

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: S Korea Temporarily Frees Holly Mother Han

Knut Holdhus
September 2, 2026



Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#), aka. Mother Han, being wheeled into the courtroom by her grandson Moon Shin-chul at Seoul Central District Court August 31. 2026



Logo of MBC News, the news division of the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), one of South Korea's four major nationwide television and radio networks

Two-year sentence, no immediate detention for Mother Han as Seoul court grants another month-long suspension due to failing health for the frail 83-year-old

The large South Korean media outlet [MBC News](#) reported on 1st September that the suspension of detention for [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) - also called [Mother Han](#) - has been prolonged by Seoul Central District Court until 30th September.

See also [Responsibility Must Be Proven in Appeal Court](#)



Frail [Mother Han](#) (83) in poor health has already been held for more than six months in such a cell at Seoul Detention Center. Will she survive two more years under similar conditions? Image: Chat GPT

This happened the day after she was sentenced to [two years in prison](#) at the first trial in the case concerning alleged "collusion between religion and politics". The decision means that, despite receiving a custodial sentence, the 83-year-old religious leader will not be taken into custody for the time being. The latest extension keeps her out of detention until 6 p.m. on 30th September 2026.

The development is important because a prison sentence and immediate imprisonment are not necessarily the same thing while a criminal case is still subject to appeal. [Mother Han's](#)

legal team has indicated that the first-instance verdict will be challenged. Thus, the 31st August judgment is not yet the final outcome of the criminal proceedings.

What does "suspension of detention" mean?

The Korean legal term 구속집행정지 literally means a suspension of the execution of detention. It is different from an acquittal, a pardon, or a cancellation of the underlying criminal case. Rather, it allows a person who is formally subject to detention to remain temporarily outside prison or a detention facility because of exceptional circumstances.

Such circumstances can include serious illness, medical treatment, childbirth or a close family member's funeral. In [Mother Han](#)'s case, the court has repeatedly granted extensions on health grounds. She was originally detained about two weeks before being indicted in October 2025.

The court first approved short releases in [November 2025](#) (3 days), [February 2026](#) (10 days), and [March 2026](#) (34 days). Since [late April](#), instead of issuing new releases, the court has simply extended her current release every month. This latest ruling is her fifth consecutive monthly extension.



뉴스핌

Newspim, a prominent South Korean economic and financial news agency and multimedia company based in Seoul

This distinction is particularly important in understanding what happened on 31st August. [Mother Han](#) was given a [two-year prison sentence](#), but her existing suspension of detention was still in force. Consequently, the court did not immediately take her into custody after announcing the sentence. Her previous suspension was due to expire at 6 p.m. on 2nd September, but according to [Newspim](#), on 1st September the court accepted her lawyers' request for another extension, moving the deadline to 30th September.

What happens when the suspension expires?

The suspension is temporary, so 30th September is not a guarantee that [Mother Han](#) will remain free indefinitely. When the current period expires, the court can either allow her to return to custody or, if the relevant circumstances continue to justify it, grant another extension.

In other words, an extension prevents custody during the extended period; it does not erase the prison sentence. Conversely, the expiration of a suspension does not necessarily mean that [Mother Han](#) must immediately begin serving her final sentence, because the first-instance judgment can be appealed and the appellate proceedings may still be underway.

This creates several possible scenarios over the coming months. If the court considers her medical condition sufficiently serious, her suspension of detention could potentially be extended again. If the court concludes that the grounds for suspension no longer justify keeping her outside custody, she could be ordered back into detention. At the same time, the appellate court will be considering the substance of her conviction and sentence.

The coming months are therefore likely to be crucial



뉴스1

News1, South Korea's largest private news agency and wire service



YTN

YTN South Korea's first 24-hour television news network, operating as a prominent cable and multimedia broadcaster

The immediate situation is consequently one of continued legal uncertainty rather than immediate imprisonment. [Mother Han](#) remains outside custody at least until 30th September, while her legal team prepares to challenge the first-instance judgment. The court's repeated extensions since March demonstrate, as [News1](#) pointed out 30th July, that her health has already played a significant role in determining her detention status.

