

Korea: Rights group also slams naval base arrests as 'serious failure of governance'



Sisters, some in tears, yesterday accused the police of acting worse than the old military regime in arresting some of their number in a demonstration last week.

Some 35 sisters and priests from the Association of Major Superiors of Religious Women in Korea and the Catholic Solidarity to Realize Peace in Jeju held a press conference to protest against the arrest of 29 people including 19 Religious on January 10. (—

They had been praying in front of a naval base construction site on the resort island and urging a halt to the project. All were released within two days.

Notre Dame Sister Marie Aquina Yoon Jung-ok, president of the association, said even “the past military regime did not forcibly take Religious sisters who were praying to a police station,” stressing “we can’t just ignore the forcible arrest.”

Sister Yoon said the police should apologise immediately to the Korean Catholic Church and the nation for “detaining people who were singing and dancing peacefully for two days.”

Father John Go Byeong-soo, vice-chairman of Jeju diocese’s Special Committee for the Island of Peace, called the police action “the indiscriminate suppression of religion by state power.”

The Hong Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) issued a statement yesterday criticizing the incident, saying it showed that “the government can arrest anyone if the authorities feel the actions relate to the construction of the naval base.”

The AHRC called the naval base case in Jeju a “good example of worst governance,” saying the arrest of peaceful demonstrators only shows “the serious failure of governance and the misleading of the rule of law.”

The navy and the Jeju provincial government announced Gangjeong village in Jeju would be the site of a new naval base in June 2007.

It is expected to be completed in 2014 and become the base for a new fleet of destroyers that will patrol the East China Sea between China and Japan.

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