

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: S Korea Drops Charge Against Holy Mother Han

Knut Holdhus
August 13, 2026



Lack of evidence [Mother Han](#) is linked to political funding. Illustration: ChatGPT

Illustration: Grok xAI

Chosun Biz logo

Yoon Yeong-ho Dec. 6, 2020

Unificationism officials indicted over unlawful political donations as Hak Ja Han and her assistant are cleared due to lack of proof

A large number of South Korean media outlets reported on 11th and 12th August on the investigation into alleged political influence-peddling by the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU), commonly known in Korea as [Unificationism](#) (통일교), particularly during the time when [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호) was the Director-General of the [religious organization](#)'s world headquarters.

The current investigation reached an important stage on 11th August, when the especially established Joint Investigation Headquarters for Corruption Involving Politics and Religion announced the indictment of three senior former officials and the summary indictment of six others.

At the same time, [FFWPU](#) President [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) and her former chief of staff, Jeong Won-ju (정원주), were not referred for prosecution, with investigators concluding that there was insufficient evidence that either had directly participated in the alleged offenses.

The basic facts are reported consistently by the various media outlets, although each emphasizes somewhat different aspects of the investigation.

According to [Chosun Biz](#), the Joint Investigation Headquarters, headed by Kim Tae-hoon (김태훈), Chief Prosecutor of the Daejeon High Prosecutors' Office, indicted without detention [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), former head of the [FFWPU](#) World

Headquarters; Song Kwang-seok (송광석), former chairman of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP); and a former Universal Peace Federation (UPF) chairman identified by his surname, Lee (이).



Song Kwang-seok, here 26th April 2024

They face charges of violating the Political Funds Act and occupational embezzlement. Six additional [FFWPU](#) officials, including district leaders allegedly involved to some degree, received summary indictments.

[Chosun Ilbo](#) reports essentially the same indictment but puts particular emphasis on the fact that [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) was not referred for prosecution. It describes the three principal defendants as accused of making approximately KRW 188 million (about US\$130,000) in illegal political donations to 132 politicians on 218 occasions between September 2019 and January 2025. According to the investigators, the funds were provided under the names of individual [FFWPU](#) associates rather than directly in the [organization](#)'s name.

The central allegation, as presented by both Chosun publications, is not simply that money was donated to politicians. Rather, investigators allege that the [organization](#) used its nationwide

structure to facilitate political contributions while cultivating relationships with politicians who attended [FFWPU](#)-sponsored events. The stated purpose, according to the investigation headquarters, was to expand the [FFWPU](#)'s religious influence through the politicians participating in those events.



The scale of the investigation is highlighted particularly clearly by [Chosun Biz](#) and [Yonhap News](#). Investigators searched 24 locations, including the Cheon Jeong Temple, traced approximately 480 bank accounts, and questioned 82 people connected with the case. These investigative measures were presented as part of an effort to establish whether organizational funds had been diverted and used for political contributions.

[Yonhap News](#) provides somewhat more institutional detail. It identifies [Yoon](#) as the former Director-General of the [FFWPU](#) World Headquarters and explains the nature of the summary indictments issued against six other officials. A summary indictment is a procedure under which prosecutors ask a court to impose a fine or other penalty without proceeding initially through a full criminal trial.



No proof of involvement for Jeong Won-ju Jan. 19, 2025

A particularly significant point, emphasized by [Yonhap News](#) and [Chosun Ilbo](#), concerns the distinction between the officials who were indicted and the two senior figures who were not. Investigators concluded that there was insufficient evidence that [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) or Jeong Won-ju (정원주) had directly participated in the alleged offenses. The investigation concerning them was therefore closed without referral to prosecutors, and the relevant records were returned.

The same reasoning was applied to the 132 politicians who received the contributions. Most of the Korean media reports state that investigators concluded that the politicians themselves were unaware that the money deposited into their accounts had allegedly been provided by [Family Federation](#)-related organizations for specific purposes. Consequently, none of the

132 politicians was prosecuted in connection with these allegations.

