

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: 356 Experts Urge Fair Trial in FFWPU Case

Knut Holdhus
August 7, 2025



Tatsuki Nakayama (center), international lawyer and representative of "Association of Experts Demanding a Fair and Just Trial", speaks at a press conference in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, on the afternoon of 6th August



Legal experts hold Tokyo press conference demanding fair trial standards as they speak out against lower court ruling and express concerns over judicial transparency

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Experts Raise Doubts About Court Proceedings

Order to Dissolve Family Federation: Statement Demands Fair Trial

by the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

On 6th August, a group called the "Association of Experts Demanding a Fair and Just Trial", consisting of lawyers, scholars, writers, and religious figures, held a press conference in Tokyo. They issued a statement calling on the Tokyo High Court to conduct a fair and impartial trial in the case regarding the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)).

The statement raised several concerns:

The Tokyo District Court based its [dissolution decision](#) on civil lawsuits from over 30 years ago.

The [ruling](#) relied on "assumed" harm not supported by evidence.

Government-submitted documents may contain falsifications or fabrications.

The closed nature of the hearings infringes upon the constitutional right to a public trial.



Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama, here in Tokyo in 2023

Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹), an international lawyer and representative of the group, explained,

"People who cannot stay silent about what's happening in Japan have signed this statement."

He appealed, saying,

"We want the court to hear the voices of experts from both inside and outside Japan."

Seven experts, including Nakayama - none of whom are members

of the [religious organization](#) - appeared at the press conference and voiced various criticisms of the Tokyo District Court's handling of the case.

 <p><i>Dr. Seishiro Sugihara</i></p>	 <p><i>Masumi Fukuda, author and investigative journalist, here delivering a speech 23rd Sep. 2024 in Chiba City, Japan</i></p>
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Seishiro Sugihara (杉原誠四郎), professor at former Musashino Women's University, said,

"The trial should be based on verified facts, but only the alleged victims' claims are being considered. The principle of trial by evidence is not being upheld."

Masaki Nakamasa (仲正昌樹), professor at Kanazawa University, pointed out,

"They haven't even tried to listen to current members. The trial process seems flawed."

Non-fiction writer Masumi

Fukuda (福田ますみ) emphasized,

"Testimonies from former believers who left the religious organization after being abducted and confined were used as grounds for dissolution. This is a state-manufactured 'fabrication'."

According to the association, as of 6th August, a total of 356 experts have endorsed the statement, with 104 publicly revealing their names on the website of the association. It plans to continue collecting signatures until the end of August.

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Religious Liberty Under Fire In South Korea

- August 6, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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South Korea’s Religious Liberty Crisis


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In his compelling Washington Times op-ed 5th August titled “[A new religious liberty crisis in Korea](#)”, renowned sociologist of religion Dr. Massimo Introvigne presents a sobering




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warning: South Korea, a country often praised for its democracy and human rights record, is now witnessing a disturbing escalation in state interference in religious affairs – especially targeting conservative religious movements.

His article frames this not merely as a domestic legal issue but as part of a broader and more ominous international trend where governments, emboldened by media support and political motivations, undermine religious freedom under the guise of rooting out “cults”.

At the heart of Introvigne’s argument is the case of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), formerly known as the [Unification Church](#). A criminal investigation involving a former executive accused of bribery and misusing funds has triggered sweeping state action.



Dr. Hak Ja Han addressing an audience of 70,000 at Seoul World cup Stadium 11th November 2017. Photo: Graeme Carmichael / HSA-UWC

Although the [organization](#) insists it was not institutionally involved in these alleged personal misdeeds, prosecutors have carried out aggressive raids on the [Federation](#)’s main sacred grounds and even the home of its leader, Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#). These actions, particularly the travel ban placed on [Dr. Han](#) – known globally as the “Mother of Peace” – are portrayed by Introvigne as excessive and politically charged.

What makes the situation alarming, according to Dr. Introvigne, is that this is not an isolated case. Other prominent conservative churches, such as the *Yoido Full Gospel Church*, have also faced raids.

These events, he argues, reveal a pattern: the targeting of religious bodies aligned with conservative, pro-American, or traditional [family values](#). This signals a broader agenda – one that could eventually endanger the religious liberty of all groups deemed ideologically inconvenient by the current political elite.

