

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Korean Government Raids of FFWPU Look Political

Knut Holdhus
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Candlelight rally to impeach President Yoon Suk-yeol at the South Korean National Assembly on 4th December 2024. In the middle is current President Lee jae Myung

South Korean authorities' overreach decried as Family Federation sees raids on its sacred sites and gets drawn into the country's fierce power struggle

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The Washington Times The Washington Times carried on 22nd July a report headlined "[Family Federation under scrutiny in South Korea over alleged bribery of former first lady](#)". It was written by Andrew Salmon, the paper's Asia Editor.



Kim Keon-hee, here in Washington DC July 10, 2024

The article sheds light on the current South Korean administration's aggressive pursuit of investigations into former President Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열), his wife Kim Keon-hee (김건희). But as the headline indicates, considerable attention is given to the fact that the "vortex of scandals [...] has sucked in the [Family Federation](#), formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)"

Basically, the piece by Andrew Salmon reveals a troubling pattern of overreach, politicization of justice, and potential abuse of state power. While rooting out corruption is a legitimate government responsibility, the scope, intensity, and optics of these investigations increasingly resemble a political purge cloaked in the language of accountability.

First, the use of disproportionate force in the recent raids - including the deployment of riot police, military police, and a convoy of vehicles - raises serious concerns about the administration's approach to law enforcement. The description of a "military-style operation" at the [Federation](#)'s Gapyeong complex, widely viewed as sacred by adherents, crosses a line from legitimate investigation into intimidation.

The Washington Times quotes Demian Dunkley, President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) in USA, as saying,

"The [Family Federation](#) has always cooperated fully with governmental inquiries - not just in Korea, but around the world. We have shown respect even when our beliefs were misunderstood, even when our practices were questioned. That cooperation was not returned."

Commenting on what the paper calls a "massive search-and-seizure operation" on 18th July, Dunkley states it was "not law enforcement - it was political theater, conducted with unnecessary force."

Rev. Dunkley also condemned the treatment by the current administration of the [Family Federation](#) co-founder [Hak Ja Han](#) (82),



Reverend Demian Dunkley, President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) in USA. Here, speaking Jan. 19, 2025

"Dr. [Hak Ja Han Moon](#) is a global advocate for dialogue, reconciliation and unity. To respond to her message of peace with aggression is not just unfair - it is unjust."

Such tactics suggest the government is not merely pursuing justice but rather sending a message to dissenting institutions: cooperate or be crushed.

This is particularly alarming given the [Federation](#)'s global presence and advocacy for conservative [family values](#) - positions often at odds with South Korea's increasingly progressive political mainstream. Targeting a [religious organization](#) in this fashion invites comparisons to authoritarian regimes that have used state machinery to suppress minority beliefs under the guise of law enforcement. The rhetoric of Rev. Damian Dunkley - calling the raid "political theater" and "a gross misuse of taxpayer-funded

resources" - echoes the frustrations of many who see this not as justice, but vendetta.

The Yoon administration is no longer in power; the current government, instead of focusing on forward-looking policies, appears consumed with retroactive investigations. With agencies such as the Corruption Investigation Office, the Supreme Prosecutors Office, and even the military police involved in these probes, the breadth of the effort seems less about justice and more about domination of the public narrative. Are all these agencies necessary to investigate a former first lady over a handbag and jewelry? Or is this a convenient pretext to dig deeper into ideological opponents and political adversaries?



Former South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, here in a meeting at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., April 27, 2023

Moreover, the fact that religious institutions are caught in the crossfire suggests a worrying erosion of civil liberties. Regardless of one's views on the [Family Federation](#), South Korea has a constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. When sacred sites are treated as crime scenes without transparent cause, and religious leaders are effectively treated as criminal suspects, it weakens not just that particular group but the broader principle of freedom of belief in South Korean society.

The question must also be asked: to what end? If the objective is transparency and rooting out corruption, then where is the proportionality? Where is the consistency? Are similar resources being applied to allegations involving allies of the current administration? If not, this begins to look very much like selective justice, a tool historically employed by autocrats and strongmen to neutralize rivals and consolidate control.

Even beyond religion, the scope of investigations now spans shamans, army officials, and media acquisition attempts. The breadth of targets suggests an ideological cleansing more than a

focused effort to fight corruption. The inclusion of spiritual figures and minor players stretches the plausibility of any cohesive criminal conspiracy and instead gives the appearance of a wide net cast for political advantage.

In democratic societies, justice must not only be done - it must be seen to be done. That requires fairness, proportionality, and transparency. The current administration's conduct - from its choice of targets to its tactics - risks undermining public faith in those very principles. If South Korea wishes to maintain its democratic integrity, it must urgently reconsider whether its pursuit of accountability is veering dangerously into the territory of repression.

True justice is blind. Political justice, however, sees only enemies.

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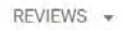
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part of the large conservative Christian media group. Reported that key figures associated with the [Family Federation](#) allegedly sought government favors to facilitate several major initiatives.

Yes, bribery and corruption involving politicians and government officials have been significant issues in South Korea. The country has seen multiple high-profile corruption scandals involving top-level politicians, presidents, and major business conglomerates ("chaebols").

Park Geun-hye (박근혜 – President 2013–2017) was impeached and imprisoned for corruption, bribery, and abuse of power in a scandal involving Samsung and her confidante Choi Soon-sil (최순실).



Lee Myung-bak (이명박) – President of South Korea 2008–2013. Photo (2010): Government of Chile. License: [CC Attr 2.0 Gen](#). Cropped

Lee Myung-bak (이명박 – President 2008–2013) was also convicted and jailed on charges of bribery and



Park Geun-hye (박근혜 – President of South Korea 2013–2017). Photo (2013): Foreign and Commonwealth Office / Wikimedia Commons. License: [OGL v1.0](#). Cropped

embezzlement.

