**North Korea to Try U.S. Journalists**

**By CHOE SANG-HUN  
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SEOUL — Two American journalists detained in [North Korea](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/northkorea/index.html?inline=nyt-geo) will be indicted and tried on charges of perpetrating "hostile acts" against the Communist state, a crime punishable by years in a labor camp, the North’s state-run news agency reported on Tuesday.

Pyongyang’s decision to put Laura Ling and Euna Lee on trial signaled that the regime has no intention of freeing them soon.

Their indictment comes amid heightening tension between Pyongyang and Washington over a North Korean plan to launch a rocket by Wednesday next week. United States officials consider a possible rocket launch a provocative test of the North’s long-range missile technology.

Ms. Ling and Ms. Lee, reporters for Current TV, a San Francisco-based media venture founded by former U.S. Vice President [Al Gore](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/g/al_gore/index.html?inline=nyt-per), were arrested by the North Korean military on March 17 on charges of illegally crossing the border from China. They were in China to report the plight of North Korean refugees who fled hunger at home and were living in hiding there.

The North’s state-run Korean Central News Agency accused the two of “illegal entry" and said, "their suspected hostile acts have been confirmed by evidence and their statements, according to the results of intermediary investigation conducted by a competent organ.”

"The organ is carrying on its investigation and, at the same time, making a preparation for indicting them at a trial on the basis of the already confirmed suspicions," it said.

This was the first reported case in which a U.S. citizen will be indicted and tried in North Korea, South Korean officials said. The North’s criminal code calls for between 5 and 10 years of "education through labor" for people convicted of "hostile acts" against the state.

In a "severe" case, the code allows more than 10 years in labor camp.

Fred Lash, a [U.S. State Department](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/s/state_department/index.html?inline=nyt-org) spokesman, said the U.S. government has seen the report and was working diplomatically to "achieve a favorable outcome," Reuters reported.

Washington has no diplomatic ties with Pyongyang, but a Swedish diplomat based in Pyongyang met the journalists on Washington’s behalf.

On Tuesday, North Korea said it would allow the reporters consular access and treated them according to international laws.

When Ms. Ling and Ms. Lee were arrested on the border between China and North Korea under the still-unclear circumstances, they became unwitting pawns in the delicate international politics surrounding the North’s planned rocket launch, said a senior South Korean official.

On Monday, North Korea detained a South Korean worker in a joint industrial complex in the North on charges of inciting North Korean workers to defect to the South. South Korean officials were struggling to get access to the detained worker on Tuesday.

With a three-stage rocket placed at a launch pad on the North’s northeast coast, Washington warned that there will be "consequences" if North Korea presses ahead with the launch.

Pyongyang has said that if Washington tries to punish it for what it calls the launching of a communications satellite, not a missile, it will quit six-nation nuclear disarmament talks and restart its plutonium-producing nuclear facilities.

Washington, Japan and South Korea are concerned about a North Korean missile launch, fearing the North is trying to miniaturize its [nuclear weapons](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/science/topics/atomic_weapons/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier) so that its missiles can carry them as warheads. They also accuse North Korea of exporting missile technology to countries in the Middle East.