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#### HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN KOREA

Human rights violations have been inseparable part of Korean history / throughout almost 4000 years of dynastic rule which consolidated the patriarchal culture and caste system, during the political militarism, economic plunder and cultural invasion under the Japanese colonial rule, and as a result of the division of the country that put Korea in a vanguard position in the cold war. However, since the dictatorial rule of Park Jung-Hee human rights issues have become a general concern .

##### 1. Human Rights under the Park Jung-Hee Regime

The Park regime which took power through a military coup initiated vigorous economic plans. It imported much foreign capital to develop industries and established and consolidated an export-oriented economic system. Therefore, the long-time agricultural economy of Korean society changed to an industrial economy. Korean society became urbanized and industrialized. This economic development began to show deep rooted problems in the 1970s, approximately 10 years after its initiation.

In October 1972, President Park declared martial law under which he dissolved the National Assembly and amended the Constitution in order to prolong his military rule, and oppressed any opponents to his rule. Opposition to the dictatorial system under the Yushin Constitution led to the arrest of Catholic and Protestant ministers, politicians, journalists, intellectuals and students. These arrests and imprisonments acted as the catalyst for the creation of the anti-system movement. In response, the Park regime resorted to the so-

system movement. In response, the Park regime resorted to the so-called Presidential Emergency Decree to repress the movement. In 1974 alone 331 were arrested and tried in the military court of whom 7 received the death sentence. Afterwards, until the assassination of Park Jung-Hee in October 1979, 2704 people were arrested and imprisoned altogether.

## 2. Human Rights under the Chun Doo-Hwan Regime

Despite efforts to establish a democratic government after the fall of Park Jung-Hee the military coup d'état led by Gen. Chun Doo-Hwan once again plunged Korea into the military ruled dictatorship. Chun Doo-Hwan arrested many who opposed the coup and massacred Kwangju citizens. Government reports spoke of 200 dead but they are generally known to have numbered 2000. Between 1980 and 1985 the number of arrests and imprisonments reached 3291. In 1986 alone over 4610 people were detained, mainly students and workers.

Also in 1987, thousands of citizens, students, workers and democratic activists were routinely arrested and many were imprisoned on charges of violating the National Security Law, the Law on Assembly and Demonstration, and the Law on Violence. The prisoners of conscience continued their struggles even within the cells in detention centers. In the process, confrontations between prisoners of conscience and the detention center authorities resulted in the injuries of many prisoners. Those who were branded as leaders of these resistance activities were even more severely punished and beaten. Along with massive arrests, the most severe human rights violation is torture. Information agents and interrogation officers of the Anti-

Communist Bureau of the National Police Headquarters, the National Security Planning Agency and the Counter Intelligence Corp have been responsible for numerous cases of torture. Among such representative cases are the tortures of Kim Keun-Tae, once student activist and former chairperson of the Youth Alliance for Democracy; Kwon In-Sook, a woman Seoul National University student and labour activist; and Seoul National University student Park Jong-Chul who was tortured to death.

Kim Keun-Tae was tortured at the Anti-Communist Bureau of the National Police Headquarters for three consecutive days by electric and water torture. After such violent beatings and torture Kim was charged with violating the National Security Law and was sentenced to seven years imprisonment. During his appeal, Kim's sentence was reduced to five years. Kim exposed his torture during his trial, but the judge presiding over his case refused to recognize the torture in spite of the evidence.

Ms. Kwon In-Sook was arrested and taken to the Puchon Police Station in May of 1988. Kwon, originally arrested for having falsified information on her job application in order to qualify her to work in a factory, was interrogated by officers at the police station on the whereabouts and names of other labour activists in that area. In the process of interrogation, an officer by the name of Moon KwieDong began to molest her, sexually harassing her while threatening Kwon to release information on fellow labour activists.

On January 1987, a young student named Park Jong-Chul was taken to the Anti-Communist Bureau and severely tortured during his interrogation

in which agents attempted to force Park to reveal information about student activists. Park died in the process of torture; he had not even been formally charged with any illegal activities. The death of Park Jong-Chul and the subsequent exposure of the cause of his death served as an opportunity for the people to express their long suppressed criticisms and complaints against the Chun Doo-Hwan regime. These three cases are merely examples of hundreds of other cases, many of which still remain hidden. In addition to torture, many dissident leaders were routinely placed under house arrest under the Chun . regime. Outspoken political leaders were frequently placed under house arrest. Ordinary citizens had their human rights violated every time they were stopped in the streets by riot police or plain-clothes policemen who searched their belongings.

