

Human Rights without Frontiers

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Draft project

Campaign for the release of South Korean humanitarian aid workers

Noguchi's experience

Hopefully, Takayuki Noguchi should be released on August 9 and sent back to Japan. It is obviously the **result of a campaign orchestrated by a Japanese NGO with the collaboration the Japanese media and the Japanese authorities.** *Human Rights Without Frontiers* has used its regular press services to drum out urgent appeals to the international community to put pressure on China to get the release of Noguchi workers and more generally, to decriminalise the efforts of international humanitarian workers when helping North Korean refugees in the lack of any other international protection or mechanisms to decide on their status and needs.

Though NGO representatives were not allowed into the court room at the trial of Takayuki Noguchi on 28 June in Nanning, Guangxi Autonomous Province, it was obvious that the international pressure and media attention put Chinese authorities in an uneasy and uncomfortable position. The trial was obviously pre-judged and the sentence of 8 months, while Noguchi has already been imprisoned for nearly seven months, can be considered a face-saving formula for the Chinese authorities in Nanning.

We now have

- to start a campaign for Noguchi's political rehabilitation on national and international level
- to work for the release of other humanitarian aid workers imprisoned in China
- to guarantee the safety of other aid workers who are now involved in further underground activities
- to use the occasion of Noguchi's announced release to raise awareness of the ways China reneges on its commitments and obligations in the field of international humanitarian law and refugee law.

The case of the South Korean humanitarian aid workers

Human Rights Without Frontiers believes that the release of Takayuki Noguchi will provide certain momentum and it will be the right moment to reinvigorate the debate on North Korean refugees and imprisoned humanitarian workers. Three South Korean aid workers are still in prison:

- Mr Yong-hui Chon was sentenced to five years in prison;
- Mr Hee-tae Kim has no sentence delivered yet (or HRWF is not aware of any)
- Rev. Bong-il Choi has no sentence delivered yet (or HRWF is not aware of any).

These cases lacked the pressure and attention that were needed in due time to have a chance to get their release. **The lack of commitment from any South Korean NGO, from the South Korean media and the South Korean political authorities explain the heavy sentences that have been inflicted on the three South Korean aid workers.**

Two objectives stand out:

- Moral rehabilitation of Takayuki Noguchi, as he will carry out with him a sentence of a criminal offender. The charges brought against him by the Chinese court should be discussed in the light of their illegitimacy and invalidity in the context of the North Korean refugee issue.
- Release of South Korean humanitarian workers imprisoned in China.

Campaign

To this end, HRWF proposes following activities (not necessarily chronologically):

- **Activity 1:** HRWF will be preparing a report on humanitarian workers arrested in China that will be used as a support information material during all private and public meetings.
- **Activity 2:** Appointments at European institutions in Brussels organised for Takayuki Noguchi and other LFNKR staff members to meet officials and brief them on the arrest, the trial, and the detention at the Chinese prison in Nanning. This should be used as an occasion to expand on the case of North Korean refugees, their plight and lack of protection. Most importantly, these meetings will be used to highlight the arrest and detention of other humanitarian workers and call for the need to build up international pressure for their release.
- **Activity 3:** Seminar to be organised jointly by HRWF and LFNKR in Seoul (in October?) with the participation of Takayuki Noguchi, academics, parliamentarians (South Korean and Japanese who have already demonstrated commitment to the issue), national and international journalists. HRWF as a Western NGO is maybe in a better position to raise a number of issues with some South Korean officials:

- a) The issue of imprisonment of South Korean humanitarian workers. We have already met a representative of the South Korean embassy in Brussels and briefed him on the Noguchi trial highlighting the importance of pressure and the illegitimacy of the charges brought against all humanitarian workers who are helping North Korean refugees.
- b) A comparative study of the effectiveness of the strategies adopted by the South Korean government and the Japanese government with regard to the detention of their nationals in China.
- c) The status of humanitarian aid workers in international law.
- d) A comprehensive report documenting the arrest, detention, and trial of humanitarian aid workers.

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