The first-instance court sentenced [Mother Han](#) to two years - according to [YTN](#) on 31st August, one year for violating the Political Funds Act and one year for violations involving the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act and occupational embezzlement. The prosecution had sought a considerably heavier sentence of 13 years.

Thus, the 30th September date should best be understood as the next point at which [Mother Han](#)'s detention status will have to be reconsidered, not as the date on which her two-year sentence automatically begins. If her appeal proceeds normally and another suspension is granted, she could remain outside custody

for considerably longer. If the suspension is not renewed, however, she could face detention while the legal process continues.

The [MBC News report](#) therefore highlights an important distinction that can easily be missed when reporting the verdict: [Hak Ja Han](#) has been sentenced to prison, but she has not, at least for now, been sent to prison.

See also [Responsibility Must Be Proven in Appeal Court](#)

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Korean investigation into alleged political interference and financial misconduct by the **Shincheonji Church of Jesus** and the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification**, commonly referred to in



*Intensely persecuted, even by government representatives: **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification**. Here its logo*



*Intensely persecuted, even by government representatives: **Shincheonji Church of Jesus**. Here, its logo.*

South Korea as **Unificationism** (통일교), formally ended on **31st August 2026**. The prosecution–police **Joint Investigation Headquarters** (합동수사본부, “Joint Investigation HQ”), headed by Kim Tae-hoon (김태훈), Chief Prosecutor of the *Daejeon High Prosecutors’ Office*, announced that it had indicted **32 people**, including Shincheonji [See [editor’s note 1 below](#)] leader Lee Man-hee (이만희) and **Family Federation** leader **Hak Ja Han** (한학자). **Four of those indicted were placed under arrest**.

See also [Mother Han’s Detention Suspension Extended Again](#)

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The logo of **Law Times** (법률신문), South Korea’s premier and oldest specialized legal media outlet.

The **Law Times** (법률신문) adds that the 32 defendants were divided evenly between the two organizations: **16 were affiliated**

with Shincheonji [See [editor’s note 1 below](#)] and **16 with the Family Federation**. All four arrested defendants were Shincheonji figures, including Lee Man-hee (이만희) and former General Secretary Go Dong-an (고동안). The remaining **12 Shincheonji-related defendants and all 16 Family Federation-related defendants were indicted without detention**.

The investigation, which lasted approximately **eight months**, was launched in January and was described by the media as an investigation into alleged **“religion–politics collusion”** (정교유착). It examined whether religious organizations had sought to influence political parties and elections through organized membership drives, illegal political donations, or relationships with politicians. It also investigated allegations of embezzlement, tax evasion and other financial irregularities within the two religious organizations.



Joint Investigation Headquarters. Illustration: ChatGPT, 29th August 2026.

Law Times (법률신문) provides additional political context for the creation of the **Joint Investigation HQ**. According to the newspaper, the investigation was launched in January after discussions about establishing a special prosecutor had

failed to make progress, with **President Lee Jae-myung** (이재명) **ordering the creation of the Joint Investigation HQ**. The investigation therefore operated as a combined prosecution–police

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operation rather than as a separate special-prosecutor investigation.

A large number of South Korean media outlets reported on the prosecutors' allegations on 31st August. The articles largely agreed on the overall outcome, but emphasized somewhat different aspects of the investigation.

The **Chosun Ilbo** provides the most detailed account of the allegations against Shincheonji [See editor's note 1 below] and the Family Federation.

The logo of Chosun Ilbo, a large South Korean daily newspaper, featuring the characters '朝鮮日報' in a bold, traditional Korean font.

*The logo of the **Chosun Ilbo** (조선일보), South Korea's largest and most influential daily newspaper.*

Regarding Shincheonji [See editor's note 1 below], the **newspaper** reports that investigators concluded that **tens of thousands of followers were organized into the conservative People Power Party (PPP)** between June 2021 and April 2024 in an attempt to influence internal party elections and political outcomes. The alleged campaign covered four major electoral or party contests: the **2022 presidential election, the 2022 local elections, the 2023 PPP leadership election and the 2024 parliamentary elections**.

According to **Chosun Ilbo**, investigators believe Lee Man-hee used Shincheonji's highly hierarchical organizational structure to allocate membership targets among its 12 regional "tribes", with some followers allegedly pressured to join the PPP against their wishes.