This distinction is important because the investigation's conclusions do not amount to a finding that the alleged donations were lawful. Rather, according to the reports, investigators allege that the [FFWPU](#)-related officials who arranged the donations violated the Political Funds Act, while concluding that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute either the politicians who received the money or [Hak Ja Han](#) and Jeong Won-ju.

The reports also place the case within a broader investigation involving another religious movement, Shincheonji [See editor's note below]. The Joint Investigation Headquarters is separately examining allegations that some Shincheonji members in the Seoul metropolitan area joined the Democratic Party of Korea (DPK) ahead of the 3rd June 2026 local elections, potentially in violation of the Public Official Election Act.

Here the reports differ slightly in emphasis. [Chosun Ilbo](#) adds an allegation that Shincheonji [See editor's note below] members may have been encouraged to join the Democratic Party in connection with disputes over obtaining approval to change the designated use of buildings for religious facilities. [Chosun Biz](#) and [Yonhap News](#), by contrast, mention the broader investigation without providing as much detail about the alleged motivation.



Finally, [Yonhap News](#) quotes the Joint Investigation Headquarters as saying that it will continue to conduct a "strict and swift" investigation into other allegations involving both the [Family Federation](#) and Shincheonji [See editor's note below].

The various media reports portray the 11th August announcement as a mixed outcome for the prosecution's investigation of the [FFWPU](#): nine officials face charges, including three who have been formally indicted for trial, but investigators did not establish sufficient evidence to prosecute [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) or Jeong Won-ju (정원주), and they likewise found no basis to prosecute the 132 politicians who received the alleged contributions. The reports therefore distinguish between the alleged institutional scheme and the question of individual criminal responsibility at its highest level.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

[Editor's note 1: Shincheonji, officially known as Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony, is a new religious movement founded in South Korea in 1984 by Lee Man-hee, who claims to be the promised pastor mentioned in the Bible's Book of Revelation.

Shincheonji teaches that the Book of Revelation is being fulfilled through its church and that Lee Man-hee has received divine revelation to interpret it. He teaches that South Korea is the location where the prophecies of the Book of Revelation are actively playing out in real-time, making it the epicenter of the final harvest. Shincheonji focuses on filling the literal 144,000 slots of the 12 Tribes mentioned in Revelation. Once this number of truly sealed, flawless believers is completed, they believe they will rule as kings and priests over the rest of humanity.]

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Korea Warned At

Defense points out Mother Han's leadership does not mean responsibility for every act, as Yoon's independence in decision-making as executive director

Part 4 of a 4-part series on the Hak Ja Han trial

See part 1: [How Reliable Is the Prosecution's Key Witness?](#)

See part 2: [Yoon's Changing Accounts Challenged by Defense](#)

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Conflicting accounts concerning luxury gifts: Chanel handbag and Graff necklace. Illustration: Grok xAI, 12th August 2026.

The first three articles in this series have examined specific elements of [Hak Ja Han's](#) defense: disputed timelines, conflicting accounts concerning luxury gifts, and challenges to the legality and reliability of the prosecution's evidence.

The [Family Federation's](#) 6th August [statement](#), however, ultimately makes a broader argument.

At its heart is a question about **responsibility**: was [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) – also called [Mother Han](#) – personally directing the political, financial and business activities now attributed to her, or were those matters being handled independently by senior executives such as former World Headquarters Director [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호)?

The defense says the latter.

A religious leader or an executive decision-maker?

문화일보

Logo of *Munhwa Ilbo*, a conservative newspaper and South Korea's only national evening daily, ranking among the top ten dailies by circulation.

According to the 5th August *Munhwa Ilbo* (문화일보) [report](#), [Mother Han's](#) lawyers told

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the court during closing arguments that she was fundamentally a religious leader and that administrative and financial affairs were handled by Yoon.

The Family Federation's 6th August statement makes this distinction central to its entire defense.

The argument is not that Mother Han had no authority within the organization. Rather, the defense says that **religious leadership should not automatically be equated with personal responsibility for every administrative or financial action carried out by senior staff.**

This becomes particularly important if the prosecution's case depends on proving that Yoon acted on Mother Han's explicit instructions.