Major companies like Samsung, Lotte, and the SK Group have been implicated in bribery scandals aimed at securing

government favors or business advantages.

These cases revealed deep ties between political power and corporate interests, a system critics sometimes call “crony capitalism”.

To tackle the corruption, South Korea has introduced strong measures. The Kim Young-ran Act of 2016 criminalizes giving or receiving gifts and meals above a strict threshold for public officials, journalists, and educators, helping curb lower-level bribery and influence.

As opposed to Japan, South Korea has on several occasions shown that its judiciary is independent. It has proven relatively willing to prosecute elite figures, including sitting presidents, which is rare globally. In addition, a free press, active civil society, and strong public demand for accountability have played key roles in exposing corruption.

The [Family Federation](#) is cooperating fully with the authorities and granted access to the special investigation team visiting the international headquarters in Gapyeong and the Seoul headquarters located in Yongsan-gu to look through physical and digital documents.

Rev. Hwangbo Guk, President of the [Family Federation](#) in South Korea, said in a message to leaders and members gathered to a prayer vigil in Gapyeong 18th July,

“The truth will undoubtedly be revealed. [...] Now is the time to attune our ears to Heaven’s will, to lift the torch of truth above lies and confusion, and to walk this path with sincerity, proving our hearts through action – not retreating in the face of the world’s criticism.

Let us completely discern false energies and march forward toward the gates of [Cheonil-Guk \(Kingdom of Heaven\)](#) opened by our [True Mother](#). [...] This is the time to establish Heaven’s order, uphold the dignity of [True Parents](#), and be reborn in a life centered on the Word.



Rev. Hwangbo Guk, President of the [Family Federation](#) in South Korea, speaking in Gapyeong 18th July 2025. Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#)

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I believe this current trial is a time to forge our strength. Let us overcome the trial together and unite our hearts to overcome this crisis. Then Heaven will open an even greater victory for us."

As a comment to sensationalist claims made by Chosun Biz, Dr. Michael Balcomb, President of the [Family Federation](#) in Europe and the Middle East, points out,

"Actually, prosecutors are mainly focused on the former presidential administration, and the impeached former President Yoon Suk-yeol and his wife, former first lady Kim Keon-hee. Indeed, the police raided the headquarters of President Yoon's former political party today. As this is an ongoing legal investigation, we cannot comment further at this stage."

The *Chosun Biz* claimed that a former [Family Federation](#) leader sought favors from the government for certain large projects. To obtain such favors, he allegedly attempted to bribe the former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희) by giving her through an intermediary two luxury handbags and a necklace with diamonds. According to *The Korea Herald*, it was a "diamond necklace made by Graff" worth about \$43,000, and Chanel bags worth a combined \$14,000, from a high-ranking [Family Federation](#) official "surnamed Yoon in 2022".



The former First Lady of the Republic of Korea Kim Keon-hee (김건희). Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#)

The *Chosun Biz* claims that the [Family Federation](#) representative through bribery sought support for its "development project on the Mekong River in Cambodia."

Dr. Balcomb emphasizes,

"The concept of South Korean investment in a new Mekong River Global Enterprise Zone in Cambodia is not new. Indeed, the South Korean government is always looking for ways to strengthen its business, economic and political ties with other nations in Asia, in the mutual interests of both nations and, perhaps, as a counterbalance to the ever-spreading influence of the People's Republic of China. The [Family Federation](#) naturally supports such national objectives."

The *Chosun Biz* also writes that the former [Family Federation](#) leader tried to get government help for the acquisition of YTN, a major South Korean news network. According to media reports, the [religious organization](#) aimed to expand its media presence by buying or taking control of a mainstream broadcaster.

Dr. Michael Balcomb explains,

"I don't know any specifics about this proposed acquisition, but see nothing sinister about it. The [church](#) already owns several well-known media properties, including three daily newspapers: The Washington Times, Sekai Nippo in Japan, and the Segye Ilbo in Korea. Acquisition of a broadcaster would be a logical step. Of note, other churches also own mainstream media properties."

According to South Korean media reports, the [Family Federation](#) have pushed for support to have the UN open a 5th UN office branch in South Korea in order to increase the [federation's](#) own prestige and global standing. Commenting this, Dr. Balcomb states,



Dr. Michael Balcomb speaking at outdoor event in London 17th July 2025. Screenshot from video by [FFWPU](#)

"There are many Koreans who feel that the United Nations is under-represented in Asia, and that Korea would be natural place to open a 5th UN office (the others being in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi). Moreover, given the still-divided state of the Korean peninsula, and the role of the UN in the Korean War which

peninsula, and the role of the UN in the Korean war which broke out 75 years ago, strengthening the UN presence in Korea could help with securing a lasting peace and possible reunification. Certainly, the [Family Federation](#) supports such an initiative and is one of its many advocates."

As for the [religious organization](#) having been drawn into the investigations involving the former president and his wife, Michael Balcomb writes in a letter to members on 18th July,

"Since this is an ongoing legal investigation, we cannot comment further on this matter at this time."

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranks South Korea relatively well globally. In 2023, it ranked 32nd out of 180 countries, showing improvement but indicating room for progress.

Historically bribery and corruption have been tied to the political and business elite. However, the country has taken serious and visible steps to address them, and public intolerance for corruption is high.

See also [Raids Blur Line Between Justice and Politics](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus

Featured image above: Former South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and First lady Kim Keon-hee in Tokyo 16th March 2023. Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

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