

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: States like Japan and S Korea use the Law in War on Faiths

Knut Holdhus
October 1, 2026



Sam Brownback with his book "China's War on Faith", co-authored by Michael Arkush and Joel Rosenberg. Published May 2026 by Republic Book Publishers



Opened can of worms that allowed the introduction of a series of legal "Trojan horses" targeting the Family Federation and welcomed by Beijing: Former Japanese prime minister Fumio Kishida, here on July 14, 2022

The speakers at the HJI online conference on September 24, 2026 on threats to religious freedom: From left to right, Dr. Michael Jenkins, former US ambassador Sam Brownback, Dr. Massimo Introvigne

The dangerous regional precedent of turning the law into an instrument of state-sponsored religious persecution

During an international Zoom conference hosted by the HJ International Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership in New York on 24th September 2026, distinguished experts gathered to discuss contemporary threats to religious freedom. Under the theme "Honoring Constitution Day - Contemporary Threats to Religious Freedom: The Significance of the 1st Amendment", presenters highlighted how democratic nations are increasingly failing to protect religious minorities. Although the presentations ranged widely, several observations were particularly relevant to the systematic, state-backed persecution currently faced by the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly the Unification Church) and its leader, Dr. Hak Ja Han, in both Japan and South Korea.

The Ideological Roots and Weaponization of "Brainwashing"

Dr. Massimo Introvigne a leading scholar on new religious movements and prominent activist for religious freedom, traced the modern targeting of religious minorities back to pseudo-scientific theories of "brainwashing" [See editor's note 1 below] and "coercive persuasion". Originally pushed by Marxist and secularist groups to attack all religions, these concepts were eventually narrowed down to target unpopular minority groups labeled as "cults".

Totalitarian states like China historically weaponized these ideas, exporting them into democratic Asian neighbors through left-wing legal networks and communist parties.

While Western courts - such as the U.S. federal courts

in the landmark 1990 Fishman decision - historically rejected brainwashing [See editor's note 1 below] as unscientific nonsense akin to a "flat earth" theory, the concept is now being reintroduced into democratic legal systems through legal "Trojan horses". These modern variations include the concepts of "coercive control" and "spiritual abuse", which are being aggressively utilized by state actors to dismantle the [Family Federation](#).

State Persecution and "Spiritual Abuse" Legislation in Japan

The crisis for the [Family Federation](#) escalated drastically in Japan following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2022. The assassin's grievances regarding his mother's financial donations to the [Family Federation](#) were seized upon by the Japanese Communist Party and anti-religious hostile actors. Backed by ideological pressure from China, this culminated in a severe state-backed crackdown.

A central mechanism of this persecution is Japan's newly passed legislation criminalizing the "[spiritual abuse](#)" of children (defined broadly to include minors up to age 18). Under the guise of child protection, the law relies on highly ambiguous definitions of psychological coercion. It penalizes standard religious practices, such as counseling family members against abortion, advising against certain holiday celebrations, or engaging in traditional confessions.

As Dr. Michael Jenkins, current president of the [Universal Peace Federation](#) of North America, noted, the legal hostility against the Japanese [Family Federation](#) has reached unprecedented heights. Japanese authorities have pushed to dissolve the [religious corporation](#) entirely. Shockingly, the legal rationale used by Japanese bodies states that even if no ongoing wrongdoing is found, the [religious organization's](#) foundational theological teachings imply they might commit violations in the future. This directly criminalizes religious doctrines under the assumption that faith equals automatic mind control [See editor's note 2 below].

The "Church Dissolution Bill" in South Korea

The state-sponsored hostility in Japan has directly spilled over into South Korea, creating a dangerous regional precedent. Dr. Jenkins revealed that the Chinese Communist Party's "anti-heresy" committee (Jin Zhao) has actively hosted meetings in Seoul with Korean and Japanese representatives to demonstrate how states can weaponize public distrust to eliminate persecuted religious organizations.



Advocating for Japanese dissolution order as a model for disbanding the [Family Federation](#) in South Korea: Minister of Justice Jeong Seong-ho- (also anglicized as Chung Sung-ho)

This transnational pressure has heavily influenced South Korean politics. South Korean President Lee Jae-myung instructed his Minister of Legislative and Judicial Affairs to study Japan's legal tactics specifically to replicate them against domestic churches. This has resulted in a highly controversial piece of legislation currently sitting before the National Assembly's Judiciary and Legislative Committee, officially designated as Civil Code 221-5932, but widely dubbed the "Church Dissolution Bill".

This bill utilizes vague legal terminology to mandate the complete dissolution and asset seizure of any church or nonprofit organization that becomes vaguely "involved in politics". Crucially, it dictates that if a church leader is convicted of any crime, the entire religious body can be permanently shut down and its properties confiscated by the state. Under this highly politicized climate, prominent leaders like Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#) face intense judicial jeopardy, with other elderly religious figures already being detained long-term and sentenced for non-violent electoral infractions.

