

EXTERNAL

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MEDICAL CONCERN

Eun Su-mi
REPUBLIC OF KOREA (South Korea)

Amnesty International is seeking the release of Eun Su-mi, an adopted prisoner of conscience with serious health problems. She is aged 31 and recently underwent major bowel surgery. She was admitted to the emergency room of a private hospital in Kangnung, the town in which she is imprisoned, with suspected appendicitis. Upon surgery, it was found that she had tumours in the bowel and a right hemicolectomy and partial ileal resection are reported to have been performed. The surgeon then recommended her transfer to a fully-equipped hospital for further investigation, including investigation of a lung lesion, but she was instead returned to prison. Attempts to readmit her to hospital have met with administrative difficulty and delay.

Background

Eun Su-mi is serving a sentence of five years' imprisonment following conviction for membership of an "anti-state" organization. She was arrested in April 1992 and her sentence is due to run until April 1997. Eun Su-mi has apparently had health problems for some time. In early 1995 she was admitted to hospital from prison with chest pain and is reported to have been diagnosed as having angina pectoris. Further examination was recommended, but this was not permitted by the prison authorities.

Eun's recent bowel surgery took place at the end of April 1995. Prison staff had admitted her to hospital on 27 April with severe diarrhoea and fever. The staff had suspected acute appendicitis, but in fact, surgery revealed tumours. According to reports received by Amnesty International, routine pre-operative examination also detected a lung lesion and frequent cardiac arrhythmia. The surgeon performed a right hemicolectomy and partial ileal resection. It is unclear whether any histological tests were performed; the only information that AI currently has is that the family were informed that there had been "an inflammatory mass, probably not a malignant tumour". Although the surgeon recommended her transfer to one of the larger hospital for investigation of the underlying cause of her bowel disease, the lung lesion and her heart problems, this did not occur. On 9 May - 12 days after admission to hospital - she was returned to prison.

Eun Su-mi's family have attempted to have her readmitted to hospital, but without success to date. According to the information available to AI, the family first approached the prison director

who referred them to the prison doctor. The prison doctor is said to have told the family that they would have to apply to the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry in turn stated that it could only take action if approached by the prison director.

From information available, it appears that the prison authorities have failed to take action because Eun's hospitalization would mean that guards would have to be assigned from the prison staff and the prison director is reported to have claimed that there are insufficient resources for this.

Amnesty International is urging Eun Su-mi's unconditional release from prison. She is a prisoner of conscience arrested for membership of a left-wing political grouping and is unlikely to have access to much medical attention in prison. A report published in 1992 by the Seoul-based *Lawyers for a Democratic Society* examined medical care in Korean prisons. By way of illustration, it noted that in 1990 there were 1,500 prisoners in the medical section of Seoul detention centre who were attended by only one full-time doctor and a number of non-medical personnel. No medical staff were on duty during the night and prisoners frequently complained of delays in obtaining medical attention, lack of proper treatment and a general attitude of neglect. When Eun Su-mi was admitted to hospital in April, it appears that she had been in distress for some time before she was hospitalized.

Eun is also held in very poor and unsanitary conditions in Kangnung, a town on the east coast, 250 km from Seoul. She is housed in a small solitary cell said to measure 4 square yards [3.6m²] to be without windows and in which there is an insanitary pit toilet.

Background to arrest

Eun Su-mi was one of a group of some 40 people arrested in April 1992 by South Korea's intelligence agency, the ANSP, or Agency for National Security Planning. She and others were accused of membership of *Sanomaeng* (Socialist Workers' League), an organization which has been classed as an "anti-state" organization by the authorities. South Korea has a National Security Law¹ which gives a very broad definition to what is considered to be an "anti-state" organization. Equally, the courts have interpreted the law broadly and it has been used to imprison people holding left-wing views or views seen to be similar to those of the government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). Since 1990, over 200 members or alleged members of *Sanomaeng* have been arrested; around 40 remain in prison to this date.

The authorities charge was that members of *Sanomaeng* planned to overthrow the state by violent means. However, *Sanomaeng* members have stated their commitment to non-violent means of political activism and have sought to set up a political party. Amnesty International believes that there is no evidence behind the state's charge and that Eun Su-mi was given a five-year prison sentence because she was on the policy planning committee within *Sanomaeng*.

She had been a university student from 1982 to 1984 at Seoul National University, where she studied sociology, and here she became involved in student politics and headed the Women's Student Committee. She was expelled from university before graduation following a student sit-in and took a job in a factory. She then became involved in the labour movement and later joined *Sanomaeng*.

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Amnesty International believes Eun to be imprisoned for her non-violent political views and is calling on the authorities for her unconditional release. Furthermore, it is asking the authorities

¹For further information on the National Security Law, please see *Republic of Korea: Concerns Relating to Freedom of Expression and Opinion* (ASA 25/12/95 - June 1995)

to account for the reasons why they have thus far failed to respond to recommendations about the investigation and management of her care.

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To: Medical professionals
From: Medical Office / Asia Regional Program
Date: 14 July 1995

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

Eun Su-mi
REPUBLIC OF KOREA (South Korea)

Keywords

Theme: POC/ ill-health/ medical care

Summary

Eun Su-mi is a 31-year-old female prisoner of conscience who has recently undergone major bowel surgery. Despite recommendations that she be hospitalized for further investigation, she was returned to prison shortly after surgery. Amnesty International is calling for her release. Please see the details attached.

Recommended Actions

Letters are requested from medical professionals to the addresses below and should:

- outline Eun Su-mi's case and express deep concern that she has not been admitted to hospital for further investigation following recent major surgery after a tumorous bowel condition was discovered
- ask about the conditions in which she is being held and about what plans there are for the management of her medical problems. Stress that while she is in prison it is the responsibility of the authorities to provide her with medical care of a standard equal to that of the population at large. Express concern that administrative considerations appear to have taken precedence over arrangements to provide her with the medical attention she requires
- urge that steps are immediately taken to allow further medical investigation
- note that Eun Su-mi was imprisoned for the peaceful expression of political opinion and not involved in any violent crime or in the advocacy of violence
- urge her unconditional release from prison

Letters could refer to the UN *Principles of medical ethics relevant to the role of health personnel, particularly physicians, in the protection of prisoners and detainees against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of punishment*. These state at Principle 1: "Health personnel, particularly physicians, charged with the medical care of prisoners and detainees have the duty to provide them with the protection of their physical and mental health and treatment of disease of the same quality and standard as is afforded to those who are not imprisoned or detained."

Letters to the prison authorities should ask whether histological tests were performed after Eun's surgery and whether an exact diagnosis has been made.

Addresses

Mr Ahn Woo-mahn
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
1 Chungang-dong
Kwachon-myon
Shihung-gun, Kyonggi-do
Republic of Korea

Director General
Correction Bureau
Ministry of Justice
1 Chungang-dong
Kwachon-myon
Shihung-gun, Kyonggi-do
Republic of Korea
(Department responsible for prisoner welfare)

Prison director - and -
Prison doctor
Kangnung Prison
720 Hongjae-dong
Kangnung
Kangwon-do 210
Republic of Korea

Copies can be sent to:

Association of Physicians for Humanism
Sudaemoon ku
Youngehun-dong 69-4, 2nd floor
Seoul 120 070
Republic of Korea

If possible, please send a copy of letters written to the Minister of Justice to the prison, marked for the attention of the prison director and doctor.

Eun Su-mi

