

Physicians for Human Rights

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://phr.org/our-work/resources/south-korean-activist-seeks-medical-proof-of-torture/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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Kim Young-hwan, the South Korean human rights defender who was held in detention by the Chinese government for over 100 days, [is undergoing medical evaluation to investigate and document the torture](#) that he says occurred at the hands of Chinese security agents.

Kim, who was allegedly helping North Korean defectors in China and promoting human rights in North Korea, was arrested on March 29 and charged with endangering national security. He was released and expelled from China on July 20 after human rights groups campaigned for his freedom.

Kim asserts that he was severely tortured, undergoing beatings, electric shocks, sleep deprivation, and forced hard labor, in the early days of his detention in northeastern China. The Chinese government officially denies the torture allegations, and South Korea is hesitant to press the matter before any international bodies or courts until it has material evidence that torture occurred.

Although most of the bruises and scars have faded by now, Kim knows that a forensic medical evaluation conducted in compliance with the UN [Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (aka Istanbul Protocol) constitutes critically important evidence in torture cases. Trained clinicians examine all signs of physical and psychological abuse and produce a medical-legal affidavit documenting their conclusions. These affidavits often serve as key evidence to prosecute perpetrators of torture.

Kim's first set of medical evaluations took place on August 8, but the clinicians provided conflicting interpretations regarding a facial bruise. Kim is scheduled to undergo a more thorough examination next week.

It is critically important that Kim be evaluated by at least one clinician who has not only undergone Istanbul Protocol training but has also performed forensic evaluations recently and on a regular basis. Additionally, the South Korean government must ensure that the evaluators are objective, operating under complete clinical independence, and free from any undue political influence within or outside South Korea.

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