The Global Stakes and the Need for Vigilance

The presenters emphasized that the suppression of the [Family Federation](#) is not an isolated incident, but a blueprint for global authoritarian encroachment. Former U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback, explained that

authoritarian regimes systematically target religious groups because people of faith answer to a higher moral authority than the state - a reality that totalitarian regimes find intolerable.

When democratic nations like Japan and South Korea adopt these repressive legal frameworks, they provide a dangerous validation for authoritarianism worldwide. For instance, countries like Rwanda have already cited Japan's restrictive religious policies as a justification for shutting down thousands of local churches. The conference concluded with a stark reminder: the protection of the soul's right to freedom requires eternal vigilance, and the weaponization of the law against the [Family Federation](#) threatens the

foundational liberties of all spiritual communities globally.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

[Editor's note 1: "Brainwashing" was a popular term that emerged during the early Cold War to explain why some prisoners of war and political detainees appeared to adopt beliefs favored by their captors. The idea suggested that powerful psychological techniques could erase a person's existing beliefs and replace them with new ones against their will, almost like reprogramming a machine.

Over time, however, the concept was largely discarded by mainstream psychology and cognitive science as a scientific explanation of persuasion or belief change. Researchers found little evidence for such a process, that any special, unique process existed that could fundamentally override human autonomy and completely remake a person's personality or convictions.

Studies in psychology, sociology, and psychiatry showed that belief change is usually gradual, variable, and dependent on many factors: social pressure, isolation, coercion, rewards, threats, conformity, identity, and existing motivations. People can certainly be influenced, manipulated, indoctrinated, or coerced, but there is no scientifically demonstrated mechanism that allows a person's mind to be completely overwritten in the dramatic way implied by "brainwashing".

The concept came under especially heavy criticism in the 1970s - 1990s during debates about new religious movements - by anti-religious activists and others often called "cults". Some experts testified that members had been brainwashed, while other scholars argued that the theory lacked clear definitions, reliable measurements, falsifiable predictions, and strong empirical support. Courts increasingly viewed brainwashing testimony skeptically because it often could not meet scientific standards of evidence.

A major problem was that "brainwashing" lacked a clear, measurable definition. Different writers used it to describe very different phenomena, from prisoner interrogation to religious conversion to participation in controversial groups. Because it could not be reliably operationalized or tested, it failed to meet basic scientific standards. Studies of prisoners of war and members of new religious movements showed that apparent ideological conversions were often temporary, strategic, situational, or reversible rather than evidence of a mysterious mind-control process.

By the 1970s and 1980s, many psychologists, sociologists, and legal scholars concluded that brainwashing functioned more as a cultural and political metaphor than as a validated scientific theory. Courts also became increasingly skeptical of expert testimony claiming that members of new religious movements had been "brainwashed". Today, scholars generally prefer more specific concepts - such as persuasion, coercive control, social influence, indoctrination, obedience, and group dynamics - rather than assuming the existence of a mysterious power that can completely rewrite a person's beliefs.]

[Editor's note 2: In Japan, the "mind-control" myth has been a powerful tool used to stigmatize and suppress new religious movements (NRMs), particularly since the 1980s. The concept suggests that NRMs manipulate or "brainwash" their followers, depriving them of free will and rational thought. This narrative gained traction after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, when public fear of dangerous cults intensified. Although Aum was an extreme and violent exception, the incident cast suspicion on all NRMs, allowing critics, media, and the government to label diverse groups as manipulative or psychologically coercive.

The "mind-control" myth serves multiple social and political functions. It simplifies complex questions of belief, making it easier to portray converts as victims rather than as individuals exercising spiritual agency. This framing justifies legal and social intervention, including the coercive "[deprogramming](#)" of believers - sometimes involving confinement or psychological pressure to force renunciation of faith. Lawyers, ex-member groups, and certain media outlets have used the idea of mind control to construct NRMs as threats to family stability and national order, reinforcing social conformity and Japan's preference for established, non-controversial religions such as Buddhism and Shinto.

In recent years, the myth resurfaced following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose attacker cited resentment toward the [Unification Church](#). Public outrage reignited scrutiny of NRMs, and politicians and journalists revived "mind-control" rhetoric to explain the [Church](#)'s fundraising and recruitment practices. Critics argue that this framing discourages genuine religious tolerance and critical examination of Japan's restrictive religious climate. Overall, the "mind-control" myth functions less as a scientific or psychological concept and more as a moral panic - a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority faiths and to reaffirm mainstream social norms about religion, obedience, and the boundaries of acceptable belief.]

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Longer Medical Leave Before 1st Appeal Hearing

September 30, 2026 • The News Desk



Medical leave extended for
Mother Han as the Seoul High
Court prepares to hear her appeal
and bail request on 13th October

South Korean media outlets reported on 29th September 2026, that the *Seoul High Court* has extended the [suspension of detention](#) for [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) – also called [Mother Han](#) – leader of the [Family](#)

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[Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), allowing her to remain outside detention while [her appeal](#) against a [two-year prison sentence](#) proceeds. The decision was reported by the news agencies [Newspim](#), [Newsis](#) and [News1](#), with the outlets providing somewhat different details about the conditions and background of the extension.

