

Beat: Politics

North Korea detains third American for illegal acts

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USPA News - A 56-year-old city worker from Ohio has been detained in North Korea over unspecified illegal acts, bringing to three the number of American nationals currently being held in the reclusive country, the North Korean and U.S. governments confirmed on Friday. Jeffrey Edward Fowle, 56, is believed to have been arrested in mid-May after entering the country on April 29 as part of a tour group.

"[He] acted in violation of the DPRK law, contrary to the purpose of tourism during his stay," the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in a brief dispatch, referring to the country by its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. KCNA said Fowle was detained and is still being investigated, but the report gave no details about the allegations he is facing. Japan's Kyodo news agency, however, citing an unnamed diplomatic source, said Fowle had been arrested after allegedly leaving a Bible in a hotel where he had been staying. Marie Harf, a spokeswoman for the U.S. State Department, said it was aware of Fowle's arrest, though she could not provide other details due to privacy laws. "This is the third U.S. citizen that has been detained in North Korea. Obviously, [there is] no greater priority for us than the welfare and safety of U.S. citizens abroad, and [I] don't have any additional information to share at this time," she said. A local newspaper in Ohio, the Dayton Daily News, said Fowle lives in West Carrollton and is a longtime city employee in nearby Moraine. City Manager David Hicks told the newspaper that local officials had agreed not to comment on Fowle's detention in North Korea at the request of the family's legal counsel. "The detention of any American citizen in North Korea concerns me, especially one with Ohio ties," said U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown. "The State Department is currently gathering additional information on the cause of the detention and I will work closely with State as we learn more about this case. My thoughts are with Mr. Fowle and his family and I will be sure the State Department does everything it can to ensure the safety of U.S. citizens abroad." The news of Fowle's arrest comes less than two months after 24-year-old American citizen Matthew Todd Miller was detained for alleged "rash behavior" while going through formalities to enter North Korea as a tourist. New Jersey-based travel agency Uri Tours confirmed Miller was a traveler on one of its private tours. "He had a tourist visa for the DPRK, but tore it to pieces and shouted hoarse that 'he would seek asylum' and 'he came to the DPRK after choosing it as a shelter.' This was a gross violation of its legal order," KCNA said in a brief news dispatch in late April. It added that Miller was taken into custody after authorities took "a serious note of his behavior," but it remains unclear what charges he is facing. Prior to Miller's arrest on April 10, U.S. missionary Kenneth Bae was arrested in November 2012 after he traveled from China to the North Korean special economic zone of Rason with a group of businessmen. He was sentenced in April 2013 to 15 years of hard labor after being found guilty of committing hostile acts aimed at toppling the North Korean government. The family of the jailed Korean American has denied the allegations, describing Bae as a tour operator and Christian missionary. But the state-run KCNA news agency said the "hostile acts" allegedly committed by Bae had been proven in court with evidence, although it has provided no information to support the claims. North Korea and the United States have no diplomatic relations, but Sweden acts as a protecting power. The U.S. State Department also said Friday that officials from the Swedish Embassy in Pyongyang have visited Bae a total of 11 times since his arrest, most recently on April 18. Bae's family and American officials have repeatedly voiced concerns over his chronic health problems and have called for his immediate release. In February, Australian tourist John Short, 75, was arrested in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang after spreading Bible tracts at a Buddhist temple 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. On March 3, Short was released and expelled after apologizing in a confession that was published by state-run media.

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