



Written by on April 3, 2009

U.S. Journalists Face Trial in North Korea

The two women are employed by San Francisco-based Current TV, an online media company started by former U.S. Vice President Al Gore and attorney Joel Hyatt, the son-in-law of former U.S. Sen. Howard Metzenbaum. Laura Ling is the younger sister of Lisa Ling, a journalist best known for her role as a co-host of ABC's *The View* from 1999-2002.



State Department spokesman Joel Casey told *People* magazine: "We are working to resolve the situation diplomatically and Secretary Clinton is engaged on the matter." Because the United States does not have diplomatic relations with the communist nation, a Swedish diplomat has reportedly visited the two women.

The two journalists were apprehended by North Korean border guards along the frozen Tumen River, which separates China from North Korea, as they were filming North Korean refugees. Shortly after their arrest, South Korean television channel YTV, quoting an official in Seoul, said guards from the North crossed the border into Chinese territory to arrest two US journalists.



Australian Associated Press (AAP) reported that RSF (the French acronym for Reporters Without Borders), an international media freedom group, had urged North Korea to drop plans to put two detained US reporters on trial. RSF announced on April 1 that it was "by no means clear" that the two journalist were on North Korean territory when they were apprehended by the North's border guards. The group said that, if convicted, the women could be sentenced to between five and 10 years of forced labor.

RSF also stated that it had been told by "several sources" on the Chinese side of the border that North Korean border guards likely crossed the Tumen River to arrest the journalists, who were filming from the Chinese bank.

AFP reported that some analysts in Seoul, South Korea, think that the North plans to use the pair as a bargaining chip with the United States after the upcoming North Korean missile launch. President



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Barack Obama and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, meeting on the sidelines of the G-20 financial summit in London on April 2, agreed that the missile launch will violate UN Security Council resolutions and that the launch should be met with "a stern, united response from the international community."

"Their missile launch violates UN Security Council Resolution 1718 and there will be consequences, certainly (at) the UN Security Council if they proceed with the launch," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on March 31.

AFP also quoted the Paris-based RSF as stating: "There is an urgent need for North Korea's neighbors, especially China, to apply diplomatic pressure to obtain the release of Ling and Lee as soon as possible. It would be unacceptable if North Korea used the two journalists for diplomatic blackmail at a time when it has stepped up tension in the peninsula by announcing a missile launch."

The question remains: will the United States stand by its citizen journalists, or abandon them to maintain its strong defense of enforcing UN Security Council Resolution 1718?

Normally, we would bet on our State Department to strongly back the UN and hand over the journalists as sacrificial lambs. However, this time, the two women may have one trump card that may save them: they work for a company founded by Al Gore, who is certainly well connected with any Democratic administration.

Photo: AP Images



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