FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Tears After 13 Months of Prayer

Knut Holdhus
October 20, 2026



Young members of the Family Federation at a prayer vigil outside Seoul Detention Center in October 2025

세계일보

Segye Ilbo, one of the top 10 comprehensive daily newspapers in South Korea


Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (2025): Segye Ilbo

Tears reflect a year of prayer, interfaith solidarity, and hope for justice for Mother Han

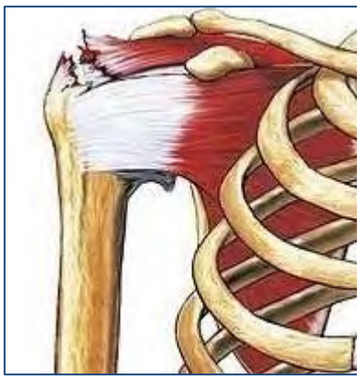
In a commentary published in the South Korean daily Segye Ilbo on 20th October 2026, religion correspondent Jeong Seong-su (정성수) reflects on the emotional response among Family Federation members to Hak Ja Han's release on bail, highlighting interfaith solidarity, her decades of international peace initiatives, and the hopes of followers who continue to pray for her recovery and a fair trial.

The decision to grant bail to Hak Ja Han (한학자) - also called Mother Han - head of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), prompted an emotional response among many of her followers, according to Jeong. In his opinion piece, he looks beyond the legal implications of the Seoul High Court's ruling to consider what the decision means to believers who have spent more than a year praying for their elderly leader's health and awaiting developments in her case.

Entitled "Mother Han Granted Bail: Tears of Those Who Sustained Her Through Prayer", the commentary does not dispute that the legal proceedings remain unresolved. Rather, Jeong focuses on the human and religious dimensions of the decision, describing the relief experienced by followers while acknowledging their disappointment that strict restrictions will prevent them from freely meeting Mother Han (83). He also places the present situation within the context of her longstanding efforts to promote peace across religious, national, and ideological divisions.

More than a year of prayer and waiting

J eong begins by emphasizing that the bail decision, announced on 19th October, was not an acquittal. Mother Han's appeal against her two-year prison sentence will continue, and the question of her alleged involvement in unlawful acitivities remains before the courts. Nevertheless, the possibility of continuing medical treatment outside detention brought considerable relief to those who had been anxiously following her situation.



One of several reasons for being in need of medical treatment: 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

More than a year had passed since Mother Han was taken into pretrial detention in September 2025. Although the enforcement of her detention had been suspended on health grounds, enabling her to receive hospital treatment, uncertainty about her condition and the outcome of the proceedings had continued to weigh heavily on her followers.

Jeong notes that the Seoul High Court's 13th Criminal Division granted bail after considering Mother Han's health, the progress of the case, and the extent to which evidence had been collected. The court required a cash deposit of 200 million won, restricted her residence to the hospital where she is receiving treatment, and prohibited contact with almost everyone except a narrowly defined group, including medical personnel, lawyers, and caregivers.

These restrictions mean that the decision does not allow Mother Han to resume her ordinary activities. Jeong acknowledges the disappointment among followers who had hoped to visit her and embrace her after such a prolonged period of uncertainty.

An unexpected expression of interfaith solidarity

One of the most striking details in Jeong's commentary concerns a Catholic peace ambassador who had been praying for Mother Han.



South Korean religious leaders at the prayer rally in support of Mother Han 13th October 2025 outside Seoul Detention Center

According to an associate quoted by Jeong, the ambassador telephoned after hearing the news of the bail decision. She explained that she had been praying for Mother Han every morning at dawn in a Catholic church and that the announcement had moved her to tears.

For Jeong, this account illustrates how concern for Mother Han's health has extended beyond the boundaries of the Family Federation itself. The participation of someone from a different religious tradition suggests that the emotions surrounding the case cannot be understood solely in terms of the organization's own membership.

He also describes how followers continued their prayers in different circumstances. Some waited outside the detention center, while others offered their support from distant countries. The strict conditions attached to bail, however, have prevented some from realizing their hope of meeting Mother Han personally.

Jeong interprets these reactions as the expression of a community that has endured a long period of anxiety and now hopes for further relief. He acknowledges that some believers may regard the court's decision as an answer to their prayers, while distinguishing this religious interpretation from the court's legal reasoning.

A record of international peace initiatives

The commentary then broadens its perspective, connecting the emotional response to Mother Han's release with her record of international peace activities.



Mother Han speaking in Dakar, Senegal Jan. 18, 2018

Jeong argues that bringing together people separated by religion, nationality, and ideology requires sustained effort and dedication. He points to Mother Han's travels around the world to promote cooperation and dialogue.

In 2018, she delivered a keynote address at the Africa Summit in Dakar, Senegal. She also helped lead efforts to organize the Asia-Pacific Summit in Kathmandu, Nepal, where peace and cooperation were central themes.

