

From:

Date:

President Lee Myung-bak  
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Seoul 110-820, REPUBLIK KOREA

Dear President!

I am writing to you in order to express my deep concern regarding the case of Mr. Moon Myungjin, who refuses to perform military service on the grounds of his beliefs and who is sentenced to 18 months imprisonment. Mr. Moon Myungjin has, among others, participated in an international conference on "Globalising Nonviolence" in Paderborn, Germany in 2006 and in an exchange on nonviolence training in Bilbao, Spain, in 2008. He also helped organise the International Day on Conscientious Objection in Seoul in May 2009.

He wrote in 2011:

*"I came to have firmer and clearer thoughts about my conscientious objection while engaged in the protest against the expansion of a US military base in Pyeongtaek in 2006. The villagers just wanted to spend their lives working the land on which they had grown up. Instead, the government mobilized the armed forces and riot police to evict them. In the early morning of May 4, I saw ruthless violence by the army and the police with my own eyes when their operation to crack down on the villagers as well as the protestors started. People either responded just as violently, or helplessly froze in the face of the overwhelming state violence. At that moment, on the one hand I was prepared to react in a nonviolent way in an effort not to become a devil while fighting back against the devil; on the other, I just felt a primal fear to see the armed forces, known to exist for national security, attack its own people as if they were the enemy."*

The Republic of Korea does not recognise the right to conscientious objection. Although repeatedly reminded by the United Nations Human Rights Committee that this constitutes a violation of article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), your country has so far failed to recognise conscientious objection, and continues to imprison objectors. In September 2009, a judge even presented a case of a conscientious objector to the Constitutional Court, arguing that clause 1 of article 88 of the Military Service Act conflicts with Article 19 of the South Korean constitution which guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

No efforts have yet been made to set up a law introducing alternative military service for the conscientious objectors who are still treated as criminals. For a person with a criminal record, there is no chance to get a Government job and jobs in the private economy are also almost impossible to get.

I urge you to make sure that a person who refuses to do military service on the grounds of his beliefs or religion should no longer be punished and imprisoned. Your country should introduce an alternative service in order not to wrongly imprison and criminalise the youth of the nation any more. And, please, release Mr. Moon Myungjin from prison as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,