

Senator Paul H. Tsongas

Floor Statement

September 30, 1980

To:
Tom
Palmer
Nat. Desk
(3pp)

Mr. President, for myself and for my distinguished colleagues, Mr. Levin and Mr. Kennedy, I am introducing a sense of the Congress resolution urging the Government of the Republic of Korea to fulfill its commitment to the democratization of the Republic of Korea and to ask that the death sentence imposed upon Kim Dae Jung and the harsh prison sentences imposed upon his 23 co-defendants be reversed.

As I am sure my colleagues know, Kim Dae Jung, the leading member of the South Korean political opposition, was sentenced to death on September 16 by a military tribunal. He was charged with violating the sedition and national security laws--charges which the State Department characterized as being "pretty far-fetched." Before the trial, the man who was almost elected President of South Korea was kept in an underground cell, often stripped of his clothing, interrogated 15 hours a day for 60 days. He was not allowed until the trial to see a lawyer of his own choosing or the members of his family. At the trial itself, Amnesty International and the International Commission of Justice were denied observer status.

The sentencing of Kim Dae Jung has brought home to me the need to question publicly the future direction of our special relationship with South Korea. And it has awakened in many Americans new and serious doubts about the extent of our military and economic commitment to that country. We learned only a short time ago in another part of Asia that stability and

security must rest on more than military authoritarianism. They depend as well on the support of the people.

It is my belief that Kim's trial and sentencing symbolizes a broader tragedy in South Korea. After President Park's assassination last October, there was much promise of a gradual institution of a democratic processes. Even after Chun Doo Hwan assumed control of the army in a coup de main in December, the transition government of that country seemed to be taking important if faltering steps toward a greater level of citizen participation. In the long run, political vitality could have provided greater long-range security against the north. Then the contrast between the political systems on either side of the 38th parallel could not have been clearer to the Korean people and to the world.

But then came the martial law decree of May 17 and the virtual takeover of the government by General Chun. Since that time, Chun has closed down the popularly elected National Assembly, purged thousands of civil servants, ousted over 1,800 executives of state-run banks and corporations. Leading politicians of all political parties have been arrested. All political dissent has been stifled. The news media has been placed under tight military censorship. Official American statements of disapproval of Chun's actions have been deliberately distorted and twisted into apparent endorsements, thereby contributing to rising anti-American feeling.

I am not yet prepared to suggest the particular course we should adopt in dealing with the new South Korean Government. But we must make it clear

that if the South Korean Government carries out these harsh sentences, we are prepared to reassess the present terms of our relationship with South Korea. The future of democracy in South Korea depends on it.

Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to support this resolution!

To:
Tom
Palmer