

Beat: Miscellaneous

N. Korea releases American tourist Jeffrey Fowle after 5 months

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USPA News - American tourist Jeffrey Fowle, who was arrested earlier this year after leaving a Bible in a hotel where he had been staying, was released by North Korea on Tuesday and flown to Guam, U.S. officials said. Two other Americans remain imprisoned in the reclusive country.

Fowle, a 56-year-old former city worker from Ohio, was arrested in mid-May after entering the country on April 29 as part of a tour group. North Korea's state-run news agency said he had been arrested for illegal acts "contrary to the purpose of tourism," but it provided no other details. Fowle later told CNN that the charges stemmed from him trying to leave a Bible at a hotel. White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest confirmed Fowle's release on Tuesday and welcomed North Korea's decision. "I am in a position to confirm that Jeffrey Fowle has been allowed to depart the DPRK and is on his way home to rejoin his family," Earnest said, referring to North Korea by its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Marie Harf, a spokeswoman for the U.S. State Department, said Fowle was transported out of North Korea by an aircraft provided by the U.S. Defense Department. "As a condition of his release, the DPRK authorities asked the United States Government to transport Mr. Fowle out of the country," she said, adding that the transportation took place in a time frame specified by North Korea. It was not immediately clear why North Korea decided to release Fowle as the government announced in late June that it would put Fowle and a second American on trial. In a brief dispatch from the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on June 30, the government said "suspicions about their hostile acts" had been confirmed by evidence and their testimonies. The second American, 24-year-old Matthew Todd Miller, was arrested in April after he allegedly ripped up his tourist visa at immigration and demanded asylum from North Korea. A third American, U.S. missionary Kenneth Bae, 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. 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. There was no indication that North Korea would also release Bae and Miller, but the U.S. has repeatedly called for their release. "While this (Fowle's release) is a positive decision by the DPRK, we remain focused on the continued detention of Kenneth Bae and Matthew Miller and again call on the DPRK to immediately release them," Harf said. "The U.S. Government will continue to work actively on their cases."

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