Jeong further recalls two notable encounters involving Mother Han and her husband, Sun Myung Moon (문선명 - 1920-2012). In 1990, the couple met Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow. The following year, they visited North Korea and held talks with its leader, Kim Il-sung (김일성 - 1912-1994).

Jeong highlights the ideological significance of these encounters: although the movement opposed communism, its leaders nevertheless sought direct engagement with leaders of communist states. In his account, these meetings exemplified an effort to pursue dialogue across deep political divisions.

He also cites the establishment of the Women's Federation for World Peace and the Interreligious Federation for World Peace as institutional foundations for initiatives emphasizing women's participation and cooperation among different faiths.

Nobel Peace Prize nomination and the importance of a fair trial



Jan Figel, European Union's Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief 2016-2019, here in July 2023.

Jeong adds that Hak Ja Han (한학자) was nominated for consideration for the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize, although she did not receive the award. In April, media outlets reported that Ján Figeľ, the former European Union Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief, had nominated her. The reported grounds included interreligious dialogue, peace on the Korean Peninsula, and humanitarian cooperation.

The final part of the commentary returns to the legal proceedings. Jeong argues that the questions raised by Mother Han's defense, including the admissibility of testimony and opportunities for cross-examination, should be examined thoroughly during the appeal. He expresses the hope that the court will scrutinize both the allegations and the evidence carefully.

He also cautions the media against allowing criticism of specific allegations to become a negative portrayal of Mother Han's entire life or of the religious convictions of her followers. In his view, determining legal responsibility should not mean abandoning respect for human dignity.

Concluding with a reference to the Analects (논어), an ancient Chinese text collecting the sayings, teachings, and discussions of the philosopher Confucius (공자) and his disciples, Jeong recalls the observation that the enduring greenness of pine and cypress becomes apparent only when winter arrives. He hopes that Mother Han's lifelong commitment to peace will likewise remain steadfast through adversity.

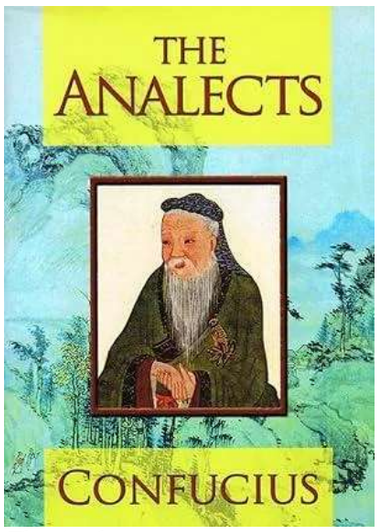
For Jeong, the tears shed by followers on 19th October embodied more than immediate relief. They represented a year of prayer, uncertainty, and perseverance. The bail decision has not settled the legal questions surrounding Mother Han, but it has allowed her supporters to turn their attention toward her recovery while continuing to hope for a fair judicial outcome.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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A Lost Lawsuit, But A Fight Worth Having

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Shinichi Tokunaga Tatsuki Nakayama

Despite a lost lawsuit, plaintiff hopes for a freer society for all faiths as personal cost of publicly exposing religious beliefs is highlighted

Tokyo, 10th October 2026 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper Sekai Nippo. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese.

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"There Is Value in Having Fought to the End"

Plaintiff and Lawyers Report on Lawsuit Against Eito Suzuki Over Disclosure of Religious Faith

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by the editorial department of Sekai Nippo

The *Tokyo District Court* on 8th October dismissed the claims of a male member of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (FFWPU, formerly the Unification Church), who had sued journalist Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト) for invasion of privacy and defamation.

Following the ruling, the plaintiff and his attorneys held a press briefing in Tokyo. The following is a summary of their remarks.

Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama: "A Disappointing Judgment That Fails to Recognize Damage to the Plaintiff's Social Standing"

In cases involving privacy such as this one, the court must make an overall assessment by weighing the plaintiff's right to privacy against the defendant's freedom of expression and the public interest served by the disclosure. In legal terminology, this is known as a "balancing of competing interests". There were several weaknesses in our case.

First, before the shooting incident involving former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), the plaintiff had listed his real name and his employment as a religious organization staff member on his LinkedIn profile, intending to connect with other religious professionals. (This information has since been deleted.)



From a demonstration 29th May 2016 in Shibuya, Tokyo held by UNITE, a student organization primarily of Family Federation second-generation believers in Japan. Photo UNITE

He had also posted photographs of himself and his family on a blog, identifying himself anonymously as "an administrative staff member of the Unification Church". Furthermore, when he participated in a street speech organized by UNITE, an organization of second-generation believers, in June 2016, he introduced himself by name to Suzuki, who approached him. In December 2023, although he did not disclose his name, he appeared in public and delivered a street speech as a member of the *International Federation for Victory over Communism*.

Based on these circumstances, the court concluded that the plaintiff had been prepared, to some extent, for his religious affiliation to become public knowledge. It therefore ruled that Suzuki's actions did not constitute a tort.

Suzuki had described the plaintiff as someone involved in a disguised volunteer organization. In addition to alleging an invasion of privacy, we added a defamation claim partway through the proceedings.