Introvigne connects this crackdown in South Korea to global ideological shifts. He suggests that Korean authorities may be emulating controversial legal measures from France and Japan – countries that have introduced “anti-cult” laws widely criticized by international legal scholars for violating fundamental freedoms.

Even more concerning is the claim that Korean anti-religious policies have been influenced by China, whose government is known for its aggressive suppression of religious and spiritual movements perceived as threatening to the Communist Party’s ideology.

The Italian scholar writes,

“The immediate cause of what is happening in Korea is the new administration’s intent to punish former President Yoon and whomever offered him support. The remote cause, however, is the growing influence in the country of a movement targeting “cults” that dates back to the 1950s, when groups such as the [Unification Church](#) were established and quickly became influential. Scholars have noted that these campaigns have been fueled by China, which is hostile to conservative and anti-Communist religious movements, including the [Unification Church](#). Evidence



Former President of South Korea **Yoon-Suk-yeol** 19th Sep. 2023. Photo: [Korea.net](#) / Korean Culture and Information Service. License: [CC ASA 2.0 Gen](#). Cropped

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has emerged of a sustained and decade-long cooperation between Korean anti-cultists and their Chinese counterparts, who operate under the supervision of the Communist Party."

If true, this raises the prospect that authoritarian models are beginning to influence policies in democratic states under the guise of public safety or reform.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the current crisis, as highlighted in the article, is the continued practice of **forced deprogramming**. Introvigne recalls the harrowing stories of individuals **kidnapped** by family members or anti-cult groups, held in **confinement**, and subjected to psychological pressure until they **recant their beliefs**.

This practice, which had been widespread in Japan until its courts began ruling against it in 2015, persists in South Korea with tacit judicial tolerance. The international human rights community has documented thousands of such cases, some ending in psychological trauma or even death. That South Korea – an advanced democracy – remains a stronghold of such a practice is a severe indictment of its human rights regime.

Beyond the legal and ideological dimensions, Introvigne also emphasizes the symbolic harm inflicted by the state's actions. The raids on churches were not only legally questionable, he argues, but also culturally and spiritually disrespectful. Sacred sites were treated as crime scenes; respected religious leaders were subjected to humiliating scrutiny.

Such actions appear designed not only to investigate potential wrongdoing but to delegitimize and stigmatize entire faith communities. The public nature of these raids, often conducted with media present, suggests they may be intended as much for spectacle as for justice.

In presenting this analysis, Introvigne underscores a pattern seen in many other democracies: unpopular or minority groups are first targeted under vague or stigmatizing labels – like **"cult"** – which allows governments to enact sweeping measures with minimal public resistance.

Introvigne points out,

"Rumors that other conservative churches and religious movements may soon be targeted continue to circulate. Activists who seem to have the ear of the new Korean administration propose to introduce new statutes based on laws existing in France and Japan (and widely criticized by international religious liberty activists and legal scholars), allowing for the swift dissolution of movements labeled as 'cults'."

miviludes

Mission interministérielle de vigilance
et de lutte contre les dérives sectaires

Logo of MIVILUDES, a French government agency to fight so-called "cults".

Once this legal and political machinery is in place, however, it rarely stops with the original targets. Larger and more mainstream religious groups eventually come under scrutiny, especially when their values clash with those in power. The slippery slope is clear: today's **"cult"** can quickly become tomorrow's church.



Fighting for religious liberty: Second-generation members of the [Family Federation](#) protesting 6th May 2025 outside the Japanese parliament against the dehumanizing treatment inflicted on them by the authorities in league with militant lawyers. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Introvigne's article ultimately serves as a crucial call to vigilance for defenders of religious liberty. It urges international observers, legal scholars, and human rights advocates not to overlook what may appear to be domestic controversies but are in fact part of a global struggle over freedom of belief and conscience. South Korea, long seen as a democratic model in Asia, risks damaging its reputation if it continues down this path.

What is needed now, as the article concludes implicitly, is firm resistance from civil society, religious leaders, and international institutions. Korea's democratic institutions must uphold the fundamental principles of religious freedom, even – or especially – when doing so is politically inconvenient.

The suppression of any faith, regardless of its popularity or ideology, is a dangerous breach of democratic norms. Left unchallenged, it could herald an era in which governments, not individuals, decide which beliefs are acceptable.

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Text: Knut Holdhus

Featured image above: Dr. Massimo Introvigne, here speaking at a conference on religious freedom in Geneva, Switzerland on 16th June 2025. Screenshot

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