

South Korea: A Letter to President Lee Myung-bak... "I was accused of violation of National Security Law"

Wednesday 22 February 2012, by [PARK Jung-geun](#) (Date first published: 16 January 2012).

In South Korea, the National Security Law - enacted in 1948 to fight all the ones who express support or collaborate with organization ennemy of the State, let's say all "communists" supporters, and frequently used during dictatorship - remains a strong tool in the hands of governments. Park Jung-geun experienced it. Because of re-tweets with humour of some messages showing sympathy to North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, he has been arrested in January.

To denounce the absurdity of his case, he decided to write a letter to president Lee Myung-bak to tell him his story, to talk about his modest life as an independant photographer running a small business in Seoul. In a way, it expresses difficulties of youth in South Korea, especially because of high unemployment.

Full of humour, the text has been translated in English by @gocherryJ, an activist who supports movements like Occupy Youido (Youido is the name of districts of ministries and Parliament in Seoul)...

Philippe Mesmer

Greetings, Your Excellency President Lee Myung-bak.

I once wrote a letter of thanks to soldiers as an elementary school kid, but I have never wrote one to the President of Korea. I came to write this letter to Mr. President, because something happened to me last year.

Let me introduce myself first. I am Park Jung-geun, an 23 year old Seoul citizen, activist, and photographer who faced 6 sessions of police investigation and has been detained for violation of National Security Law (That is, I am being accused of "praising and/or supporting an enemy of the state" and posession of anti-government material).

I need to explain more. I was born in Seoul in 1988, enjoyed school life, unusually studied hard in high school and raised my mock K-SAT test scores every time, thinking to myself, "to survive in Korea, I must go to college, despite expensive tuition!" But, in 2006 I had a terrible disease and was hospitalized. My leg was badly hurting and I could barely stand up, but chanting to myself "You can do it! Just do it! Let's try it!" I studied hard in hospital bed, had the KSAT test lying in bed of the school nurse's office, and managed to go to a Seoul-based college to study social work.

But I hardly enjoyed the school, quit, and guess what I did? I became a photographer, which was my family business. There was always a camera in my home, I enjoyed taking pictures of everything as a kid. Unlike Mr. President, I grew up in an urban ghetto, photographing what you might have never taken a closer look, what you might've never seen, and what is stuck in the ghetto and totally invisible to the 1%. Hence, some of the pictures in my hard drive may look offensive and make you uncomfortable. However, no one could judge what I had to see in my life. Photography can't lie.

That is how I came to own a local microbusiness of a small photo studio I inherited from my dad in Amsa-dong, Gangdong-gu in Seoul.

I was impressed when one day a policemen brought a search and seizure warrant, and that document had a very detailed record on what I did in recent months, because I am careless and wouldn't take a note of myself like that.

Let me introduce a part of the list.

1. Led a photography lesson called "A Soviet Photographer" and organized "Duriban Protest 1-year Anniversary Event", in a sit-in protest area of Duriban Noodles near Hongik University, where they were protesting against the government's urban development policy and demolition of old buildings.
2. Supported campaign for residential rights of Poidong Shantytown dwellers.
3. Joined "Halve college tuition!" protests.
4. Supported Hongik University cleaners' strike.
5. Joined illegal protests and marches of groups like Hope Bus, which were protesting against layoffs in Hanjin Heavy Industries.

It was amazing that whoever in prosecution, police, or Police Security Agency managed to find out what I did, but the important fact is that I was accused of violation of National Security Law ("praising and/or supporting an enemy of the state" and possession of anti-government material).

In detail, the search & seizure warrant said I retweeted tweets from @uriminzok, a twitter account managed by National Peaceful Unification Committee of North Korea - whoa, did I spell it right? I could barely remember this name. It even said that I used "a formidable social network tool called TWITTER, having only 4 friends on which could lead to a tremendous impact," in order to praise North Korea and disseminate its propaganda.

It is hard to exhaustively describe what they said of my charges, so I would like to kindly ask Your Excellency to be caring enough to search recent news articles about me.

Most of my tweets that might appear to be praising of the North Korean regime were jokes, but I am not going to decrypt all the jokes and metaphors of my tweets, because you're not doing justice to your satire if you end up making an excuse of it, and a decoded metaphor is not a metaphor anymore.

Let me be bluntly honest. I am not talking about my charges of violation of National Security Law. I am telling you that I am a young man tormented by the government. Here are the reasons:

1. The investigation sessions were held at Gyeonggi Police Security Investigation Office in Suwon, getting to which takes me an hour and half, and as I faced 6-hour-long investigation every time, I

had to close my photo studio and my income shrank.