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However, I was surprised that the judgment concluded that merely stating that the plaintiff was affiliated with a particular religious organization, and that he had not disclosed the nature of that relationship, did not diminish his social standing.

The circumstances in which these statements were made were crucial. At the time, the Family Federation was facing its most intense public criticism following the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe. It was in this climate that the plaintiff's connection to the Unification Church was exposed. We brought the case on the grounds that disclosing this information under such circumstances constituted an invasion of privacy and defamation. It is disappointing that the court nevertheless concluded that there was no evidence that his social standing had been diminished.

Suzuki uploaded several photographs of the plaintiff. The judgment stated that the plaintiff had not refused to be photographed. However, during the two years of litigation, whether the plaintiff had actually consented to being photographed was never a point of contention. Many of the photographs were taken at an angle. If they had been taken covertly, the plaintiff might not even have realized that he was being photographed, let alone consented to it.

Attorney Shinichi Tokunaga: "Human Rights Are Won by Those Who Fight for Them"

This case concerned how to draw the line between the right to privacy and freedom of expression when the two come into conflict.

It is true that the plaintiff had disclosed some private information on social media, but this was before the incident involving former Prime Minister Abe. At that time, the social climate surrounding the Unification Church had not yet created the circumstances in which people would feel compelled to be extremely cautious and conceal their religious affiliation. These earlier disclosures should not be regarded as an abandonment of his right to privacy.

Regarding the plaintiff's volunteer activities, Suzuki disseminated information in a manner that portrayed them as if they were somehow sinister. This arguably went beyond the scope of what should be protected as freedom of expression. Nevertheless, the court ultimately prioritized the public interest cited by Suzuki and ruled that his actions did not constitute a tort.



***Militantly campaigning against the** Family Federation: Activist journalist Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka. Photo: Mikkabie / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped*

As for the defense's reliance on freedom of expression, there is no doubt that public interest in the Family Federation increased significantly after Abe's assassination. That interest was stimulated by rumors, including misinformation, and by mass-media coverage. The *Japanese Communist Party* and others were also conducting campaigns claiming that the Family Federation was responsible for corrupting Japanese politics. Investigating such matters and disclosing relevant facts can, in principle, serve the public interest.

One reason it is difficult for plaintiffs to win lawsuits involving the Family Federation is that, in the prevailing social climate, disclosing someone's affiliation with the organization tends to be regarded almost automatically as serving the public interest.

Nevertheless, regardless of the outcome of this case, it remains necessary for people to speak out and challenge what they believe to be unacceptable, guided by their own conscience.

At least for the time being, however, believers engaging in social activities may have little choice but to act with the determination to assert publicly that they have the same rights as anyone else.

To fight openly, believers are placed in the difficult position of having to take the risk that their religious affiliation will be exposed. But human rights are won by those who fight for them. We cannot expect society to show consideration simply because we do nothing.

In its ruling on the dissolution order against the Family Federation, the *Tokyo High Court* stated that there was no alternative to depriving the religious organization of its legal corporate status. At the same time, it indicated that human rights violations, including the deprivation of believers' freedom of religion, must not be tolerated.

Although these statements by the Tokyo High Court may appear contradictory at first glance, they can also be interpreted as acknowledging that the faith of Family Federation members is genuine, rather than some kind of sham or fraud. That is something we should remember.

The Plaintiff: "I Could Not Bear to See My Children Suffer"

When I was involved in volunteer activities, I once received an email from a parent after local children had participated in a neighborhood litter-picking activity. The parent wrote:



Plaintiff A, a Family Federation member who sued Eito Suzuki for violating his privacy, in Tokyo, September 2024. Photo: Sekai Nippo

> "My children have started picking up rubbish they see on the streets. Thank you so much."

That experience reinforced my belief that my activities were not in vain and that they served a meaningful purpose. I was never concealing my identity through what has been called "disguised volunteering". I participated because I wanted to contribute to and show love for my community, and because I wanted to provide a good example and a positive education for my own children.

Then everything changed. An impression was created that holding a particular religious faith was itself something evil. For a time, even my children found themselves unable to appear in public.

I could accept being blamed myself, but watching my children and the people I had worked with in volunteer activities suffer was unbearable and deeply painful. I even wondered whether it would have been better never to have participated in volunteer work at all.

But if things remain as they are, will future second- and third-generation members of the Family Federation come to believe that they should simply keep quiet and avoid speaking out? I do not want a world in which people are made to feel miserable or ashamed of their religious faith.

That is why I believe there was value in fighting this case through to the end, regardless of the judgment.

I hope Japan will become a freer country for people of every faith. Even while the Family Federation is being treated as an "antisocial force", I want to continue fighting.

I hope this lawsuit will serve as a signal to those who feel constrained and marginalized because of their religious beliefs – a starting point for building a society in which they can openly express their faith and share their joy without fear.

Featured image *above: Attorneys Shinichi Tokunaga and Tatsuki Nakayama at press conference in Tokyo on 8th October 2026. Photo: Sekai Nippo*

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