**FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Preserve the FFWPU Bridge to North Korea**

Knut Holdhus
September 9, 2026

*Official portrait of Ambassador Joseph R. DeTrani, former Associate Director of National Intelligence and former member of the Senior Intelligence Service of the CIA. He served as special envoy for the Six-Party Talks with North Korea from 2003 to 2006*

*Sekai Nippo*

**North Korea expert and special US envoy urges South Korea to preserve the bridge to North Korea built by the Family Federation and its founders**

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Op-Ed

**Family Federation Built Special Ties with North Korea**

**South Korean Government Should Cooperate Toward Inter-Korean Reconciliation**

by the editorial department of Sekai Nippo

*Father Moon (1920-2012) and Mother Han with North Korean President Kim Il-sung (1912-1994) at his presidential residence in Heungnam, North Korea on 6th December 1991Joseph DeTrani, former U.S. special envoy for negotiations with North Korea*

In 2005, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly the Unification Church),

founded by Rev. Sun Myung Moon and his wife, Hak Ja Han, established the NGO Universal Peace Federation (UPF). UPF has maintained close relations with North Korea.

Since Rev. Moon's death in 2012, Hak Ja Han has led the Family Federation. Her recent sentencing to two years in prison on bribery charges must surely have caused some consternation among the North Korean leadership.

In 1991, the couple visited North Korea and developed a close relationship with its then-leader, Kim Il-sung (1912-1994). When Rev. Moon died, Kim Il-sung's grandson, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, expressed his condolences to the bereaved family and sent a wreath. He also posthumously awarded Rev. Moon the Fatherland Reunification Prize.

*Large floral display from North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, presented to Mother Han at the celebration of her 80th birthday on May 7, 2023*

At the UPF World Summit held in 2022, marking the 10th anniversary of Rev. Moon's death, Kim Jong-un again sent a wreath to Hak Ja Han and conveyed his condolences. His message stated: "Rev. Moon devoted himself to world peace. […] His achievements and legacy will be remembered forever."

One of UPF's principal objectives is the peaceful reunification of North and South Korea. This was demonstrated by Rev. and Mrs. Moon's meeting with Kim Il-sung in 1991 and was reaffirmed when Kim Jong-un conveyed his condolences in 2022.

The following year, however, North Korea formally adopted its policy of regarding the two Koreas as "two hostile states". In 2026, it enshrined this principle in its Constitution. This means that North Korea has officially abandoned the goal of reunification and has since defined inter-Korean relations as relations between two separate and hostile entities.

Attempts by the South Korean government under President Lee Jae-myung to resume dialogue with North Korea have failed.

The Family Federation has believers in more than 140 countries. Its members look to Hak Ja Han as their leader and support UPF's mission of promoting world peace and the peaceful reunification of North and South Korea.

Hak Ja Han's prison sentence has also raised another question: What will be the future status of the Family Federation and UPF?

Indeed, if the South Korean government were to consider dissolving these organizations, it would be perceived as an obvious attack on freedom of religion.

Regardless of whether one is religious or not, the democratic societies in which we live guarantee the right to practice one's faith freely.

Given that UPF has built good relations with North Korea, the South Korean government should cooperate with the Family Federation and UPF in order to rebuild relations with North Korea.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are extremely high. North Korea is currently cooperating militarily with Russia. North Korean combat troops have been deployed to Russia to support President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. North Korea is also supplying Russia with artillery shells and ballistic missiles, while it is believed to be receiving military-technology assistance from Russia in return.

This situation is by no means favorable to peace on the Korean Peninsula or stability in Northeast Asia.

UPF and Hak Ja Han have established unique relationships with North Korea and its leader, Kim Jong-un. The South Korean government should make use of these relationships and seek to resume dialogue with North Korea. Ultimately, it should aim for the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

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# State's Faith War: Prosecution To Dissolution

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## From criminal prosecution to possible dissolution, Gingrich warns that the state's trial against Hak Ja Han is part of a broader war against religious freedom

The conviction of Hak Ja

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*Former Speaker of the House **Newt Gingrich** speaking at CPAC in 2010. Photo: Gage Skidmore / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 2.0 Gen. Cropped*

Han (한학자, co-founder and international leader of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*, has become the centerpiece of a much broader controversy over religious freedom in South Korea. In an opinion article published by *The Washington Times* on 31st August, former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich argues that the case should not be viewed simply as a dispute over political financing or as an ordinary criminal prosecution. Rather, he presents it as evidence of a **systematic, state-sponsored campaign to weaken and ultimately dismantle religious movements regarded as politically or socially conservative**.

*See also Preserve the FFWPU Bridge to North Korea*

Gingrich places the South Korean case within what he describes as a worldwide assault on religious freedom. In his assessment, this assault has traditionally been associated with openly authoritarian or communist regimes, where governments have used state power to suppress religious belief and organizations considered hostile to official ideology. What concerns him, however, is that similar mechanisms are increasingly appearing within democratic societies. He describes the phenomenon as a "global war on God", arguing that the state is being transformed from a guarantor of religious liberty into an instrument for restricting and eliminating religious communities.

For Gingrich, South Korea represents an especially important test case because it is a longstanding democratic ally of the United States. The country therefore occupies a very different political category from authoritarian states where religious repression might be expected. Since the Korean War, American military forces have remained in South Korea as part of the broader effort to protect the country's security and democratic system. Gingrich argues that the use of state power against religious organizations in such a country should therefore concern not only South Koreans but the entire democratic world.

