

**FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Seoul's Heavy-Handed Raid on Sacred Sites
Condemned**

Knut Holdhus
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One of the sacred sites that was raided - Cheon Jeong Temple in Gapyeong, South Korea

Editorial in South Korean daily: **Aggressive and insensitive investigators making investigation appear as veritable religious persecution in raid on temple regarded as holy by millions**

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On 23rd July 2025, the South Korean daily The Segye Ilbo published a compelling editorial headlined "[Excessive Investigation Undermining Religious Values: The Search and Seizure at the Family Federation](#)".

The paper voices concern over what it calls an excessive and potentially unconstitutional search and seizure at the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (previously the [Unification Church](#)) by a special prosecutor's team. The search, conducted on 18th July, was part of a wider investigation into alleged state interference and election meddling involving political figures such as

- former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희),
- businessman, political broker, and journalist Myung Tae-gyun (명태균),
- shamanistic religious leader Geonjin Beopsa - real name: Jeon Seong-bae (전성배).

While accountability and justice are essential pillars of a democratic society, the editorial raises an urgent and valid question: at what point does an investigation cross the line into religious persecution?

The editorial underscores that even in cases involving national-level political scandals, investigators must operate within the bounds of law and constitutional rights - most importantly, the right to religious freedom. The [Family Federation](#) claims that its headquarters, [Cheonwon Temple](#) in Gapyeong - regarded as a sacred site by millions of followers worldwide - was subjected to an aggressive and insensitive raid. If these allegations are accurate, the investigators' actions do not merely represent procedural overreach; they risk severely damaging public trust in the very institutions meant to uphold justice.

A particularly alarming aspect, as highlighted by Segye Ilbo, is the reported behavior of some investigators who allegedly handled sacred religious artifacts with disrespect - actions such as kicking or carelessly touching these items. For any religious community, such behavior is not only offensive but deeply traumatic. These acts, if true, go beyond poor judgment - they represent a direct affront to the

sanctity of a global faith tradition.



The [Cheonwon Temple](#). Here, prayer vigil at night

The editorial wisely avoids the pitfall of defending religious organizations unconditionally. It acknowledges that no institution - religious or otherwise - should be beyond the reach of the law. The [Family Federation](#) itself has stated its willingness to cooperate fully with the authorities. But cooperation must be met with fair treatment. Investigations based on flimsy evidence or partisan motives undermine both justice and democratic integrity. As Segye Ilbo points out, initiating sweeping searches on the basis of circumstantial evidence alone opens the door to stigma, and possibly irreparable harm, for the [religious organization](#) and its followers.



Strongly persecuted in South Korea due to refusal of military service based on religious beliefs: The Jehovah's Witnesses. Thousands of believers have been imprisoned for conscientious objection to conscription. Here, their pamphlet stand in front of the Daeseongri station in South Korea July 10, 2016

The editorial in the Korean daily claims this is not just a domestic issue. The [Family Federation](#) is an international religious body with a presence in more than 200 countries. Its followers look to South Korea as the origin of their faith. Since its founding over 70 years ago, the [Federation](#) has worked closely with world leaders to promote peace, humanitarian work, and Korean peninsula stability. The [Family Federation](#) has also contributed to enhancing South Korea's global reputation. Any investigation that disregards this context risks being interpreted - especially abroad - as state-sponsored religious intolerance. According to the editorial, this is a diplomatic issue as much as it is a legal one.

Criticism of the special prosecutor's conduct has already emerged from both ruling and opposition political factions, signaling that concerns over fairness and proportionality are not limited to religious circles.

Segye Ilbo rightly draws parallels to past incidents in Korean history where religious groups became scapegoats during periods of social or political unrest. These historical wounds remain unhealed, and repeating such mistakes in today's legal climate could fracture trust between the state and civil society even further.

In conclusion, the editorial published by Segye Ilbo is not a blanket defense of any religious organization. Rather, it is a thoughtful, principled appeal for balance - recognizing the importance of legal accountability while insisting on the equal importance of religious

liberty and dignity. In a pluralistic democracy, the rule of law must be enforced, but never at the cost of fundamental freedoms. Upholding those freedoms, especially in moments of political tension, is what truly defines the maturity of a just society.

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Kim Keon-hee, here in Washington DC 10th July 2024. Photo: Jim Bourg/U.S. Department of State. **Public domain image. Cropped**

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** Gyeongju 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.”



Reverend Demian Dunkley, President of the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** in USA. Here, speaking 19th Jan. 2025. Screenshot from **FFWPU**

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),

“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.



Former South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, here in a meeting at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., 27th April 2023. DoD photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Alexander Kubitzka / US Secretary of Defense. License: **CC Attr 2.0 Gen. Cropped**

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?**

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

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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.

See also [Heavy-Handed Raid on Sacred Sites Condemned](#)

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: 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. Photo: Daily Minjoo / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 3.0 Unp](#).

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