Beat: Local

North Korea releases two remaining American prisoners

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USPA News - Americans Kenneth Bae and Matthew Todd Miller have been released by North Korea after a secret meeting with U.S. National Intelligence Director James Clapper, the U.S. government announced on Saturday, just weeks after the reclusive country released another American. The unexpected release came after Clapper traveled to North Korea on a secret visit to discuss the matter with North Korean officials.

A senior U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Clapper carried a "brief message" from President Barack Obama in which he indicated that Clapper was the president`s personal envoy to bring Bae and Miller home. It was not known who Clapper met with while in North Korea or whether anything was offered to secure the release of the two Americans. The content of Obama`s message was also not made public. "It`s a wonderful day for them and their families," Obama said in a brief reaction at the end of a press conference at the White House. "Obviously we are very grateful for their safe return and I appreciate Director Clapper doing a great job on what was obviously a challenging mission," he added. Bae`s sister, Terri Chung, said she was "thrilled" at the thought of being able to hug her brother soon. "Words cannot adequately express our relief and gratitude that Kenneth is finally coming home," she said. "We have been waiting for and praying for this day for two years. This ordeal has been excruciating for the family, but we are filled with joy right now." Chung added: "[My brother] will not have to spend another day at a labor camp. He can now recover from this imprisonment and look forward to his wife, kids and rest of his life. Our Thanksgiving celebration this year will be one we will never forget. ... On behalf of the family, we ask for some space from reporters and the public as he tries to adjust to his life back home." United Nations spokesman StÃƒ©phane Dujarric said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed North Korea`s decision to release the two men. "[He] is relieved that they are safely returning home and commends the work of international partners in helping to secure their release," he said. Dujarric added: "The Secretary-General hopes that this positive momentum for improving relations among the concerned parties for peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and beyond will be built on." Miller, of Bakersfield, California, was arrested in April after he allegedly ripped up his tourist visa at immigration and demanded asylum from North Korea. He was later sentenced to six years in prison on charges of espionage because he allegedly sought to be jailed in North Korea to investigate the country`s human rights situation. Bae, a Korean-American missionary who lives in Lynnwood, Washington, was arrested in November 2012 and 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. His two-year-long detention made him the longest held American in North Korea since the Korean War, and the only one to have been sent to labor camp. Bae`s family had long denied the North`s allegations, describing him as a tour operator and Christian missionary. But the state-run KCNA news agency previously said that the "hostile acts" allegedly committed by Bae had been proven in court with evidence, although it provided no information to support the claims.

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