The **Law Times** provides a useful legal clarification here: it says Lee Man-hee and Go Dong-an were indicted for allegedly **forcing followers to join the People Power Party**, an action prosecutors characterize as a violation of the **Political Parties Act (정당법)**. The **law newspaper** thus makes clear that the prosecution's case concerns not simply unusually high levels of religious membership in a political party, but alleged **organized and coercive party recruitment by senior Shincheonji** [See editor's note 1 below] **leaders**.

The investigation also uncovered a separate allegation involving **about 30 Shincheonji** [See editor's note 1 below] **followers who allegedly joined the Democratic Party** to support a prospective candidate in the Goyang mayoral primary. However, **Chosun Ilbo** stresses that investigators found **no evidence that Shincheonji's central leadership or Lee Man-hee had organized or ordered this particular operation**.

This distinction is important. The major PPP case was attributed to the Shincheonji [See editor's note 1 below] leadership, whereas the **Democratic Party** episode was not. **Kyunghyang Shinmun** (경향신문) likewise indicates that the Joint Investigation HQ concluded that there was no evidence of central-level coercion in the latter case.

The logo of Kyunghyang Shinmun, a large and influential South Korean national daily, featuring the characters '경향신문' in a bold, traditional Korean font.

*The logo of **Kyunghyang Shinmun**, a large and influential South Korean national daily, ranked among the top ten in terms of circulation.*

The **Chosun Ilbo** additionally reports allegations that former Shincheonji [See editor's note 1 below] General Secretary **Go Dong-an** (고동안) **diverted approximately 6 billion won** (about US\$4,4 million) in church funds and that Shincheonji evaded approximately **7.57 billion won** (about US\$5,5 million) in taxes by operating snack shops at 70 local churches under members' personal names and concealing cash sales through double bookkeeping.

Law Times adds an important detail about the alleged **6 billion-won** (about US\$4,4 million) **embezzlement**. It reports that Go Dong-an allegedly collected money from followers by telling them that it was needed for **legal expenses**, and then diverted approximately 6 billion won for himself. This provides a more concrete description of what prosecutors mean by the alleged embezzlement.

On the [Family Federation](#), [Chosun Ilbo](#) focuses particularly on the allegation that [Hak Ja Han](#) – also called [Mother Han](#) – **diverted approximately 10.5 billion won** (about US\$7.5 million) of [Family Federation](#) funds between 2017 and 2025 and kept the money in a private safe. Investigators allegedly found that some expenditures had been disguised as overseas missionary support or other accounting entries, while cash donations were allegedly omitted from official accounts.

The [newspaper](#) says investigators concluded that some of the money was used for alleged unlawful political funding, lobbying, gifts to associates and luxury personal purchases. A total of approximately **26 billion won** (about US\$19 million) **in cash** found in private safes was seized.

[Munhwa Ilbo](#) presents the investigation in a somewhat more concise manner and highlights an important distinction: investigators said they had established evidence of

organized party membership campaigns, illegal political donations and alleged embezzlement, but had failed to prove some of the allegations concerning politicians receiving money or valuables.

The [newspaper](#) reports that **16 Family Federation-related individuals were indicted**, including [Mother Han](#), former chief of staff Jeong Won-ju (정원주), and former World Headquarters Director-General Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호). Six of those cases were submitted for summary proceedings [\[See editor's note 2 below\]](#) rather than full trials.

[Munhwa Ilbo](#) likewise reports that investigators attributed approximately **10.5 billion won** (about US\$7.5 million) in alleged misappropriated [Federation](#) funds to [Mother Han](#) and other [Family Federation](#) officials. It says the approximately **26 billion won (about US\$19 million) in cash** discovered in her private safes was seized and is subject to measures intended to **preserve assets for possible future confiscation**.

The [article](#) also emphasizes what the investigation **did not establish**. In particular, allegations that current or former lawmakers actually received illegal payments or gifts were not sufficiently proven. The [newspaper](#) cites the case of a governing Democratic Party lawmaker, [Jeon Jae-soo](#) (전재수), as an example.

