



U.S. Reporters Sentenced to 12 Years Labor in North Korea

The reporters, Laura Ling and Euna Lee, were arrested by North Korean soldiers on March 17 near the Chinese border. According to the Associated Press, it is unclear if the reporters had actually crossed into North Korea or if North Korean guards had crossed into China.

Ling and Lee are reporters for the Al Gore-affiliated Current TV website and were in China to film a documentary on North Korean refugees. At the time of their arrest, South Korea's Yonhap News Agency said that the pair "were taken by North Korean soldiers along the Tumen River on the Chinese border while filming the North Korean side."



The pair have now been found guilty by the Central Court in Pyongyang of committing a "grave crime" against North Korea, according to the state-run Korean Central News Agency. They were then each sentenced to 12 years of "reform through labor" in a North Korean prison facility.

Little is known for certain about conditions in North Korean prison camps, but South Korean missionary Chun Ki-won told the Associated Press that prisoners "frequently face beatings and other inhumane treatment while being forced to engage in harsh labor."

There is hope, however, that the two reporters will be released in the near future as it is expected that North Korea will attempt to use them as leverage in their ongoing dispute with the United States over North Korea's nuclear program.

According to the Associated Press, "Some analysts called the arrest of the Americans a timely 'bonanza' for Pyongyang as the impoverished regime prepares to negotiate for aid and other concessions to resolve the tense standoff over its nuclear defiance."

Hajime Izumi, an expert on North Korea at Japan's University of Shizuoka, told AP that now North Korea "may release them on humanitarian grounds and demand the U.S. provide humanitarian aid in return."

The professor of international relations also said, "North Korea will certainly use the reporters as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the United States."



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