

Missionary Now Longest-Serving American Prisoner in North Korea Since Korean War

Christian missionary Kenneth Bae recently became the longest-known American detainee in North Korea since the end of the Korean War. Bae marked one year in detention this week after being arrested by North Korean authorities in the port city of Rajin on Nov. 3, 2012.

According to the National Committee on North Korea, the Communist dictatorship has not held any known U.S. citizen longer than 12 months since a cease-fire between South and North Korea was signed in 1953.

Earlier this year, International Christian Concern (ICC) sources confirmed that Bae, an active Christian missionary based in China, was most likely arrested because of his faith-related activities around the country. Practicing Christianity is completely forbidden in North Korea, and even minor violations, including the possession of a Bible, are ruthlessly punished. Bae was sentenced in May to 15 years of hard labor for allegedly committing "hostile acts" against the North Korean regime.

Human rights organizations estimate that tens of thousands of North Korean Christians are currently imprisoned in labor camps across the country. Last week Michael Kirby, the chairman of a United Nations commission investigating abuses committed by the regime, said he was moved to tears by testimony from those who had escaped the notorious labor camps. North Korea is consistently listed as the top persecutor of Christians in the world.

North Korea has rebuffed or ignored multiple requests by the U.S. State Department and Bae's family for his release on

humanitarian grounds. In late August, Robert King, the U.S. special envoy for North Korean human rights issues, was turned around at the last minute after initially being granted permission to visit Pyongyang to seek Bae's release.

Last month Bae's mother, Myunghee Bae, was allowed to visit her son briefly but was forced to leave the country with no indication of if or when he might be released. She confirmed her son's health has improved slightly since August, when he was hospitalized after losing nearly 50 pounds in the labor camp. Kenneth Bae reportedly suffers from several serious health issues, including diabetes, an enlarged heart and gallstones.

Ryan Morgan, ICC's regional manager for East Asia, says, "We marked with great sadness the one-year anniversary of Kenneth Bae's detainment. Kenneth has now been held longer by the North Korean regime than any other known U.S. citizen. Our prayers are with his family during this incredibly difficult time, and we again renew our call for his release to the North Korean authorities.

"No one should ever face imprisonment simply because of their religious beliefs, yet thousands upon thousands of men, women and children are living in what has been described as hell on earth simply because they choose to be Christian. Our hope is that the world takes this highly unfortunate anniversary as an opportunity to wake up to what is happening behind the closed walls of North Korea and to call with one voice for an end to the atrocities being committed by Kim Jong Un's malignant regime."