

FFWPU USA: Assault on religious liberty - Christian leaders detained without conviction in So. Korea

Demian Dunkley
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The Newsletter

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Hello family. *The Washington Times* article on True Mother's imprisonment and religious freedom under threat in South Korea.

News

Christian leaders detained without conviction in South Korea



Photo credit: HSA-UWC

By Andrew Salmon - The Washington Times - Wednesday, October 22, 2025

SEOUL, South Korea — For more than 30 days and counting, 82-year-old Hak Ja Han Moon has been confined in a 70-square-foot cell at Seoul Detention Center, where the religious leader’s attorneys say she has endured multiple interrogations lasting 10 to 12 hours.

Nearly blind and suffering from a heart condition, the co-founder and spiritual head of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification is allowed only five visitors for a total of 10 minutes a day. Her trial on bribery charges is scheduled to begin Tuesday but could be delayed. If that happens, she could be held for up to six months because prosecutors refused to allow her home confinement for fear she could taint evidence.

About 200 miles away in the Busan Detention Center, Rev. Son Hyun-bo, 62, founder and head pastor of Segeroh Presbyterian Church, has been detained for nearly 50 days.

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Christian leaders detained without conviction in South Korea



Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, who founded The Washington Times alongside her husband, the late Rev. Sun Myung, delivered the keynote address at the Global Rally for the Reunification of Korea at Seoul's World Cup Stadium. (PHOTO CREDIT: HSA-UWC) (sponsored) [more >](#)



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About 200 miles away in the Busan Detention Center, Rev. **Son Hyun-bo**, 62, founder and head pastor of Segeroh Presbyterian Church, has been detained for nearly 50 days.

A former special forces soldier, Rev. Son is in fair health but is suffering from mold in his cell, said his son, Chance.

"He is someone who does not express his weakness," said Mr. Son. "Every time I ask him, 'Are you OK?' he says, 'Why ask? God has got

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my back.”

The imprisonment of two religious leaders and the raids, investigations and questioning on political matters of other conservative pastors in [South Korea](#) have religious freedom advocates and international officials warning that President Lee Jae-myung’s left-leaning government may be weaponizing the justice system against political opponents.

Their concerns have amplified after the apparent suicide of an official under investigation by the same officials responsible for interrogating Mrs. Moon.

“The lawfare being directed at religious leader Dr. Hak Ja Han in [South Korea](#) is deeply troubling,” former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on X last month. “The intensifying assaults on religious liberty are a betrayal of the democratic principles that [South Korea](#) is meant to espouse.”

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‘It is a purge’

In politically polarized [South Korea](#), widespread legal offensives were unleashed in the aftermath of a fraught power transfer from conservative President [Yoon Suk Yeol](#) to liberal Mr. Lee. Mr. Lee won the presidency in June after Mr. [Yoon’s](#) impeachment for declaring martial law in December.

Special counsel investigators say Mrs. Moon ordered the bribery of Mr. [Yoon’s](#) wife, Kim Keon-hee, and placed her organization’s support behind a conservative lawmaker, Kweon Seong-dong, who is also in detention.

Investigators say Mrs. Moon aimed to receive political favors, including official assistance for a Cambodian development project and the acquisition of a Korean cable TV channel, neither of which transpired.

The federation maintains that Mrs. Moon had no knowledge of the alleged bribery and blames a rogue executive, subsequently fired, named “[Yoon](#).” He, too, is in detention.

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Mrs. Moon has been detained and indicted on charges of

embezzlement, bribery, illegal political donations, and destruction of evidence. The federation, formerly known as the Unification Church, owns multiple businesses, including The Washington Times.

Jan Figel, president of the nongovernmental organization Forum for Religious Freedom Europe, accused Mr. Lee’s government of taking political vengeance against supporters of its political opponents.

“This is not anti-corruption. It is a purge,” Mr. Figel wrote.

Rev. Son was indicted on charges of violating the Public Official Election Act. The pastor, a vocal conservative, supported Mr. Yoon and criticized Mr. Lee at rallies and from his pulpit. During a rally before his impending arrest, Rev. Son called Mr. Lee “the same as Hitler and the Nazis” and shouted, “Lee Jae-myung has to die for Korea to live.”

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Mr. Lee was the victim of an assassination attempt in January 2024, when he was stabbed in the neck while visiting a construction site in Busan. The inflammatory rhetoric by Rev. Son has become a slogan used by some conservative groups rather than a literal call for assassination. It was nonetheless inflammatory given the recent history of political violence in South Korea and contributed to the controversial nature of the religious leader’s arrest.