The defense argues that there is no sufficient direct evidence – such as a contemporaneous written instruction, recording or other objective document – establishing that she personally ordered the alleged political payments and gifts.

Instead, it says the prosecution has relied heavily on Yoon's testimony and on inferences drawn from the importance of the activities involved.

"It must have been reported"

The Family Federation describes what it regards as a fundamental weakness in the Special Prosecutor's reasoning.

According to the Federation, the prosecution has essentially assumed that because a particular project or transaction was important, it **must have been reported to Hak Ja Han and must therefore have been undertaken on her instructions.**

The defense argues that this is not sufficient in a criminal trial.

In its view, prosecutors must establish the defendant's involvement through tangible evidence rather than reasoning that an important activity would "naturally" have required the leader's approval.

This argument connects the different issues examined in the previous three articles. (See [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#))

The defense points to the disputed dates of the alleged 100 million won (in 2022 ca. US\$ 77,000) report, the access records concerning the alleged morning meeting, the changing accounts of the Chanel handbag, the chronology of the Graff necklace and Yoon's alleged failure to inform Mother Han about his meeting with then-President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열).

The Federation says these examples all point in the same direction: **Yoon Yeong-ho was capable of acting independently, and his later testimony should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that Mother Han ordered his actions.**



The defense's portrayal of Yoon

The Federation's statement



Yoon Yeong-ho, here 5th December 2021. Screenshot from live transmission from an international rally by [FFWPU](#).

goes further by presenting [Yoon](#) as someone who may have had substantial personal interests of his own.

It alleges that his lifestyle was far more expensive than would normally be expected from his official salary and points to luxury vehicles, expensive accommodation, private-jet travel and Chanel handbags.

The defense interprets this as evidence of possible personal financial misconduct and argues that [Yoon](#) consequently had a powerful incentive to transfer responsibility to his superior.

The statement also claims that [Yoon](#) continued pursuing aspects of the MPP project (The Mekong River Peace Park project) for personal and family interests even after leaving the [Family Federation](#).

Again, these are **defense allegations**, not established findings. Their significance lies in how the defense uses them to challenge the prosecution's assumption that [Yoon](#) had no reason to give false or self-serving testimony.

The question of [Mother Han's](#) health

The final part of the [Family Federation's](#) argument is different in character. It concerns [Hak Ja Han](#) herself.

According to the [Federation statement](#), [Mother Han](#) is 83 years old and suffers from severe visual impairment. The [statement](#) says that she is legally blind in both eyes due to exudative macular degeneration and end-stage glaucoma [See editor's note 1 below]. Having also undergone atrial fibrillation [See editor's note 2 below] surgery and shoulder joint replacement surgery, she requires assistance with some everyday activities.

Her lawyers therefore asked the court to allow her to exercise her right to defend herself without being detained.



During [Hak Ja Han's](#) detention, she suffered a fall causing a tear of the supraspinatus muscle, the most common form of rotator cuff tear.

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This argument should be distinguished from the question of guilt. The defense is essentially making **two separate appeals**: one concerning whether the prosecution has proved the charges, and another concerning the conditions under which an elderly defendant should be able to participate in her defense.

"When in doubt, in favor of the accused"

The [Family Federation](#) concludes its statement by invoking the legal principle *in dubio pro reo*, commonly translated as

“when in doubt, in favor of the accused.”

The principle is related to the broader presumption of innocence and the requirement that criminal guilt be established to the applicable standard of proof.

The defense argues that this principle is particularly important in the [Mother Han](#) case because, in its view, the prosecution's evidence contains several unresolved problems.

According to the [Federation](#), key testimony conflicts with documentary records and timelines; a substantial quantity of evidence was allegedly obtained unlawfully; and the central prosecution witness could not be effectively cross-examined.

From the defense's perspective, these problems accumulate rather than stand alone.

The defense's overall theory

Taken together, the four parts in this series on the [Family Federation's](#) 6th August [statement](#) present a consistent theory of the case.

