

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations Office at Geneva
1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland

11 December 2012

Re: Human Rights Violations in Gangjeong, Jeju Island, Republic of Korea

Dear Mr. Frank La Rue, Mr. Maina Kiai, Ms. Margaret Sekagya, and Mr. El Hadji Malick Sow,

The National Network of Korean Civil Society for Opposing to the Naval Base in Jeju Island¹ is sending you a joint letter to bring your special attention to the situation of human rights violations in Gangjeong, Jeju Island. Human rights defenders including peace activists, religious leaders, villagers, and environmental defenders are continuously harassed by the government of the Republic of Korea, the navy and construction companies during their peaceful protest against construction of Jeju naval base. In response to the submitted individual complaints, three special rapporteurs sent a joint allegation letter to the Government on human rights violations in Gangjeong on 30 May 2012. Unfortunately, the Government has not sent a response to the allegation letter yet.

1. Recent Situation

Recently, the Navy and the construction companies(Samsung C&T and Daerim) have been continuing naval base construction on a twenty-four hour basis in Gangjeong village. Consequently, human rights violations of human rights defenders including peace activists and villagers have also been occurring on a twenty-four hour basis. Between July 2009 and August 2012, police arrested 586 human rights defenders while 22 people were detained between 2011 and 2012. Currently, five human rights defenders are in prison, undergoing trials.

Gangjeong villagers and peace activists who oppose to the naval base construction have been protesting at the gates of the naval base construction business committee headquarters and construction site to prevent construction vehicles from entering. They have been blocking the vehicles by sitting in front of the gates holding banners or through one-person demonstrations. When vehicles enter or exit the gate, traffic polices are mobilized to control traffic and task force police start to move towards

¹ The National Network of Korean Civil Society for Opposing to the Naval Base in Jeju Island consists of 125 Korean civil society organizations. Currently, People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), National Council of Churches in Korea, Solidarity for Peace And Reunification of Korea are serving as co-convenor of the network.

human rights defenders. Warnings are issued two or three times, demanding voluntary dissolution of peaceful assembly and announcing that those who remain will be forced to be removed and criminally punished for obstructing official businesses. The task force police then create a circular formation to execute the 'isolating operation'², and other police officers force human rights defenders into that circular formation.

Since 'isolating operations' are happening depends on the vehicles' transportation schedule, it is carried out every 30 minutes to 1 hour during day time and 1.5 hour to 2 hour during night time. Every time, there are around 300~400 police forces to 'isolate' only five to ten human rights defenders in average. At night time, there are fewer human rights defenders who protest in front of the constructions site but a number of police forces remain same.

Construction vehicles are going in and out at all hours of the day and caisson³ production continues throughout the night, thereby threatening labour rights including safety of the workers. Last summer, seven caissons that had been mounted offshore of Gangjeong were destroyed by a large typhoon, and workers at the Hwasun Port production site where the caissons were made revealed that construction had been shoddy. Unattended wreckage from these destroyed caissons is still found at the coastal waters of Gangjeong which cause environmental destruction at the site. At around 1am on 26 November 2012, Samsung C&T tugboat was submerged from colliding with wreckage from the destroyed caissons. Yet, the construction companies and the Navy are enforcing the construction with tight schedule which raises serious concerns of further accidents.

2. Excessive Use of Force by the Police

The most serious problem found in Gangjeong village is the excessive use of police force. In particular, 'isolating operation' that has been occurring 24-hours results in serious human rights violations. The forcible removal of human rights defenders during the 'isolating operation' is accompanied by violence and harassments. Since the police forces physically move human rights defenders into their circular formation to facilitate in and out of construction vehicles, those human rights defenders are heavily injured. They had head injuries when police dragged their bodies by holding their legs and they were dropped on the floor when police carry their bodies by holding their legs and arms. Sometimes, they were kicked by the police and/or their joints were twisted. Since 25 October 2012, six human rights defenders were sent to emergency room due to injuries occurred during the 'isolation operation'. There have even been cases where police

² 'Isolating operation' is a method to isolate and immobilise demonstrators by surrounding them with police troops. At Gangjeong village, 'fixing' is implemented by creating a space for entrapment and then forcing people to go into that space. Normally, police troops form two circular walls, sometimes with the addition of a third wall of shielded troops to isolate protesters.

