

Unificationist Leaders in Bangkok Exonerated by Thailand's Highest Court

Lek Thaveetermsakul
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Dr. Lek Thaveetermsakul, secretary-general of the Universal Peace Federation in Thailand, and a senior leader of the Unification Church in Thailand, told media in Bangkok that he was overjoyed on Sept. 1, 2011 when the Thai Supreme Court exonerated him and seven other Unificationists who had suffered imprisonment and public humiliation for decades, according to *The Nation*, a major Thai newspaper. The unfounded charges related to racketeering, public deception and posing a threat to national security had been filed by the Thai military government in 1991 and had resulted in imprisonment of the Unificationist leaders for years.

Lek said he was happy that justice was finally served because he and his fellow Unificationists had been stigmatized for two decades, even though they had worked to promote love, unity and world peace, the *Nation* reported. The verdict confirmed that the group was not involved in criminal actions or inciting disunity as accused, he said.

The military government had accused Lek and seven others of inciting public chaos and disunity through writing and the spoken word. However, the group was acquitted by the Criminal Court in February 2003 and by the Appeals Court in June 2004.



Background: Explosive Church Growth Led to National Persecution in 1991

In 1988 Thailand's Unificationist movement successfully held the Fifth Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP) Convention of World Students, co-hosted by Ramkhamhaeng University, the biggest public University in Thailand. Hundreds of international students, thousands of local university students as well as university administrators and professors attended the convention, the symposium at the University, the main address by World CARP President Hyo Jin Moon and performances at the Thailand Cultural Center, as well as the Hanmadang Sport Festival. Based on the success of the World CARP Convention, the movement's leaders developed close ties to the president, administrators, professors and students of Ramkhamhaeng University.

In 1990, there were approximately 300 fully committed young people as well as 200,000 associate-members connected to the Unification Cultural Center. Based on the rapid growth in membership and church development, the Thai Unification Church received special recognition from True Father (Rev. Sun Myung Moon) when he presented to Thai leaders the "Best Witnessing Award 1990," which was the

second best witnessing result, next to Japan. The movement in Thailand appeared to be heading for a higher dimension through increased membership and various activities.

Immediately after the convention, a huge and well-equipped headquarters of the Unification Cultural Center opened in front of Ramkhamhaeng University to further expand outreach. Many young people and university students were attracted by the variety of linguistic and cultural activities including the Divine Principle workshops. Hundreds of students flocked to the weekly activities organized by the Unification Cultural Center. Upon the success of the established model, more workshop centers were established and many new centers were set up in other main provinces of Thailand. The church developed steadily with the rapid increase in membership through the witnessing activities.

National Persecution of the Church and the Imprisonment



However, the fortunes of the church changed in early 1991. In that year, the military staged a coup against the democratically-elected government of General Chatichai Choonhavan claiming that they were taking action to protect the Monarchy and to clean up the corruption in the government. After the military coup, Thailand was ruled by a temporary government under the military regime, the so-called National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC).

In May 1991, due to the anger and misunderstanding of a few members' parents, false accusations were reported to the police and spread to the daily newspapers. Although the Unification Cultural Center and the Unification Cultural Foundation were legally registered, the *Daily News* in Bangkok, reported in its front-page headline news that the organization was an illegal cult called "Moonism" and that it was brainwashing young people not to respect and obey their own parents (but to believe in True Parents only), drugging them with white powder (which was, in fact, salt), confining or locking them up in the

center against their will and sending them out fundraising.

The negative parents worked very hard to accuse and testify against the church to the *Daily News* and the Special Branch of the Police in charge of the investigation. After a long investigation, the police could not find any solid ground to take any action against our movement, but the *Daily News* newspaper continued to publish negative front page headline news every day to attack the Church. It also mobilized public opinion and put pressure on the Military Regime to take strong action against the movement. The *Daily News* was the only paper that attacked the church continuously, and it gained huge profits from the sales of the newspaper through their propaganda. The negative media attack exposed the church to the sensitive underlying political situation of the country which was under the military regime during that time. As there was no other way to stop the newspaper, the Church decided to sue the newspaper for the false accusations and fake reports in court.

As soon as the court accepted the case filed against the newspaper, the National Crime Suppression Division Police suddenly raided all of the Church centers on June 26, 1991, confiscated everything, and arrested eight leaders. All the centers were closed down without evidence of criminal acts. The Chief of Police of the Division, who had a close relationship with the Military Regime, appealed directly to the regime to apply martial laws instead of the customary Court of Justice. He claimed that the movement called "Moonism" was a threat and posed danger to the peace and security of the nation, and that the teaching of "Moonism" was even more dangerous than communism because of the rapid increase in membership, which reportedly had reached up to 200,000.