He points first to a series of cases involving Christian leaders. Presbyterian pastor Son Hyun-bo (손현보) of the Presbyterian Segyero Church (세계로교회) in the large city of Busan, Gingrich writes, was imprisoned and convicted after opposing what he regarded as a "woke" agenda in public schools and defending Christian values. He also cites the arrest and prosecution of 95-year-old Lee Man-hee (이만희), leader of Shincheonji Church, together with investigations and raids involving other churches. Gingrich interprets these cases as indications of a broader pattern in which religious organizations can become targets when their beliefs or political positions are perceived as incompatible with the priorities of the government.

***Pastor Son Hyun-bo** (손현보) of Segyero Church in Busan, here August 2025. Photo: Bitter Winter*

The case of Hak Ja Han (한학자 – also called Mother Han – is, however,

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central to his argument.

Mother Han, 83, became the sole leader of the Family Federation following the death of her husband, Sun Myung Moon (문선명), in 2012. Gingrich emphasizes Moon's own history of imprisonment under communism and portrays the Family Federation as a global religious movement that has expanded into more than 140 countries. He also stresses activities associated with the organization and Mother Han's leadership, including international conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue and advocacy for religious freedom. These activities, he notes, contributed to her nomination for the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize.

*Will soon have been **one year in pretrial detention** in spite of her **advanced age and serious health problems**, being legally blind, suffering from a severe heart condition and having undergone major shoulder surgery while in detention: Dr. Hak Ja Han, aka. Mother Han, as she appeared at Seoul Central District Court 31st August 2026. Photo: Dr. Michael Balcomb, resolution improved by ChatGPT, 6th September 2026.*

Against this background, Gingrich portrays Mother Han's prosecution as particularly troubling. He points to her age and serious health problems, noting that she is legally blind, suffers from a severe heart condition and underwent major shoulder surgery while in detention. At the time of his article, she had spent approximately 340 days in pretrial detention. Seoul special prosecutors had also sought a **13-year prison sentence** on allegations involving bribery and violations of political-funds legislation.

Gingrich argues that the significance of the case extends beyond the specific criminal charges. In his view, the prosecution represents the first stage of a much broader campaign directed at the Family Federation itself. He describes the criminal proceedings as the "spearhead" of a coordinated effort in which legal prosecution, political rhetoric and proposed legislation could work together to place increasing pressure on the organization.

Particularly significant, in Gingrich's interpretation, is the possibility of institutional dissolution. He points to statements attributed to members of the government of President Lee Jae-myung (이재명) concerning the use of foreign dissolution orders as a model for disbanding the Family Federation. He also highlights President Lee's public characterization of the organization as "heretical" and his call for its dissolution.

*Advocating for Japanese dissolution order as a model for disbanding the Family Federation in South Korea: Minister of Justice Jeong Seong-ho (정성호 – also anglicized as Chung Sung-ho). Photo: 대한민국 국회 / Wikimedia Commons. Korea Open Government License Type 1. Cropped*

For Gingrich, such rhetoric becomes especially consequential when combined with legislative initiatives. He discusses Civil Code Amendment Bill No. 2215932, which he says has been nicknamed the "Church Dissolution Act." According to his description, the proposed legislation would give the government extensive powers to audit, inspect and potentially dissolve religious organizations that it determines have "interfered in politics". Gingrich warns that broadly defined or undefined criteria could potentially be applied far beyond the organization currently

beyond the organization currently under scrutiny.

The issue, therefore, is not merely whether a particular religious leader committed a criminal offense. Gingrich frames the deeper question as one of **state power and religious autonomy**: how far may a democratic government go in regulating, investigating, financially penalizing or ultimately dissolving a religious organization because of its political activities or perceived political influence?

He notes that major Christian organizations, including the World Evangelical Alliance, a global alliance of evangelical Christians, have expressed opposition to the proposed legislation precisely because of the possibility that vague standards could eventually be used against other religious communities. From this perspective, the Family Federation becomes a possible precedent: a government action initially justified against one controversial or politically unpopular movement could establish legal mechanisms subsequently applicable to a much wider range of religious organizations.

Gingrich consequently presents South Korea as a warning to other democracies. If an elderly religious leader with an international peacebuilding record can be imprisoned and convicted, while the organization she leads faces possible dissolution through the combined use of criminal proceedings, political pressure and new legislative powers, he argues that **no religious community can assume that it is permanently protected from state overreach**.

His conclusion is therefore directed beyond Seoul. The conviction of Hak Ja Han (한학자), in Gingrich's view, should prompt democratic societies to reconsider the boundaries between legitimate law enforcement and governmental interference with religious freedom. The central question is whether South Korea will remain a democratic "beacon of freedom" or move toward what he calls a communist-inspired, anti-religious authoritarianism.

For Gingrich, the international community should not remain silent. He calls on democratic governments, and particularly the United States, to defend religious liberty and to make clear that attacks on religious organizations can have consequences for international relationships. He specifically urges President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio to raise the issue with Seoul.

The larger warning running through the article is stark: **when political disagreement with a religious movement becomes grounds for mobilizing the coercive power of the state against its leaders, institutions and assets, the principle of religious freedom itself is placed at risk.** In Gingrich's interpretation, the prosecution of Mother Han is therefore not simply a Korean legal controversy. It is a test of whether modern democracies can resist the temptation to use state power to dismantle religious movements they regard as troublesome, conservative or politically inconvenient.

*See also Preserve the FFWPU Bridge to North Korea*

***Text**: Knut Holdhus, editor*

***Featured image** above: From prosecution to dissolution. Illustration: ChatGPT, September 2026.*

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