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CHINA | CSW calls for release of detained South Korean activists

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is concerned about the welfare of Kim Young Hwan, a South Korean activist working for democracy and human rights in North Korea, and three of his colleagues, after they were arrested in China on March 29, and calls upon the Chinese authorities to release them.

Kim Young Hwan entered China on March 23. A week later, after losing contact with him, his family reported him missing to the South Korean Foreign Ministry. South Korean officials discovered that on March 29 he had been arrested by the Chinese authorities along with three of his colleagues whilst visiting Liaoning Province, on the border with North Korea.

So far there little explanation has been given for the arrest of Mr. Kim and his colleagues, although the South Korean Foreign Ministry was told that they had been charged with “crimes of endangering national security”. As the group has been denied access to consul officials or a lawyer, it has been difficult to assess the exact reason for their arrest.

Mr. Kim has been active in lobbying for human rights in North Korea since the 1990s and there is some concern that this arrest may have been orchestrated at the request of the North Korean authorities. On his arrest, Chinese security agents took him to the city of Dandong, located on the border with North Korea, rather than to Shenyang, the capital city of Liaoning Province.

North Korean officials from the National Security Agency and the General Bureau of Reconnaissance, which is in charge of espionage tasks targeting South Korea, frequently operate out of Dandong.

CSW’s Advocacy Director, Andrew Johnston, said, “CSW calls for the unconditional and immediate release of Kim Young-Hwan and his colleagues. Their detention, without access to legal or consular assistance, is in violation of international law, and the charges against them are vague and without basis. It is clear that they are being targeted because of their human rights activism in North Korea.”