Jang Dong-hyuk, the newly elected leader of South Korea’s conservative People Power Party, sharply criticized prosecutors’ raids on churches and called Mr. Lee’s government a “pro-China dictatorship.”

President Trump questioned whether Mr. Lee was conducting a political “purge” when Mr. Lee defended the church raids at a White House summit in August. Mr. Lee shrugged off the question and told administration officials that the prosecutors were acting independently.

The special counsel team investigating Ms. Kim, and collaterally, Mr. Yoon, is under pressure after the apparent suicide of a 57-year-old local government official on Oct. 10. He had been interrogated over suspicions he enabled unfair property transactions for Ms. Kim’s family.

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the opposition has demanded the release of CCTV interrogation footage. That has not been granted, but an investigator [told local media](#) that the special counsel will “thoroughly review the investigation status and methods of all ongoing cases ... to ensure there is no negligence in protecting the human rights of those involved.”

However, unlike regular prosecutors, the special counsel lacks a human rights oversight affiliate. That has [drawn criticism](#) from unidentified prosecutors who have spoken to conservative media.

Discussing the methodologies of the special counsel, Ms. Kim’s attorney Choi Ji-woo [told](#) the press, “The South Korean judicial system has become dysfunctional, gripped by madness.”

Yet in [South Korea](#), home to a powerful shame culture, suicides of people under investigation are hardly unusual.

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In 2023, actor [Lee Sun-kyun](#), known for the Oscar-winning movie “Parasite,” killed himself after undergoing interrogations, one reportedly lasting 19 hours, on a drug rap.

In 2009, former President Roh Moo-hyun committed suicide amid investigations into the alleged corruption of his family members.

Other religious leaders targeted

Rev. Son and Mrs. Moon are not alone in their judicial tribulations. Other pastors have faced raids, investigations and questioning on political matters.

Most notable is Protestant Rev. Jeon Kwang-heon, a fiery conservative who peppers his sermons with obscenities and whose followers massed in the streets in opposition to liberal President Moon Jae-in and against the current president, Mr. [Lee](#).

His home was “ransacked” by prosecutors, said an associate, and he is forbidden from leaving [South Korea](#) pending investigations into allegations that he instigated a court invasion.

“Korean prosecutors have much more power to detain prior to indictments and trials because the English Common Law concept of habeas corpus is different,” said Brendon Carr, a U.S. lawyer with [Seoul](#)-based firm HHC Employment & Labor Law. “[Korean prosecutors] have up to 20 days to hold someone for investigation without charge, and once indicted, it is almost indefinite — though people in detention have a fast track to trial.”

[South Korea’s](#) 99%-plus conviction rates bode ill for Mr. Son and Mrs. Moon.

“In Korea, the game’s over once an indictment has occurred: There will be a conviction,” said Mr. Carr, who has 28 years of experience in Korean law. “The question becomes: What’s the punishment? There is no plea bargaining in Korea.”

Mr. [Son](#) said he hopes his father’s sentence will be a fine, not a jail term.

The detained religious leaders have been swept up in a characteristically Korean process.

Since democratization in 1987, it has become customary for the incoming administration to unleash investigations into prior governments when the political pendulum swings.

In addition to Roh’s suicide, five former presidents and multiple political allies and family members have been imprisoned.

With the justice minister and chief prosecutor as presidential appointees, the prosecution is a useful battle ax for the Blue House.

“Korean prosecutors are desperately politicized, [and] Korean law criminalizes offenses that would be seen as civil in English Common Law countries like the U.S.,” Mr. Carr said. “So, prosecutors have a starring role in every controversy.”

In the “Court of Public Opinion,” the investigation of the former first lady is pushing on an open door. Ms. Kim, the recipient of heavy cosmetic surgery, was hugely unpopular because of her perceived corruption, weakness for luxury goods and regal airs.

The legal net has been cast far below the level of Mr. [Yoon](#) and Ms. Kim. Even the press secretary of a former official has undergone interrogation, The Washington Times has learned.

The cycle likely will repeat.

“Prosecutors, whether prodded by the administration or their own eagerness, have judicial power to selectively prosecute,” said Michael Breen, author of “The New Koreans.” “In that context, it is all politics, and I bet you, five years from now, the same will happen to President [Lee](#).”

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