

Urgent appeal for solidarity with the South Korean candle light movement

Sunday 27 July 2008, by [Coalition against mad cow disease](#) (Date first published: 26 July 2008).

On July 24, the Lee Myung-bak (LMB) government issued arrest warrants against the leadership of the KCTU trade union center. This is only one of many attacks against the newly resurrected people's power in South Korea, sparked by the uproar over the US beef import.

The urgent appeal for action we are reproducing below has been published by the coalition against mad cow disease, a coalition of more than 1,700 organizations involved in the candle light movement. All responses and inquiries should be sent to defendantimadcow@gmail.com.

Urgent Appeal for Action

Greetings of international solidarity!

Starting May 2, 2008, South Korean people took to the streets holding candle lights in protest to various policies (import of US beefs in danger of being infected with mad cow disease, privatizations of public broadcasting, health, and public corporations, and the grand-canal project) put forth by the Lee Myung-bak (LMB) government.

The protesters came from all walks of life including elementary school students to 80 years old seniors, ordinary working people to opposition parties National Assembly representatives. More than a million people just in the greater Seoul area alone gathered on June 10 for a peaceful candle light protest.

However, the LMB government responded with force repressing the peaceful candle light protests. It discharged fire extinguisher and water cannon, wielded shields and batons, and crushed the people with military boots. Police Commissioner Eo Cheong-soo is leading what he proclaimed in the mainstream media "the real 80s military dictator style" violent repression.

The South Korean police arrested an 81 years old man and a 12 years old elementary school student. They lashed out shields and batons to parliamentarians, human rights monitor groups, medical volunteers, and journalists. They even discharged fire extinguisher directly at the mothers with babies in strollers and stuck an opposition party National Assemblyman with a baton. At one time, a video of policemen violently kicking the head and body of a female college student who was down on the ground was released in the media and met by a public outcry.

On June 29, the Lee Myung-bak government completely closed off the assembly venue. The police used hundreds of buses to surround the Seoul City Hall and the plaza, the main gathering point of

the candle light protests. This is clearly a serious infringement on the basic democratic rights of assembly and protest. In the last two months, the police arrested more than 1,000 people. They were all ordinary citizens who participated in a peaceful candle light march.

The LMB government is now repressing the coalition against mad cow disease which had been leading the candle light protests. The coalition consists of more than 1,700 civic groups, political parties, trade unions, and social movement organizations. The LMB government is currently detaining 3 members of the coalition: Ahn Jin-geol, Yoon Hui-suk, and Hwang Sun-won. It also issued arrest warrants to the leading members of the coalition (See below for the list of names). They are currently taking refuge at Jogye Temple located in downtown Seoul.

On July 24 the LMB government issued arrest warrants to the executive leaders of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU): Chairperson Lee Seok-haeng, Vice-Chairperson Jin Yeong-ok, and Executive Director Lee Yong-sik. The police has surrounded the building where the main office of the KCTU is located ready to move in and arrest the leaders.

The repression also extends to the trade unions that struck in support of the candle light protests. The LMB government issued arrest warrants to Chairperson Jeong Gap-deuk and First Vice-Chairperson Nam Teak-gyu of the Metal workers Union, Chairperson Yoon Hae-mo of the Hyundai Auto Workers Branch of the Metal Workers Union, and 6 other trade union officials. It plans to issue more arrest warrants and detain more members of the coalition and trade union activists. It is also issuing arrest warrants to ordinary protesters.

President Lee Myung-bak and Police Commissioner Eo Cheong-su are trying to go against democracy and to push back the time to that of the military dictatorship.

The candle light movement of South Korea urgently appeals for international solidarity to defend the democratic rights of assembly, protest, and expression against the violent repression of the LMB government. In addition, we strongly urge everyone to voice their protests in the strongest terms possible against the detaining and issuing arrest warrants to protesters.

We thank you in advance for your solidarity.

Coalition against mad cow disease (www.antimadcow.org)

The list of names with arrested warrants

Lee Seok-haeng, Chairperson, KCTU

Jin Yeong-ok, Vice-Chairperson, KCTU

Lee Yong-sik, Executive Director, KCTU

Bak Won-seok, Joint Director of the Field Office of the Coalition

Han Yong-jin, Joint Director of the Field Office of the Coalition

Kim Dong-gyu, Director of the Organizational Team

Kim Kwang-il, Director of the March Team, All Together Steer Committee member

Baek Eun-jong, Vice-Representative, Anti-Lee Myung-bak Internet Café

Baek Seong-gyun, Representative, MadCow.com

Kwon Hye-jin, Director of Education Movement Headquarters of the Young Korean Academy

Detainees

Ahn Jin-geol, Director of Organizational Team

Yoon Hui-suk, Volunteer Staff

Hwang Sun-won, Volunteer Staff

What you can do:

1. Write protest letters to President Lee Myung-bak and Police Commissioner Eo Cheong-su.

Use a sample letter of protest below or write your own and send them to the following addresses.

President Lee Myung-bak

Office of the President

1 Cheongwadae-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul, 110-820, South Korea

Email: foreignpresident.go.kr

FAX: +82-2-770-4735

Police Commissioner Eo Cheong-soo

Korean National Police Agency

Euijoo-ro 91 (Migeun-dong 209)

Seodaemun-gu, Seoul, 120-704, South Korea

Email: cnpa100police.go.kr

Please send copies to defendantimadcow@gmail.com.

2. Write solidarity messages and send to defendantimadcow@gmail.com.

3. You are welcome to organize your own action or protest in solidarity with the candle light movement in your local areas such as protesting or having a press conference in front of the Korean embassy or consulate office. Please send a report to defendantimadcow@gmail.com.

A sample letter of protest

In the last two months, the Lee Myung-bak government arrested more than 1,000 persons and is threatening the people by violently repressing the demonstrators in the streets. The violent repression against the peaceful candle light protests that are taking place in South Korea is a

serious infringement on people's democratic rights including the rights of assembly and protest, and freedom of speech. We are deeply concerned of the seriousness of the situation.

There is no justification whatsoever in arresting and issuing arrest warrants to the leading members of the coalition against the mad cow disease. We intend to inform the world of the current situation and protest in the strongest terms possible in cooperation with South Korean organizations in defense of the coalition.

We demand the followings to the Lee Myung-bak government:

1. The LMB government must immediately stop the violent repression of the peaceful protests.
2. The LMB government must immediately release the detainees and call off the arrest warrants.
3. The LMB government must swiftly compensate any loss or damage incurred by the victims including the wounded.
4. The LMB government must guarantee fully the rights of peaceful assembly and protest.