

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: No Religious Freedom In Japan - 330 Faith Leaders Speak Up

Knut Holdhus
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Press conference of the World Religious Leaders Conference 7th August 2025 in Seoul

Faith Leaders at International Event Zooming in on Religious Freedom and Universal Values

The 2025 World Religious Leaders Conference in Seoul

From 5th to 8th August 2025, Lotte Hotel World in Jamsil, Seoul became a global stage for a most significant interfaith gathering: the 2025 World Religious Leaders Conference. This four-day international event drew over 330 religious leaders - including 80 from the United States, Europe, South America, and Asia, and 250 from South Korea - united under the theme of "Religious Freedom and Universal Values". Through a series of speeches, testimonies, and a jointly issued declaration, participants collectively emphasized the urgent need to preserve spiritual freedom and ethical cooperation in an increasingly fractured world.



There were many Korean-language reports from national and local media outlets - TV Chosun, Shin-A Ilbo, News1, Maeil Ilbo, Daehan Ilbo, Segye Ilbo, Namdo Ilbo - each offering unique insight into the motivations, messages, and aspirations of the event.

Together, they paint a picture of religious leaders who are not only committed to protecting the sanctity of faith, but also invested in the spiritual, cultural, and moral well-being of humanity.

Reporter Kim Gwan of TV Chosun wrote an overview of the conference, with an emphasis on the diversity of religious representation and the inclusive vision behind the gathering. The article notes that the conference included leaders from Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Orthodox Christianity, reinforcing its interreligious and cooperative character.



*George Augustus Stallings Jr.,
Founder and Archbishop of
Imani Temple*

The TV Chosun report details the sequence of events, beginning with Archbishop George Stallings' opening prayer and including keynote addresses from figures like Dr. Ahn Shin, President of the Korean Association for the Study of Religion, and Rev. Ki-hoon Kim, Chair of World Clergy Leadership Conference (WCLC). Taj Hamad's opening address echoes the theme of unity, urging all religious leaders to act with "one heart and one voice".

Notably, the article reports that the conference will continue twice monthly until December, with the goal of facilitating ongoing dialogue around religious freedom and universal ethics. This sustained commitment to dialogue reflects the understanding that peacebuilding and moral leadership are not one-time efforts but require continual engagement and renewal.

Shin-A Ilbo's reporter Jeong Won-young focuses on the collective declaration issued during the Press Conference of World Religious Leaders, offering a detailed look at the

language and intentions behind this important document. The declaration identifies three foundational principles:



peace

1. Absolute guarantee of religious freedom
2. Spiritual solidarity beyond specific doctrines
3. Commitment to universal values such as truth, love, justice, and



Dr. Ahn Shin, President of the Korean Association for the Study of Religion

These principles reflect the religious leaders' shared belief that faith-based values are integral to social harmony and human dignity. The declaration also directly critiques global trends of repression, stating that law must not "become a tool that infringes on human spiritual freedom."

The Shin-A Ilbo report adds philosophical depth by quoting Dr. Ahn Shin's analysis of religious discrimination. He identifies ignorance, intentional bias, and systemic misunderstandings as root causes, and calls for religion to serve as a space for "personal dialogue" and a foundation of civil society where differences are respected rather than condemned.

In a comprehensive report by Lee Bok-jin in [Segye Ilbo](#), the conference is framed as a profound response to global challenges surrounding religious discrimination and moral erosion.

According to the article, the event served as a call to action for religious leaders to reclaim their rightful roles as moral compasses in a world increasingly at odds with truth and conscience.



Taj Ibraheem Hamad, World President of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), lamented the silencing of religious voices and the marginalization of spiritual values. He warned that when "religion is silenced, the conscience of society is silenced," highlighting a deeper concern that societal ethics deteriorate when spiritual freedoms are ignored. The report also captures Hamad's

assertion that religious leaders must unite around truth, conscience, and spirituality, transcending doctrinal differences to uphold shared human values.



Taj Hamad, World President of Universal Peace Federation (UPF)

The [Segye Ilbo](#) article strongly supports the idea that religious freedom is not merely a legal issue but a foundational pillar of civilization. The piece underscores that suppression of spiritual expression threatens the moral and cultural identity of communities worldwide, emphasizing that law should serve peace and coexistence - not be wielded as an instrument of control.



Namdo Ilbo highlights the emotional and spiritual dimension of the conference. In addition to listing major speakers and dignitaries, reporter Yoon Tae-min in his article gives weight to the personal testimonies shared by participants, particularly Archbishop Sulanch Lewis, Co-Chair of the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) Women's Division. Her declaration that "God will wipe

away every tear, and where there is love, there is no fear," encapsulates the core spiritual aspiration of the conference: to build a world free from fear and hatred.

Yoon Tae-min's article also emphasizes the broader context - that religious freedom is not just a theological concern but a prerequisite for the flourishing of human society. The report commends the

conference's intent to create a global forum of dialogue, noting that over 4,000 religious leaders are expected to participate in the ongoing monthly sessions through the end of the year.

A Unified Moral Vision in a Fragmented World



Some of the participants at the World Religious Leaders Conference in Seoul 5th to 8th August 2025

The different reports construct a powerful narrative: the 2025 World Religious Leaders Conference is not a symbolic gesture but a coordinated, values-driven movement that affirms the centrality of religion in addressing global crises. In an era marked by rising extremism, political polarization, and cultural fragmentation, the event's participants urged societies to return to foundational values rooted in faith, human dignity, and spiritual freedom.

A conference of this scale inevitably raises numerous issues, and while each media outlet may present its own perspective, a consistent message emerges: religious freedom is not optional - it is essential. It is not a luxury, but a necessity.

Moreover, according to several media reports, this conference champions the idea that peace is not simply the absence of conflict, but the active presence of conscience, cooperation, and shared spiritual heritage. The fact that such a diverse group of leaders was willing to commit not only to statements but to ongoing dialogue through the end of 2025 speaks volumes about the seriousness of their mission.

In conclusion, the 2025 World Religious Leaders Conference in Seoul marks a hopeful and constructive turning point - one where dialogue replaces division, and where the sacred is not confined by boundaries, but shared as humanity's collective inheritance.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor, written based on English translation of South Korean media reports.

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356 Experts Urge Fair Trial In Dissolution Case

- August 7, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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


Tokyo, 7th August 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article.*

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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:

1. The *Tokyo District Court* based its [dissolution decision](#) on civil lawsuits from over 30 years ago.
2. The [ruling](#) relied on “assumed” harm not supported by evidence.
3. Government-submitted documents may contain falsifications or fabrications.
4. The closed nature of the hearings infringes upon the constitutional right to a public trial.

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.”



Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama, here in Tokyo in 2023. Photo: [Japanese Victims’ Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion](#)

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.



Dr. Seishiro Sugihara. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

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’.”



Masumi Fukuda, author and investigative journalist, here delivering a speech 23rd Sep. 2024 in Chiba City, Japan. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda (豊田剛)

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.

Featured image above: 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. Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀). Cropped

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