

North Korea Detaining Megachurch Pastor With Prayer Ministry

North Korea has detained the head pastor of one of Canada's largest congregations, who went missing during a regular humanitarian mission last month, a church spokeswoman said Thursday.

Reverend Hyeon Soo Lim, 60, from the 3,000-member Light Korean Presbyterian Church in Toronto, was last heard from on Jan. 31, church spokeswoman Lisa Pak said.

"The Lim family has received notice from Canadian officials that the government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has confirmed that Mr. Hyeon Soo Lim is being held in North Korea," Pak said in a statement.

Canada's foreign ministry said on Thursday it is aware of a Canadian citizen being detained in North Korea. A spokeswoman declined to give details, citing privacy reasons. Canada has a longstanding advisory against travel to the Asian state, partly because it has limited ability to provide consular assistance there.

Pak told Reuters she did not want to speculate on why North Korea had detained Lim.

Both North Korea and China have clamped down on Christian groups over the past year, and several American Christians have been detained by North Korea.

Toronto City Councillor Raymond Cho, a friend of the pastor who also immigrated to Canada from South Korea decades ago, said he was worried about Lim's health in detention.

"Rev. Lim has a very serious health problem, very high blood

pressure, he's on a prescription, and his family is anxious to send medicine," Cho said. "His wife is quite concerned because it's a real health problem. He's been there more than a month."

Cho said he will help organize a petition to pressure Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper to work hard for Lim's release.

Last month, China said it had formally detained a Canadian man, Kevin Garratt, on suspicion of stealing state secrets.

Garratt was initially picked up last year in a Chinese town on the border with North Korea. In an audio file posted to the website of his church in Canada, he said he ran a prayer and training facility that was frequented by North Koreans.

Canada suspended diplomatic relations with Pyongyang in 2010, leaving it with limited influence there. A year later, Ottawa imposed wide-ranging sanctions on North Korea in response to its nuclear weapons tests.

Pak said Lim has made hundreds of trips to North Korea, where he helps oversee a nursing home, a nursery and an orphanage in the Rajin region.

She provided Reuters with six photos that she said showed Lim distributing humanitarian aid and working on agricultural projects.

Lim has been head pastor at his church for 28 years, Pak said, and his group has done humanitarian work in North Korea since about 1997.

Lim immigrated to Canada from South Korea in 1986 and has a wife and grown son, she said.

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