

North Korea sentences Canadian pastor to life in prison

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North Korea's Supreme Court sentenced a Canadian pastor to life in prison with hard labor on Wednesday for what it called crimes against the state.

Hyeon Soo Lim, who pastors the Light Korean Presbyterian Church in Toronto, was given the sentence after a brief trial. He had been in detention since February.

Lim had earlier appeared at a news conference organized by North Korean authorities in Pyongyang in July and admitted to plotting to overthrow the North Korean state, but other foreigners detained in North Korea and then released have said they were coerced into making similar statements and confessing guilt during their detention.

Lim's relatives and colleagues have said he travelled on Jan. 31 as part of a regular humanitarian mission to North Korea where he supports a nursing home, a nursery and an orphanage. They said Lim, who is in his early 60s, has made more than 100 trips to North Korea since 1997 and that his trips were about helping people and were not political.

North Korea has very strict rules against any missionary or religious activities that it sees as threatening the supremacy of its ruling regime. Merely leaving a Bible in a public place can lead to arrest and possibly severe punishment.

Both the U.S. and Canadian governments warn against travel to North Korea.

Last year, the North released Kenneth Bae, a Korean-American missionary who was convicted of "anti-state" crimes and had been serving a 15-year sentence.

Bae, whose detention received worldwide attention, suffered medical issues in detention. He was freed along with one other American detainee after a secret mission to the reclusive communist country by James Clapper, the top U.S. intelligence official. He is reportedly planning a book about his 2-year-ordeal in detention.

An Australian missionary detained for spreading Christianity was deported last year after he apologized for anti-state religious acts and requested forgiveness.

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