The eight leaders were imprisoned without bail on the charge of conspiracy against the Internal Security of the Royal Kingdom of Thailand and with attempting to put the Kingdom under the sovereignty of a foreign state. They were accused of attempting to unify all the states in the world, including Thailand, under the newly-established state centering on Korea with the Korean language as the official language and Rev. Sun Myung Moon as the Head of State. Additionally, they were charged with conspiracy to cheat the Thai people for personal benefits. Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon also were implicated in the case and were threatened with an arrest warrant, as was the Korean missionary, Rev. Byung Wooh Kim, who was not in the country at that time. Therefore, until the case was completely resolved legally, True Parents could not safely enter into Thailand.

Unification Church members were in fear and scattered around the country, while several key leaders went into hiding to escape the police. At this critical moment, Dr. Chung Sik Yong, who was at that time the National Leader of Malaysia, was called by Rev. Byung Wooh Kim to help and guide the Thai members. He travelled to Thailand, visited the leaders in prison and comforted the members as True Parents' representative.

In May 1992, when the Military Regime manipulated the 1992 elections to guarantee their victory in an attempt to hold onto power and keep control over the country, demonstrations broke out in Bangkok calling for democratic reforms. The protests were violently suppressed by the military, and many were killed. The country was in crisis and at the brink of civil war. The King of Thailand then intervened, ending military rule and installing another interim prime minister, Anand Panyarachun.

In September 1992, new elections brought a genuinely civilian government to power under Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, leader of the Democrat Party. If the Military Regime had succeeded in holding onto power and control of the country, it would have been impossible to get bail from the court. In March 1993, under the new civilian democratic government and with the letter of support signed by the VIPs connected to the movement, the lawyers could appeal to the court and get temporary release on bail after 21 months of imprisonment.

Rebuilding the movement under persecution

From March 1993, the Thailand Church started to re-establish new foundation while undergoing legal prosecution. They consolidated all the remaining resources to defend the court case and at the same time moved forward carefully to reorganize and reactivate the movement. The Professors World Peace Academy (PWPA), the *Wonhwa Do* Martial Arts, Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) as well as witnessing activities were initiated under the Foundation for Development and Peace (FDP) which was established with the support of the key VIPs centering on General Saiyud Kerdphol, the former Supreme Commander of Thailand. Through the international conference, the image of the movement could be restored and the local VIP contacts were reconnected to support the movement again. From the 50 faithful members who remained after the national persecution in 1991, with continuous dedication and effort in witnessing, the Church was able to break through and increase membership. In 1995, the Thai Church was successful in bringing 300 candidates for the Blessing in Korea.

Building a New Image of the Movement through FFWPU and the Blessing



On November 29, 1997, FFWPU Thailand held the 36-Million-Couple International Holy Blessing Ceremony at the renowned Queen Sirikit National Convention Center in Bangkok with simultaneous live-satellite broadcast from Washington D.C. and nationwide TV broadcast. There were 1,000 participants, including 253 newly-married couples, 573 previously-married couples. It was the biggest and the first public international mass wedding in Thailand, and the event was being promoted to the public through a press conference, radio interviews and TV advertising a few weeks before the event. The video presentation of True Parents officiating the Blessing appeared every day for almost one week before the event.

The campaign attracted the attention and interest of the whole nation as well as the adversaries of the movement who conspired with the biggest newspaper and radio stations to find fault, thereby seeking to attack just one day before the actual event. The Bangkok Governor, who had promised to give a congratulatory message for the event, suddenly changed his mind after the negative-newspaper attack. However, the event was carefully prepared with no legal flaws, well-guarded with righteous VIPs, positive media contacts and trustworthy friends; thus, the media attack was successfully overcome. The event ended so beautifully that all the TV stations and newspapers reported positively with excitement as their front-page headline news, and it silenced the negative newspaper reporting completely. The event presented the new image of FFWPU, and it was a great turning point for the nation.

In June 1998, the first stage of the 360-Million Couple International Holy Blessing Ceremony was co-hosted by FFWPU-Thailand and the Department of Community Development, Ministry of Interior. It was the first public Blessing event that was officially co-hosted by the government. The event was held in Bangkok simultaneously with the main event in New York through satellite broadcast with 1,000 representative couples from all over the country attending the main program and broadcast on TV nationwide again on the next day for all the other couples throughout the nation to receive the Blessing.