Oppression of the freedoms to assemble and demonstrate were widespread. Almost all rallies, assemblies, and demonstrations which were planned to express criticisms against Chun regime were branded illegal and hundreds of fully geared riot police and hired hoodlums were mobilized with tear gas and clubs. In June 1987, while the . country experienced a nationwide protest against the Chun regime, a Yonsei University student, Hee Han-Yul was hit in the head by a tear gas bomb and fell to his death during a demonstration. Then again, in August of the same year, a Daewoo Company worker, Lee Suk-Kyu was also killed as a result of a tear gas bomb. There are countless other victims of these weapons of government oppression. The freedom of press and publications were also likewise severely repressed. Under the Chun regime, all the major newspapers, radio and

television broadcasting systems were forced to undergo restructuring. These reamalgamated press were forced to abide by the "reporting guidelines" stipulated by the Ministry of Culture. In 1986 several courageous reporters exposed these government guidelines and were thus imprisoned. The state runned Korean Broadcasting System had long been guilty of biased, inaccurate reporting and this was brought to public attention and a campaign to refuse to pay subscription fee to the Korean Broadcasting System was waged which received the support and participation of many citizens nationwide.

Publications criticizing the present system of the government were also subject to confiscations. Bookstores are searched and social lscience texts whcih might be critical of the Korean system are confiscated and prevented from being sold. Bookstore owners and publishers are also placed under arrest in connection to such "illegal" texts and even charged with the National Security Law. Other persons found to be in possession or reading such texts can also be arrested.

The 'three rights of workers - the rights to organize, engage in collective bargaining and strike are also hampered. Workers who are engaged in acitvities to form democratic trade unions are often beaten by members of company-hired goons who make up the "Save the company" team. Activities such as strikes are the subjects of police intervention and oppression.

For urban poor residents, life has become even more difficult as many of them are subject to forced evictions as a result of redeveopment policies of cities in preparation for the Olympic Games. Their small

vinyl homes and shacks are demolished with a minimum compensation. The livelihoods of farmers in the countryside are also threatened as US increases pressures to open the Korean markets to more US agricultural goods and livestock. The Farmerst Cooperatives are government-run and thus can not represent the rights and interests of the Korean farmer.

The challenge to the Chun Doo-Hwan regime in 1986 was manifested through the struggles for constitutional revision. However, after its successful hosting of the Asian Games in October, the Chun regime began to create an offensive climate by branding the democratic forces as leftists and pro-communists. As the government began its attack on the democratic forces, one by one, the democratic forces were unable to withstand the attacks and were forced into a defensive posture. Such a situation continued throughout 1986 to the beginning of 1987. In the beginning of 1987 an incident was exposed which shocked the nation and placed all the citizens into a state of anger and wrath. As a result of the cruel policies of the Chun regime a young student named Park Jong-Chul was found to have been tortured to death. The government, however, continued its offensive posture and announced on April 13 that it would not engage in any dialogue for constitutional revision. Through this action, the government clearly showed the people that it had every intention of holding on to its political power. In opposition countless Christians began protest actions such as shaving their heads, engaging in hunger-strikes, and adopting statements in opposition to the April 13th announcement. Together with other protest actions from dissident groups these efforts have culminated in formation of united peoples' opposition organization

called National Council for Democratic Constitution on 27 May involving opposition parties, Catholics, Protestants and Buddhists, lawyers, artists, literaries, students, workers and farmers. Based on this organization united and organized power was created to lead struggles for constitutional amendment and anti-government movement. Precisely within this climate, the truth of the death of Park Jong-Chul and its subsequent cover-up were revealed and the nation rose up in anger through the great June struggles of 1987. Because of these struggles the Chun regime was forced to accept constitutional revision and make the June 29th announcement. Thus suspension of military dictatorship was made possible through the election process. With the ensuing democratic space after the June 29th announcement, workers rose up in continuous struggles from July through September. Workers were demanding their rights to a democratic trade union and increase in wages. The explosion of striking workers in some 3,300 companies nationwide revealed to the people the possibilities of democracy. However, the opposition forces unfortunately failed to achieve unity within its ranks and on 18 December Kim Dae-Jung and Kim Young-Sam shared separate tickets as individual presidential candidates. This became the fundamental cause of fraud within the election process and the subsequent setbacks by the democratic forces. In the presidential election Roh Tae-Woo, former general in collusion with Chun Doo-Hwan in the Dec.12, 1979 coup, became the nation's new President.

### 3. Human Rights under the Roh Tae-Woo Regime

Since his rise to power Roh Tae-Woo had worked hard to instill an

image within the people that he is different from Chun Doo-Hwan. This was the motivation behind the amnesty of 27 February, 1988. In addition, the arbitrary searches by riot police on the streets stopped and the scenes of plainclothesmen or riot police keeping watch in the sidewalks disappeared.

