

FFWPU USA: Faith under fire in Korea: How fear became policy

Demian Dunkley
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An elderly woman of faith faces harsh detention and opaque prosecution -- and the world is taking note

By Rev. Demian Dunkley - Thursday, October 23, 2025

Fear is not justice. It is the oldest weapon of injustice. Today it is freezing consciences, silencing good people, and threatening to turn a nation of promise into a nation of whispers.

The same spirit that once built Korea's democracy is now being tested. Fear has entered courtrooms and homes, persuading citizens that silence is safety. But silence is never safe when truth is on trial.

On October 10, Dr. Hak Ja Han, respected worldwide as the Mother of Peace, was formally indicted by Korean prosecutors after months of investigation that began with massive July 18 raids involving nearly a thousand officers. At eighty-two, she now faces months of confinement before trial, without conviction and without bail. Under Korea's system, indictment alone can mean prolonged detention, and with a conviction rate reported between 95 and 97 percent, acquittal is almost impossible. Legal scholars warn that such numbers signal not perfection but pressure—a system that prizes victories more than fairness.

She is confined in a women's solitary cell of about 70 square feet, with poor ventilation and little natural light. There is no bed or chair; she sleeps on folded blankets on the floor. The air is

damp and circulation weak. She washes and dries her clothes inside the cell, adding to the humidity. Because of impaired eyesight and limited space, she can move only a few steps at a time, often resorting to crawling around on her hands and knees. The food is unsuitable for her medical restrictions, so she survives mainly on liquid nutrition and milk.

Medical records show long-standing heart failure, atrial fibrillation, diabetes, thyroid disease, and hypertension. During stress her blood pressure has reached 250. Cardiologists at Hallym University Hospital recently prescribed stronger medication and absolute rest after confirming a recurrence of atrial fibrillation at the same site as a previous cardiac procedure. She requires regular treatment, but access to outside hospitals is limited and internal medical checks are basic.

Prosecutors allege that she directed gifts to a former First Lady, made improper political donations, and misused funds related to land development. They claim the case concerns influence and transparency. Yet the alleged gifts were minor in value, and prosecutors have produced no evidence that she personally ordered them. Earlier claims that 110,000 Family Federation members were enrolled in a political party have been revised down to about 3,500. Investigators have also demanded donor and membership lists from church offices, prompting concern that a financial probe is being used to map a faith community rather than to prove criminal intent.

That system has already claimed a life. Days after a thirteen-hour interrogation by the same special prosecutor's team that is holding Dr. Hak Ja Han, a civil servant named Jeong Hee-cheol, reportedly humiliated during questioning, took his own life. In a note he wrote, "I want to turn my back on the world." His lawyer has called for the release of the full interrogation record, which remains undisclosed. The tragedy, first detailed in Bitter Winter's report "A Death Foretold," should alarm anyone who cares about due process.

As sociologist Massimo Introvigne wrote in Bitter Winter, "The goal is not truth; it is submission." His words describe a reality now exposed: interrogation as psychological warfare, justice replaced by spectacle.

The world is beginning to take notice. Former Speaker Newt Gingrich, writing in The Washington Times, called the raids and detentions "a shocking assault on religious leaders, involving over a thousand officers storming homes and places of worship." He warned that South Korea risks becoming a democracy in name only if fear replaces fairness.

Conservative commentator Charlie Kirk, days before his death, told a crowd in Seoul, "There are some terrible things happening in South Korea right now." President Donald Trump likewise asked, "What is going on in South Korea? Seems like a purge or revolution."

I have walked among our members and heard their quiet prayers for this elderly woman of peace. Their grief is deep, but their faith remains unshaken.

Dr. Hak Ja Han is not a politician. She is a faith leader, a mother, and a widow who has spent her life promoting peace, family, and interreligious cooperation. She has spoken at the United Nations, led humanitarian missions, and prayed for reconciliation between North and South Korea. To treat such a woman as a criminal is unjust. It also betrays Korea's best democratic instincts.

When faith leaders are handcuffed, when elderly women of peace are paraded before cameras, when investigations look more like theater than truth, fear wants to do what it always does: make people small.

Fear recasts prayer as provocation, love as threat, and unity as conspiracy. But fear also reveals something about those who wield it: a lack of confidence in truth.

If the case is strong, why the spectacle?

If justice is fair, why the intimidation?

If the system is righteous, why the obsession with optics over evidence?

Across Asia, faith itself is under pressure. As Fox News Digital reported, Pastor Ezra Jin of Beijing's Zion Church was detained with dozens of ministers in what advocates called the harshest religious sweep in forty years. The World Tribune described the crackdown as part of a "spiritual war," concluding that "faith without fear undermines the authority and power of the state." The same lesson echoes across borders: systems built on fear will always fear faith, because faith cannot be coerced.

A man is dead. An old woman sits in prison. And a nation's conscience is on trial.

Faith is not a crime, but weaponizing fear is. Now is the time for every voice of conscience to speak—before fear becomes policy.

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Rev. Demian Dunkley is President of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification USA. [more >](#)



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COMMENTARY

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