In July 1999, while the blessing movement was moving at full speed, ITV News TV Station, one of the most popular and powerful TV stations started to investigate the movement both locally and internationally. The ITV compiled and broadcast a highly critical, 30-minute story about the Founder of the Unification Church and also brought up the ongoing court case of the church in Thailand in connection with the newly established FFWPU with the intention to attack and damage its good image. With the help of General Saiyud Kerdphol, the chairman of FDP, an official letter of protest was written to the ITV clarifying that FFWPU was a different organization from the organization under the court case and they should not intervene with the court of justice. After that, they did not continue with any other negative story. Because of the attack, all the VIP committee members united even more strongly to support and protect our movement. A plan was made to reorganize and strengthen the movement so that we could protect it legally against any attack.

Victory in Courts

True Parents donated 300,000 USD for the Thailand Peace Embassy building. The construction started in October, 2002 on a piece of land strategically located near two major universities and the international airport. In April 2003, the Peace Embassy building was completed and all the providential organizations started operating in the new building which is now the Headquarters of the Thailand Movement. On February 19, 2003, the church won the 12-year long legal case and the court dismissed all the charges. It was one of the important victories for the movement over the national persecution. The victory restored the image of the Unification Movement in Thailand. The news was reported in all the major newspapers in Thailand. Therefore, the completion of the Peace Embassy and the victory of the court case marked the establishment of a new foundation for the movement in Thailand. However, the prosecutors in charge continued their pursuit and brought the case to the Appeals Court right after the Criminal Court decision.

On December 2, 2003, the WANGO Universal Peace Award, WANGO's highest award to individuals, was presented to Her Royal Highness, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, at a private audience in the Royal Palace in Bangkok by Mr. Taj Hamad, Secretary General of WANGO along with local representatives. The event was broadcasted in the *Royal News Report* and all the TV channels nationwide. As the WANGO Universal Peace Award was a special award from its Founder, Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon. The acceptance by the Crown Princess would mean that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Royal Secretariat Office which served as the protocol offices had acknowledged WANGO and the providential organizations registered locally as legal. It was a very significant endorsement for the national victory over prosecution by the Thai Government, the good image of the movement was restored.

On October 12, 2004, the church won another victory in the Appeals Court, and the Court dismissed the appeal of the prosecutors and confirmed the first court decision. The prosecutors re-appealed to the Supreme Court, despite the failure in the First Court and the Appeals Court. The case was finally brought up to the Supreme Court in April 2005. The advancement was another challenge for the movement to move forward to achieve greater victory.

Final Verdict from the Supreme Court

The cases in the Supreme Court are processed and kept in a highly secured and confidential system without any outside intervention. Many attempts were made to speed up and conclude the case quickly; petitions were made through members of Parliament, to the Minister of Justice, National Commission of Human Rights, Deputy Prime Minister and even to the Prime Minister. Unfortunately, they were unable to intervene in the judicial process of the court. It was almost impossible for the Thai Movement to know the status of the legal case.

By the end of May 2011, through a newly appointed Ambassador for Peace, Taveesak Tuchinda, who is a Police General, Bangkok Election Committee member, and legal consultant to several committees in the Senate, the status of our legal case in the Supreme Court was investigated. He made an appeal to the Secretary of the Ministry of Justice to follow up on the case, testifying that the organization has made great contributions to the society and the nation, that nothing would harm the national security; furthermore, as the legal case against the Movement has been going on for almost 20 years, it is time to bring it to an end.

The case was in the Supreme Court for almost 7 years and finally on August 1, 2011, the Supreme Court issued an order for a hearing on September 1, 2011. This was to be the final victory and conclusion of the legal prosecution and the national persecution of the Thailand Movement represented by the eight leaders who went through 21-month imprisonment, through three court prosecutions over a course of 21 years.

As a preparation to welcome True Parents to Thailand, Dr. and Mrs. Chung Sik Yong, the Regional President of Asia initiated a 3-Day Seminar on True Parent's Life Course in Bangkok. The date was scheduled just prior to the final hearing called by the Supreme Court on 1 September 2011. The seminar prepared members' heart to welcome the final victory of the 21-year long struggle over the Court Case in Thailand. Rev. Jin Hun Yong poured out his heart to educate the 420 Thai members. By the deep understanding of True Parents' life course, we will connect the upcoming victory with True Parents heartistically. Upon the victorious national foundation, Rev. Pasit Sirimalai, the National Leader of Thailand, will lead all members to liberate God and True Parents, offer great joy to welcome True Parents to Thailand.