



7.26.2010

NORTH KOREA CSW urges release of Aijalon Mahli Gomes

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) today added its voice to a growing international campaign for the release of American Christian Aijalon Mahli Gomes, currently imprisoned in North Korea.

Mr. Gomes, aged 30 from Boston, Massachusetts, entered North Korea on 25 January this year, crossing the border from China exactly one month after activist Robert Park, a Korean-American, entered the country. Mr. Gomes is believed to have gone to North Korea to protest against the grave violations of human rights perpetrated by the regime. He was known to have regularly attended prayer meetings and rallies for North Korean human rights in the United States and taught English at Choong-eui middle school in Pocheon from 2008-2009. His colleagues described him as “a devout Christian”.

Mr. Gomes was arrested by the North Korean authorities, and sentenced to eight years in a labor camp. He was also ordered to pay a fine of \$700,000 for illegal entry and unspecified “hostile acts”. His arrest is the third time North Koreans have detained U.S. citizens within the past year and follows the detention of Robert Park and the journalists Laura Ling and Euna Lee, all of whom were released after several months in North Korean custody.

North Korean defectors and human rights campaigners, including Free the NK Gulag, Global Justice Prayer Network, Justice for North Korea and Korea Liberty and Union, held a press conference and demonstration in Seoul, South Korea, today calling for Mr. Gomes’ release.

CSW’s National Director Stuart Windsor said: “We are gravely concerned about the well-being of Mr. Gomes, and urge the North Korean authorities to provide information as to his whereabouts and well-being without delay. We urge the North Korean regime to release Mr. Gomes immediately. Furthermore, we are deeply concerned about the plight of thousands of other prisoners in North Korea’s brutal system of prison camps, and call on the North Korean regime to open up its gulag to access to international human rights monitors and aid agencies, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the new UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in North Korea.”