

FORUM-ASIA welcomes the release of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions leader, Han Sang-gyun

(Bangkok, 22 May 2018) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) welcomes the release of Han Sang-gyun, which indicates a positive starting point for human rights and justice in South Korea. Han Sang-gyun, leader of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), was released yesterday after serving two years and six months of a three-year sentence in prison. He was among those who were imprisoned for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association under the previous regime, the Park administration.

Han Sang-gyun was found guilty of inciting illegal actions in 13 rallies in which he was involved, including the People's Rally on 14 November 2015 in Central Seoul that led to the police violently dispersing a peaceful protest. Arrested on 10 December 2015, Han Sang-gyun was charged with, amongst other things, violating the Assembly and Demonstration Act and General Obstruction of Traffic (Article 185 of the Criminal Code). On 4 July 2016, he was sentenced to five years in prison and a fine of 500,000 Korean Won (KRW), equivalent to around 435 US Dollars. The sentence was reduced to three years by the Appellate Court's decision on 13 December 2016, ruling that there was no evidence supporting the allegation that police officers had difficulties breathing due to the protests.

The detention of Han Sang-gyun was arbitrary, as stipulated in an open letter¹ sent by FORUM-ASIA to the President of South Korea, recommendation² by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, as well as in the Report³ of the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of assembly and of association, Maina Kiai, after his official visit to South Korea. Han Sang-gyun and many others activists were detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, which are guaranteed under international human rights treaties.

The unlawful detention was a symbol of the repression of fundamental freedoms under the previous regime of South Korea.

FORUM-ASIA applauds the release of Han Sang-gyun, and encourages the Government of South Korea to further extend this goodwill by releasing all prisoners of conscience who have been unjustly charged and sentenced to prison terms, including Lee Young-Joo, a women human rights defender and Secretary-General of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions. We also call on the Government to

¹ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=25302>

² UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 22/2017 concerning Han Sang-gyun Han and Lee Young-joo (Republic of Korea), A/HRC/WGAD/2017/22, 30 May 2017

³ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association on his mission to the Republic of Korea, A/HRC/32/36/Add.2, 15 June 2016, point 20.

further guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly of its people as stipulated in its Constitution and in accordance with the international human rights standards that it adheres to.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

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