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NORTH KOREA

CSW gravely concerned for US journalists sentenced to 12 years hard labor

CSW is gravely concerned for the future of two American journalists in North Korea, who have each now been condemned to 12 years of hard labor in the country's macabre imprisonment system.

Daily NK, quoting the brief report of the Chosun Central News Agency (KCNA), said: "The Central Court of the DPRK staged the trial of American journalists Laura Ling and Lee Seung Eun (Euna Lee) from the 4th to 8th. The two were convicted of crimes against the state and illegal border crossing, and the Central Court sentenced them both to 12 years of reform through labor."

The journalists, Laura Ling, a Chinese-American, and Euna Lee, a Korean-American, both working for Current TV, were arrested by North Korean border guards during a reporting trip along the China-North Korea border. While the facts surrounding the case remain unclear, the North Korean official news agency, KCNA, claimed they "were detained on March 17 while illegally intruding into the territory of the DPRK by crossing the DPRK-China border".

Quiet negotiations between the US and DPRK to secure the release of the prisoners were unsuccessful, embroiled in highly strained and complicated relations between the two countries, leading to the case coming to trial.

CSW has extensively documented the harsh detention and imprisonment system which now faces the captives in the report: North Korea: A Case to Answer- A Call to Act. Set within a country which has one of the worst human rights records in the world, these labor camps hold around 200,000 political prisoners who are often subjected to the most dire living and labor conditions.

It remains unclear whether Ms. Ling and Ms. Lee will be faced with such desperate standards of incarceration.

North Korea operates under a regime of harsh repression and control, and rules a country struggling under meager food availability. CSW concludes that there is a prima facie case for the commission of crimes against humanity and that there are indicators of genocide against religious groups, specifically Christians.

Tina Lambert, CSW-UK's Advocacy Director said: "CSW is gravely concerned for the journalists at this time. Given previous precedent, we believe it is highly unlikely that the women received a fair trial according to international standards. We call upon the North Korean regime to rescind this unjust sentence and to grant Laura Ling and Euna Lee's immediate release.

We are deeply concerned for all prisoners subjected to severe conditions in the country, including grueling labor, minimal food rations and desperate living conditions. Such treatment is indicative of the total disregard of the regime towards human rights. We urge the United Nations to boldly condemn and

extensively investigate these concerns at all levels of its system, including the Security Council, as a matter of utmost importance.”