2. Once my home and studio were searched for seizure, I cannot work functionally there.
3. I don't know why, but once my home was searched for seizure, I just can't sleep in my bedroom.
4. I am getting treatment from a psychiatrist because of insomnia started on that day.
5. My personal information was completely leaked.
6. My friends are suffering too, because I cannot sleep in my bedroom since then and have been asking them to let me sleep in.
7. During the search, policemen damaged one of my films permanently, which was a very important one to me, that had not even gone through any photographic processing yet.
8. Since the police raid, my libido died! Look! This is a very important issue to me. I feel like I am as weird an asshole as a corrupt politician hitting on a bluffing socialite. [\[1\]](#)
9. When I talk to my psychiatrist of the suffering mentioned above, he just nags like "Just don't bother to put yourself on troubles like this", which makes me get more frustrated and rant at my parents.
10. My business doesn't go well because of the issues mentioned above.
11. Because of the issues mentioned above, I ended up meeting funny people like organizers of "New Town Communists Party".
12. Prosecutors and judges ended up detaining in South Suwon Police Office Detention Center, even though they are implying that they admitted they know my pro-North-Korean tweets are jokes.

There's more! Could you imagine how many tweets I posted? Seventy thousands! I find it enormously regrettable that policemen in the Police Security Investigation Team had to read my 70,000 tweets. Yes, they worked tremendously hard. But I felt sorry that they were bothering to do such a menial job. One of the inspectors even told me he had bad wrist and neck pains because of it. It was hard for me to watch them suffer. I heard the amount of the investigation record of Superintendent Kwak Nohyun of Seoul Education Office on his alleged bribery scandal was up to 1,000 pages. I bet mine is as long as 150 pages.

Your Excellency! I am just 23 years old. I still have a long way to go to end this investigation and court procedure. More people are saying I am not guilty and I suppose so too.

During the investigation I was wondering what my crime was, if I was ever guilty. But, no matter I contemplate it deeply, I just could not ever find anything I did wrong that could consist of a criminal act. If you could convince me I am guilty after reading my letter, I would be OK living 7 years in jail. But that would not solve any problems.

I am not going to work in my photo studio for the rest of my life. I have many things to do, many people to meet. I am able and willing to get a job and contribute more to the society, if Your Excellency were capable enough to create more jobs. Plus, I must recover my shrunk libido. I wish I can have a great love affair of my life with a woman like Monica Lewinsky and Erica Kim [\[2\]](#). I wish I can live in a beautiful mansion in a beautiful untouched former green belt area just released by a government influence, like Naegok-dong [\[3\]](#), I mean. I wish I could become powerful enough to

make Guus Hiddink greet my son and take a picture with him [4].

But this case ruined everything. Many people are watching me, and I've already got a social stigma as an offender of the anti-communist law. I am a law-abiding, hard working man who deserves support and protection from the state, but it labelled me as a nasty criminal. Let me quote one good old saying written decades ago. I am not sure who wrote this, but I suppose he became a very important person of Korea.

"If a young man is willing to be on his own and the government stops him, it owes him an irretrievable debt." [5]

I suppose this quote is very true, and if Korea does not consider this as true anymore, I may want to forget about what it owes me and leave this country, because it hurts me so badly that what I have been suffering gravely contradicts what I would expect from a society admiring good old famous quotes like that.

But, I still hope I live happily ever after in Korea. I am just like the young man whoever has credit for that quote. I hope Korea is as kind to me as it was to the writer of that quote, Your Excellency.

Thank you for taking time to read my letter. I am waiting for a kind response.

In South Suwon Police Office Detention Center

January 16 2012

Park Jung-geun, a photographer.

P.S.

* <http://mesmer.blog.lemonde.fr/>

Footnotes

[1] He is talking about Pyun Yang-kyun, a former top Presidential Adviser who had an extramarital affair with a former professor and celebrity curator Shin Jung-ah, whose all degrees (BA from Seoul National, MBA and Ph.d from Harvard) were found to be fake and was convicted of influence peddling. (She openly bragged that she got her Ph.d from "internet course" of Harvard University, and Korean major newspapers, universities, art galleries, and all major clients that hired and/or respected her believed that for years!).

[2] Erica Kim is a famous Korean-American lawyer and best-selling author, and was known to be an old friend of President Lee Myung-bak. Her brother's businesses, which were found guilty of stock market manipulation, were alleged by some media commentators and politicians to be related to then president-candidate Lee.

[3] Naegok-dong is an area where President Lee Myung-bak's son bought some land to build his dad's house after retirement, but some of the procedure of obtaining the land was illegal, so they gave up buying the land.

[4] Guus Hiddink is a Dutch soccer coach who lead South-Korean national team to semi-finals at 2002 world cup.

[5] Yup, that quote was from young Lee Myung-bak's own letter to then President Park Chung-he. He wrote this letter when he could not get a decent job after serving a jail term for protesting against Korea-Japan diplomatic relation reestablishment.