[Munhwa Ilbo](#) additionally looks beyond the religious organizations themselves. It notes that another special prosecutor, [Lee Tae-han](#) (이태한), investigating allegations surrounding the **National Election Commission**, is scheduled to begin his investigation on 7th September.

[MBC News](#) gives a shorter overview, describing the investigation as having concluded after **nearly eight months**.

It highlights the four arrested Shincheonji [\[See editor's note 1 below\]](#) figures and 12 others indicted without detention.

For the [Family Federation](#), [MBC](#) reports that **16 people were indicted without detention**, including [Mother Han](#). The [media outlet](#) specifically describes the allegation that approximately **3 billion won** (about US\$2.2 million) was withdrawn under the guise of overseas missionary support and hidden in private safes, forming part of the total **10.5 billion won** (about US\$7.5 million) allegedly

문화일보

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

MBC NEWS

Logo of [MBC News](#), the news division of the [Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation \(MBC\)](#), one of South Korea's four major nationwide television and radio networks.

embezzled.

MBC News also emphasizes the unusual arrangements investigators reportedly discovered: a safe was allegedly installed discreetly in the leader's bedroom area and managed by a single employee without ordinary expenditure records.

Importantly, **MBC News** includes the **Family Federation's rebuttal**. The **organization** rejects the characterization of the money as privately embezzled **Federation** funds. It says that the so-called **"internal funds"** (내실 자금) consisted of voluntary religious offerings made by members and affiliated organizations to **Mother Han** as an expression of religious devotion. According to the **Family Federation**, the funds were **not used privately**, but were spent for public purposes such as missionary activities.

The **Law Times** report helps sharpen several points that are less explicit in the other three articles. Most importantly, it establishes that the **32 indictments were evenly divided between the two organizations: 16 Shincheonji-related defendants and 16 Family Federation-related defendants, with all four arrests occurring on the Shincheonji** [\[See editor's note 1 below\]](#) side.

The **Law Times** also gives more precise descriptions of some of the alleged crimes. Lee Man-hee and Go Dong-an are accused of

organized coercion of Shincheonji [\[See editor's note 1 below\]](#) followers into the conservative **People Power Party**, allegedly violating the Political Parties Act. Go Dong-an is additionally accused of collecting approximately 6 billion won from followers under the stated purpose of paying legal expenses and then embezzling the money.



Yoon Yeong-ho, 6th
Dec. 2020. Screenshot
from Peacelink TV

For the **Family Federation**, **Law Times** confirms the allegation that **Yoon Yeong-ho and others illegally provided approximately 189 million won** (ca. \$137,000 US dollars) **in organizational funds to 132 politicians between 2019 and 2025**. It also makes clear that **Hak Ja Han and Jeong Won-ju were not prosecuted for this political-funding allegation**, because investigators considered evidence of their direct involvement insufficient. They were, however, indicted over the separate allegation that approximately 10.5

billion won (about US\$7.5 million) in **Federation** funds had been diverted through false accounting and concealed in **Mother Han's** private safe.

Thus, while the media outlets mentioned above report the end of the *Joint Investigation HQ* and the indictment of **32 people**, their combined reporting reveals an important distinction. The investigation produced substantial cases involving alleged criminal conduct by officials of the two religious organizations, including organized political-party recruitment, alleged illegal political donations, tax evasion and alleged embezzlement. **But it did not result in the indictment of any politician alleged to have received money or gifts.** **MBC** likewise reports that no politician was ultimately indicted.

The central legal questions will therefore now move from the investigation stage to the courts: whether the alleged activities constituted criminal political interference and financial misconduct, and, in the **Family Federation** case in particular, whether the funds described by investigators as misappropriated property of the **religious organization** were in fact unlawfully diverted for private or political purposes, as prosecutors allege, or constituted religious offerings used for public or missionary purposes, as the **Family Federation** maintains.

See also [Mother Han's Detention Suspension Extended Again](#)

See also [Responsibility Must Be Proven in Appeal Court](#)

Featured image above: 32 indicted in religion-politics probe.

Illustration: ChatGPT, 1st September 2026

[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.]

[Editor's note 2: In South Korea, **summary proceedings** (known in Korean as *Yaksik Jaepan* – 약식재판) are simplified, expedited judicial processes designed to resolve minor offenses without a full, formal courtroom trial.]

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