[Newspim](#) reported in the late afternoon that the [Seoul High Court's Criminal Division 13](#), presided over by Judge Kim Moo-shin (김무신), had accepted [Mother Han's](#) application to extend the [suspension of detention](#).

The extension means that the suspension will remain in effect until 20th October, rather than expiring on 30th September as previously scheduled. [Newspim](#) noted that Mother Han has been outside detention since [late March](#), when the court initially [suspended her detention](#) because of her deteriorating health. Several subsequent extensions have allowed her to remain in hospital while participating in the proceedings.

As many South Korean media outlets generally do, [Newspim](#) only reported on the prosecution's allegations, devoting no space to the defense attorneys' counterclaims. According to the [news agency](#), [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) was convicted in the first trial on 31st August and sentenced to a total of [two years in prison](#).



Former chief secretary **Jeong Won-ju** (정원주), here on 19th Jan. 2025. Screenshot from [FFWPU](#) video, improved resolution by ChatGPT, 31st July 2026.

The [outlet](#) summarized the prosecution's allegations that [Mother Han](#) (83), together with former chief secretary Jeong Won-ju (정원주) and former [World Mission Headquarters](#) director Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호), provided 100 million won in cash to then-[People Power Party](#) lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동) in January 2022 and arranged so-called "split donations" totaling 144 million won (in 2022, ca \$111,000 USD) to ruling-party lawmakers in March and April of that year. The [news agency](#) also reported the allegation that she and

Yoon provided gifts worth approximately 80 million won (in 2022, ca \$62,000 USD), including a Graff diamond necklace, to former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희) in July 2022.

[Newspim](#) didn't mention at all that [Mother Han's](#) defense consistently has maintained that the alleged political donations and contacts were the result of individual actions taken by subordinates, entirely without the octogenarian religious leader's authorization or knowledge. Her defense team has argued that she been unfairly targeted for missteps committed by others simply because of her position as the head of the [Family Federation](#).

[Newsis](#), reporting shortly before [Newspim](#), likewise said that [Mother Han](#) would remain temporarily released during the [appeal](#). The large [news agency](#) specified that the [suspension](#), which had been due to expire

at 6 p.m. on 30th September, has now been extended until **3 p.m. on 20th October**. [Newsis](#) emphasized that the defense had cited difficulties with detention because of [Mother Han's shoulder fracture and surgery as well as problems with her eyesight](#).

[Newsis](#) also provided additional information about the first-instance



Logo of [Newspim](#) (뉴스핌), a prominent South Korean economic and financial news agency and multimedia company based in Seoul.



The logo of [Newsis](#) (뉴스시스), the largest privately owned news agency in South Korea

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proceedings. It reported that Jeong Won-ju (정원주) received two eight-month sentences, both suspended for two years.

Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호) received six months in prison and his wife, former [Family Federation](#) finance director Lee Shin-hye (이신혜), received six months suspended for one year. According to [Newsis](#), [Mother Han](#)'s defense has maintained that contacts with politicians and the provision of valuables were the result of Yoon's individual actions rather than decisions by [Mother Han](#). The [outlet](#) quoted her final statement in which she apologized for causing controversy but said that she had devoted her life to world peace and had never sought political power through money.



Yoon Yeong-ho, former director general of the international headquarters of the [Family Federation](#), here 11th February 2022. Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#)

[Newsis](#) additionally noted that [Mother Han](#) faces **separate proceedings** concerning allegations of involvement in encouraging [Family Federation](#) members to join the [People Power Party](#) collectively. The [news agency](#) also reported that a joint investigation team has brought a **further indictment** alleging that approximately 10.5 billion won in organizational funds were embezzled together with Jeong Won-ju and Yoon Yeong-ho.



Logo of [News1](#) (뉴스1), South Korea's largest private news agency and wire service.

[News1](#) similarly reported that the [Seoul High Court Criminal Division 13](#) had accepted the application for another **extension**. It highlighted that [Mother Han](#), now 83, must remain at the hospital where she is receiving treatment and is prohibited from direct or indirect contact or communication with

people connected to the case during the period of **suspended detention**.

[News1](#) described the **suspension of detention** as a legal mechanism permitting temporary release when a defendant faces serious circumstances such as severe illness, childbirth or a family funeral. The large [news agency](#) recalled that [Mother Han](#) had been formally **indicted** and **detained** in October 2025, before receiving the **initial suspension** in March 2026 because of her deteriorating health.

All three outlets reported that the **first hearing of the appeal is scheduled for 13th October at 2 p.m.** before the [Seoul High Court](#). The same hearing will include consideration of [Mother Han](#)'s **bail application**, submitted on 23rd September. Both her defense and the team of Special Prosecutor Min Joong-gi (민중기) have appealed the 31st August **first-instance judgment**, meaning that the **two-year sentence** remains subject to appellate review.

Text: [Knut Holdhus](#), editor

Featured image above: Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#), aka. Mother Han, being wheeled into the courtroom by her grandson Moon Shin-chul at [Seoul Central District Court](#) 31st August 2026. Photo: Dr. Michael Balcomb, resolution improved by ChatGPT, 6th September 2026

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