

Mother of Missionary Jailed in North Korea Pleads With US for Help

The mother of a U.S. missionary jailed in North Korea for state subversion pleaded on Tuesday for the U.S. government to help secure her ailing son's release as she ended a trip to see him.

Kenneth Bae, who was born in South Korea but is a naturalized U.S. citizen, was arrested late last year while on a visit to North Korea and sentenced to hard labor for 15 years in May.

North Korean media said his missionary activity constituted a crime against the state.

His mother, Myunghee Bae, last week traveled to North Korea to see him.

"I was happy to see him and to hold him, but it broke my heart to leave him behind. I am more anxious than ever to bring him home," she said in a statement on a family-run website campaigning for his release.

"I plead with our government to do everything in their power to secure my son's release soon."

Kenneth Bae, 45, was recently moved from prison to a hospital in the capital, Pyongyang, after his health began to deteriorate.

Myunghee Bae said she had wrapped up her trip after visiting her son three times and his health was improving. It was not clear from the statement if she had already left North Korea.

Bae was sentenced amid a long series of acrimonious exchanges between North Korea and the United States over North Korea's

nuclear program.

In August, a planned trip by Robert King, U.S. special envoy on North Korean human rights issues, to try to negotiate Bae's release, was canceled by North Korea.

After Bae was sentenced, North Korea state media quoted a court official as saying he had been using his tourism business to form groups aimed at overthrowing the government.

Bae has acknowledged being a missionary and has said he conducted religious services in the North, which is hostile to outsiders advocating religious causes within its tightly controlled political system.

He first went to China for a two-month mission trip with the Hawaii-based evangelical group Youth With a Mission in 2006, according to a video sermon by Bae and a note posted on the website of a Korean Presbyterian church in St. Louis in the United States.

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