³ A caisson, or concrete water-retaining structure, is being used in the construction of the naval base. A huge structure reaching 8,800 tons is to be constructed and lowered into the sea to form the framework of the breakwater.

force simply left after their operation without giving attention to those who were injured during the operation. 'Isolating operations' are carried out even when human rights defenders are having their meal at the demonstration site, by taking their kitchen utensils away and isolating them.

The 'isolating operation' is done for the purpose to ensure that construction continues based on the Navy's schedule, and therefore, focuses solely on facilitating construction vehicles' movement without giving any regard to human rights and safety of human rights defenders. Complaints against the police's violent operation cannot be properly made because it is not possible to identify the officer in question as they wear masks or hide their nametags. Meanwhile, on 17 October 2012, the Jeju District Court decided that a peace activist who had been charged with obstructing official duties was not guilty, ruling that "infliction of injury in the process of protesting wrongful execution of law by the police counts as self-defense."

Women human rights defenders are sometimes arrested by male police officers instead of female. According to the law, women should be arrested by female police officer. Women human rights defenders are subject to humiliating situations when their bodies or underwear are exposed as they are dragged by male police officers. The human rights defenders have repeatedly demand for the situation to be improved but nothing has been done by the police. In addition to the physical violence, there have been abuses involving verbal harassment. The police have been engaging in foul language as well as humiliating verbal insults such as "you are dirty" or "a dog is barking." Human rights violation by the police including both degrading verbal abuse and physical violence, have been threatening the self-respect of human rights defenders.

Another problem is that police's surveillance against villagers and peace activists became daily routine. The police have been taking photos of individuals who participate in peaceful assembly, religious activities, press conference as well as even those who are involved in small disputes in the village. The stress of the residents and peace activists due to this measure has reached a serious level. On 13 September 2012, it was found that a broadcasting team hired by the Jeju Provincial Police Agency was live-broadcasting the situation at the gate of construction site by setting up cameras and laptop at the nearby building and using the wireless internet connection. The Police Agency had assigned two broadcasting personnel in Gangjeong village per day so that they can live-broadcast the situation in front of the construction site each day, including days when no special events were taking place, and had added instructions to the personnel to take care that the fact of broadcasting was not exposed. Record-keeping activities of this kind are serious human rights abuses that have chilling effects on the freedom of expression of those who are opposed to the naval base construction. Such excessive use and abuse of Government authority clearly violates the freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the rights of human rights defenders.

3. Police Abetting of the Construction Company and Private Security Firm Employees' Abuses

In the process of protesting against the naval base construction, villagers and peace activists inevitably face not only the police but also the construction companies and private security forces hired by the naval base construction business committee. The violence of the construction company and their private security forces are also at a serious level. In addition, the police, despite recognising sufficient knowledge of the violence, have been taking no efforts to stop private security forces. On 26 April 2012, Father Jeong-hyun Moon was physically and verbally harassed by private security forces at the gates of the construction site while protesting against the police who interfered the Catholic mass. In general, private security forces engage in threats and physical abuse, sometimes wear masks to hide their identities and subject villagers and peace activists to serious intimidation. The police are taking an onlooker stance, and do not prevent illegal activities or punish those who are responsible.

4. Interference with the Practice of Religion

Various religious activities take place in front of the naval base construction site each day, including Catholic masses, Buddhist services, and Protestant worships. On 8 August 2012, without sufficient prior notice, police broke up a Catholic Mass to carry out an 'isolating operation', which led to the destruction of the Host during the Holy Communion. As the police pushed participants of the mass to one side of the road, the Host that Father Jeong-hyun Moon had been carrying fell to the ground. People protested that the Host had fallen but the police ignored them and trampled on the host, breaking it into pieces. Father Moon wept and fainted, and two people who protested the incident were arrested on the spot. But the police's repression of religious activity has not abated, and the practice of interfering mass to execute 'fixing' operations is continuing.

We again would like to call on your continued attention to the situation of human rights defenders in Jeju Island who are against the naval base construction. We urge you to take actions on on-going serious human rights violations in Gangjeong village.

If you have any further questions or need a clarification, please do not hesitate to contact us at any time. We do hope this letter will contribute to your work.

Yours Sincerely,



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