strike since he's been detained.

Lim has been an activist seeking equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people since 1997. He has been vocal in seeking abolition of the draconian National Security Law in South Korea, campaigned against the governments AIDS policies and media propaganda, and lobbied for the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission. He's also led committees against internet censorship and discrimination against LGBT people. He now leads an LGBT group at AI Korea.

Amnesty International has also come to learn that when Lim undertook the 'physical ability test' for military service as he was required to do he was asked questions relating to his sexuality. He found that once identified as homosexual or as transgender, he was categorised as having a 'personality disorder' or a 'behavioural disability'. If he then reportedly submitted this as evidence to the military authority he would have been declared as exempt from active military service and be assigned to a civilian alternative to military service such as work in social services for a period of time.

Recommended Action:

Please send letters of support to:

Lim Taehoon (No. 3318)
Seoul Detention house, P.O. Box 20
Gunpo Post Office
Gyeonggido, 435-050, South Korea

Please send emails/letters to the South Korean authorities raising the following points:

- Call for the unconditional release of Lim Taehoon who is a prisoner of conscience as he has been detained for the peaceful exercise of his rights.
- Call on the authorities to ensure that Lim Taehoon is not tortured or ill-treated, either by law enforcement officials or by other prisoners
- Call on the authorities to expand the alternative to military service to include all of those people who object to serving in the military due to conscience, belief and faith.
- Call on the authorities not to discriminate against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals or transgender people by labelling them as having a 'personality disorder' or a 'behavioural disability' this goes against the International Bill of Human Rights - everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, is guaranteed the fullest enjoyment of their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights.

Addresses:

Ms Kang Kum-sil
Minister of Justice, Ministry of Justice
1 Chungang-dong
Kwachon City
Kyonggi Province
Republic of Korea

Fax: +82 2 2110 3079

E-mail: webmaster@moj.go.kr

Salutation: Dear Minister

Mr Cho Yung-kil
Minister of Defence
Ministry of Defence
3-1 Young San-dong
Yongsan-ku, Seoul
Republic of Korea
Fax: +82 2 703 3109

Salutation: Dear Minister

E-mail: Cyber@mnd.go.kr

Please send copies of your appeals to the National Human Rights Commission South Korea:

Fax: + 82 2 2125 9811 / 9666

E-mail: nhrc@humanrights.go.kr