Control over the media and press has also to a large extent been alleviated. Thus the arrest of former President Chun Doo-Hwan's brother, Chun Kyung-Hwan was made possible as was the sentencing of Moon Ki-won, the police officer responsible for the sexual torture of Ms. Kwon In-Sook.

In spite of these changes, about 350 prisoners of conscience remain in prison from the 1970s and another 100 persons have warrants out for their arrests in connection with democratic activities. Furthermore, the laws of suppression which have come to be referred to as the "evil laws" - the National Security Law, the Law on Assembly and Demonstration, and the Public Security Law have not been amended and remain. More importantly, however, is the fact that the military powers which have served to provide basic support to the Chun regime continue to play the role of being the pillars of the Rho government. Thus it is generally believed that the superficial reformist policies of Rho Tae-Woo are bound to reach a point of limitation.

Under the pressure for democratic reforms pushed by opposition parties and people the Rho government released 217 prisoners of conscience including Kim Keun-Tae through three occasions one of which was his inauguration day as the President on 27 February on which day 135 were released. However, since the rule of Rho's government 347



more political prisoners were arrested by 20 August. The present total number of prisoners of conscience is approximately 650 which is a far bigger number than that at the last days of the Chun regime. The tendencies of human rights violations under the Rho regime appear as follows:

First, most of long-term political prisoners who were imprisoned under the Park regime remained in prisons. Most of these prisoners are imprisoned for ideological affiliations and include some Korean migrants from Japan and the US. Several of them have claimed that they were arrested for fabricated incidences based on testimonies attained under the torture or deliberately created for the interests of the ruling group. From a long time imprisonment (10 to 20 years) many shows serious health problems and some have become old and weak.

Second, increasing arrest of workers involved in labour disputes are evident. During last July and August the outbursts of workers struggles were recorded and just over those two months 1070 new trade unions were organized showing unprecedented vitality. Unexpectedly those workers struggles took place in large conglomerates such as Hyundai, Daewoo and Samsung which have maintained its dispute-free policy as well as in regions other than the capital-metropolitan areas. Instead of accommodating such active workers struggles the government adopted repressive measures using physical forces and arresting many union leaders with various excuses. An obvious example is the arrest and imprisonment of Hyundai Engine Co. union president, Mr. Kwon Yong-Mok. Stern and repressive policies of the government in collusion with large companies are causing an imprisonment of many workers.

Third, from the beginning of this year the issue of national unification have become a general concern in the society. Students have attempted to hold a meeting with students of North at the truce village on two occasions on 10 June and 15 August and in addition, the religious and literary groups have suggested a contact with their counterparts in North. Pressured by such moves the Rho government has made gesture suggesting a possible meeting of paliamentary represetatives from both parts of Korea. However, this unification issue still is a very sensitive one and the government prohibits any attempts of civilian contacts. Consequently over 8157 students and citizens were arrested in connection with June 10 and August 15 North .and South Korean students meeting. Of those arrested 41 were formally charged. Recently a dramatist was arrested and charged for playing a drama that praised North Korea while a Rev. Shin Chul-Ho of Methodist church and some youth members of his congregation were arrested and charged for showing slides about daily lives of North Korean. Also a high official in the government has recently made a strong remark about clearing the country of leftists and pro-communists. Incidences of terrorist acts against a journalist who criticized "military culture" and members of dissident cultural group (a woman member was raped) appear as new violations of human rights in Korea. When considering various contemplations of possible changes in government policies after the Olympic Games these violations seemed to fortell unpleasant future.

#### 4. Additional note

As generally understood the problems of apartheid are not prevalent

in Korea. In relation to discrimination against the minority groups, Koreans in Japan are a big concern'and supports and solidarity have been extended to their struggles in Japan. Recently a million signature collecting campaign have been pormoted to oppose the finger printing of aliens in Japan.

Problems of apartheid in South Africa are not widely known among Koreans. Although the Korean Presbyterian Churches which are affiliated to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches are concerned with activities and repressions on Rev. Allen Boesak they have not developed the concerns to specific actions of support. Informations about the extent of trade between Korea and South Africa were almost non-existent. Neither has the newspapers reported any articles about this trade or relationship nor the Christian Institute for the Study of Justice and Development had any informations. The Korean government declined to provide any materials or informations showing its reluctance to disclose internationally sensitive informations. Also the press do not feel the need to report on these issues. Therefore, unfortunately there is no one or a group in Korea who are concerned or support stuggles of South African to overcome apartheid. The following comments from the business manager of Gold Star that maintains close trade relations with South Africa which was reported in a foreign newspaper may in fact, reflect the level of general consciousness about South Korean issues among Korean.

"Korean business agent for Gold Star, Edward Kim said he believes tSouth Africa is a good market for his products. He\_said tI am not a politician but a businessman who believes all people of South Africa can benefit from increased investment by companies such as ours.i"