

Beat: Miscellaneous

North Korea expels Australian tourist John Short for `religious crimes`

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USPA News - Australian tourist John Short was expelled from North Korea on Monday after being held in detention for nearly two weeks for committing anti-North Korean religious acts. He was released after a confession was published by state-run media.

John Short, 75, was arrested on February 18 after he spread Bible tracts around the Popun Buddhist temple in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang on February 16, which is known in the country as the `Day of the Shining Star` and marks the birthday of former leader Kim Jong-il. Before Monday`s release, Short apologized for committing the crimes on what is regarded as the country`s greatest national holiday. "I deeply apologize for what I have done by spreading my Bible tracts on February 16, the birthday of His Excellency Kim Jong Il," he said in comments published by state-run media. "The people of the DPRK regard February 16th as the greatest national holiday." Short continued: "I now realize the seriousness of my insult to the Korean people on February 16th because I made the Korean people angry and for this I truly apologize." He also admitted to having committed `religious crimes` last year during a previous visit to the country. Short said he hired a South Korean businessman in early 2012 to translate his Bible tracts into Korean after hearing there is no religious freedom in North Korea and that foreigners are not welcome to visit or attend for church. He said he later transported several small-sized versions of his Bible tracts into the reclusive country in August 2012. "I committed the criminal act against the law of the DPRK by spreading my Bible tracts in Pyongyang underground station on the train ... I was interested to see if I could possibly carry more on another occasion," Short said. "In February 2014 I came as a tourist to DPRK to spread my Bible tracts in a larger quantity." Short asked the North Korean government for understanding and forgiveness and promised to make no further attempts at spreading Christianity in the country. It was not immediately known whether Short, who lives in Hong Kong, had made the confession voluntarily. Australia`s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said it had confirmed through the Swedish Embassy in Pyongyang that Short had been released and deported. "Clearly this is welcome news for Mr. Short, his family and his supporters," a spokesperson said. "Australian consular officials stand ready to provide assistance to Mr. Short to ensure he can return to his home in Hong Kong as soon as possible."

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com

www.gna24.com