The defense does not merely argue that individual pieces of evidence are mistaken. It argues that **the prosecution has constructed a picture of [Mother Han](#) as personally directing activities that were, in reality, carried out by [Yoon](#) and other executives.**

The defense says [Yoon](#) sometimes acted independently, that his subsequent testimony contains important contradictions, and that the prosecution has relied too heavily on assumptions about what a [religious organization's](#) leader must have known or authorized.

The prosecution, by contrast, maintains that its evidence supports the charges against [Mother Han](#).

The *Seoul Central District Court* will ultimately have to decide between these competing interpretations.

What is at stake on 31st August?

The 31st August verdict will therefore involve more than the credibility of one witness.



Will have to decide between two competing interpretations:
Presiding judge Woo In-seong.
Image: Grok xAI, 30th July 2026.

The court will have to assess the relationship between [Mother Han](#) and [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), the reliability of [Yoon's](#) testimony, the significance of documentary and physical evidence, the legality of evidence-gathering procedures, and whether the prosecution has established [Mother Han's](#) **personal responsibility for acts defined as criminal.**

For the [Family Federation](#), the conclusion is clear: when the prosecution's direct evidence is disputed by objective records and when reasonable doubt remains concerning

the defendant's personal involvement, the court should acquit.

Whether that argument persuades the judges remains to be seen.

For **Mother Han**, the answer will come on 31st August, when the *Seoul Central District Court* is scheduled to deliver its first-instance judgment.

*NB. This article presents and explains the arguments made by **Mother Han**'s defense team and the **Family Federation**. It does not independently establish the truth of the allegations concerning **Yoon Yeong-ho**, the MPP project or the legality of the evidence. The prosecution's position and the court's eventual assessment may differ substantially from the defense's interpretation.*

See part 1: [How Reliable Is the Prosecution's Key Witness?](#)

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: **Yoon Yeong-ho** responsible for executive actions, **Mother Han** as religious leader.
Illustration: ChatGPT, 12th August 2026.

[Editor's note 1: End-stage glaucoma refers to advanced glaucoma in which extensive, usually irreversible damage has occurred to the optic nerve. The optic nerve carries visual information from the eye to the brain, and glaucoma progressively destroys its nerve fibers, typically because of damage associated with elevated intraocular pressure.

In end-stage disease, **vision is severely reduced**, often with a very restricted visual field. A person may retain only a small central or peripheral area of vision, while much of the surrounding field is permanently lost. In the most advanced cases, glaucoma can result in **near-total or total blindness**.

Glaucoma-related optic-nerve damage cannot currently be reversed. Treatment therefore focuses on **preserving whatever vision remains**, usually by lowering intraocular pressure through medications, laser treatment, or surgery. Regular monitoring is important because further damage may occur even when symptoms are not obvious.]

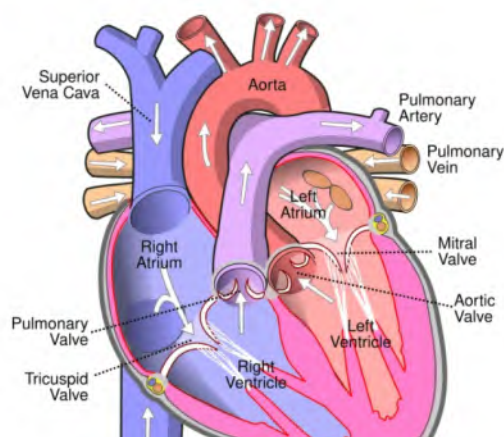




Diagram of the human heart. Illustration:
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[Editor's note 2: Mother Han's arrhythmia has been diagnosed as atrial fibrillation (AFib), which is the most common type of irregular heart rhythm (arrhythmia). Normally, the heart's electrical system makes the upper chambers (atria) contract in an organized way, pumping blood into the lower chambers (ventricles).

In atrial fibrillation, the electrical signals in the atria become rapid and chaotic, causing the atria to quiver instead of contracting effectively. One key feature of atrial fibrillation is an irregular and often rapid heartbeat. Patients may feel palpitations, fluttering, or pounding in the chest. The irregular heart rhythm may cause an inefficient blood flow from the atria to the ventricles and an increased risk of blood clots forming in the atria, which can travel to the brain and cause a stroke.]

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