

South Korean Activist Says He Was Tortured in China
By: Choe Sang-Hun, The New York Times
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SEOUL, South Korea — A South Korean advocate for democracy in North Korea claimed on Wednesday that he was tortured by Chinese state security agents during his three-month detention in China.

The man, Kim Young-hwan, 49, made the accusation at a news conference in Seoul after he and three other South Korean activists were expelled from China last week. The four were seized by agents from the Ministry of State Security in northeastern China on March 29.

“For the last two months of my detention, they persistently demanded two things as a condition for my release: I admit to violating the Chinese laws and I never talk about the abuse I had suffered in their hands when I returned home,” Mr. Kim said. “I rejected them.”

“Even when the Chinese security officials handed me over to the South Korean officials at the airport for my expulsion, I angrily demanded that they apologize for the torture and abuse,” he added.

Mr. Kim did not give details of the abuse he says he suffered, pending a formal complaint from the South Korean government to Beijing. But when a reporter asked him whether he suffered “physical abuse” and “sleep deprivation,” he said “Yes, both.”

After interviewing Mr. Kim, the South Korean government asked Beijing on Monday to investigate his claim, officials at the Foreign Ministry in Seoul said. The ministry may take further actions after receiving a response from China, they said.

Mr. Kim said his group did not break Chinese laws. It collected information on human rights in North Korea and helped North Korean refugees living in China, he said.

The arrests of the four South Koreans on charges of “endangering national security” received wide public attention in South Korea because of Mr. Kim’s background. As a leader of the student movement that helped force the South Korean military strongman Chun Doo-hwan to make democratic reforms in the 1980s he was tortured and imprisoned by his own government.

South Korean officials, as well as rights groups, had accused China of denying the four proper access to consular and legal services while they were held there. Beijing had earlier said it handled the case according to its domestic laws.

Mr. Kim, widely considered the leading ideologue of the South Korean student movement of the 1980s, secretly traveled to the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, in 1991 at the invitation of the North Korean leader at the time, Kim Il-sung. After his return home, however, he became a vocal opponent of the North’s government and has since campaigned for human rights for North Koreans.