

South Korea: Government's prohibition of entry of activists becomes a mockery

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A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission

SOUTH KOREA: Government's prohibition of entry of activists becomes a mockery

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) strongly condemns the Korean government's prohibition of entry against activists of civil society movements from other countries without reason and the refusal to grant a visa to the main organiser for 'World March for Women' which is going to be held during the G20 summit in Korea.

According to the information obtained, Paul Quintos of think tank IBON Int'l, Maria Lorena Macabuag (Migrant Forum Asia), Josua Mata (Alliance of Progressive Labor), Joseph Purugganan (Focus on the Global South), artist Jess Santiag and Rogelio Soluta (May First Labour Movement) and Joanna Bernice Coronacion (Alliance of Progressive Labor - Youth) from the Philippines, were detained on November 6, 2010 and deported by immigration officials at the Incheon airport. The only reason they were given was by the Immigration department at the Incheon airport was that their entry was prohibited by the need of the Korean government.

Ms. Bushra Khaliq who is a national coordinator of Pakistan chapter for the 'World March for Women' was refused to grant visa to Korea at Korea Embassy in Islamabad. According to the statement provided by her, the Korean Embassy damaged the page number 28 of her passport and while protesting, the Embassy said that it was done by mistake by the Embassy. Later the reason of the denial was given that she belonged to a potential terrorist nation. Due to the damage of her passport, she faces now difficulty in travelling to Japan where another meeting is to be held on November 13, 2010.

If the explanation of the Immigration department is correct, either article 11 (1) 3 or 11 (1) 4 of the Immigration Control Act seemed to have been applied for their denial of entry. They can be read, "Persons deemed highly likely to commit any act detrimental to the interest of the Republic of Korea or public safety; Persons deemed highly likely to commit any act detrimental to the economic or social order or the good morals." Technically, the Minister of Justice can decide on the prohibition of any foreigner's entry into its territory.

Based on the information, the Asian Human Rights Commission urges the Minister of Justice of South Korea to make it clear under which article those activists' entry was denied and to provide reasonable evidence to justify the decision of prohibition. It is also reported that the blacklists of the activists made by the Korean security agencies were shared with the Korean Embassy in the region not to issue visa to those activists when they applied for in the country. Again, the Minister of Justice and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade are required to explain under which article of which law

and on what bases imposed to make the blacklists.

Apart from this, another area of important issue here is that the Korean government has now narrowed down its space for diversity of opinion and expression which is a core element for the democratic society. Unfortunately, it is not new but has lasted since the government entities misinterpreted and wrongly applied for laws under the name of public safety. However, there is no reason that the deprivation of the right of freedom of opinion and expression through solidarity activities by the Korean government can be justified. While the roles of civil society have been appreciated by many governments and also at the UN by taking part in the discussion and raising their concerns with government's lack of concern, sadly, the Korean government has yet remain away from this due to its limited understanding on democracy.

Ideology still remains among people positioned in the government who had been educated and raised under the military dictatorship of such circumstance where different opinion could not survive. Under this context only one political ideology existed and the people in the middle were forced to choose one or the other. That's how the social dialogue in the Korean society has been built up. Due to international pressure or image or whatsoever, no participation of the marginalised or of civil society was evolved in much more intelligent methodology by inviting only those who support the government and presented as if it was the opinion from the civil society. Of course, attempts were made to change this but now face similar problem that people faced under the military dictatorship.

Seoul is a host country for G20 summit 2010 but the government's action on the prohibition of entry of activists from civil society has now become a mockery not only in the region but in the international society and it only demonstrates how biased perception and self-limited understanding on opinion and expression the Korean government has.