FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Trump Alarmed Over Church Raids in Korea

Knut Holdhus
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Trump challenges President Lee on crackdown and voices concern as faith communities are caught in Korea's political crossfire

See also Religious Liberty Under Fire in South Korea

The Washington Times' recent report, "Trump presses South Korean President Lee Jae-myung on church raids, political 'purges'" (25th August. 2025), highlights a moment of international tension that reaches beyond diplomacy into questions of religious freedom, political stability, and the integrity of civil society.

South Korean President Lee Jae-myung, here on August 23, 2025

The article describes how President Donald Trump, hosting newly elected South Korean President Lee Jae-myung at the White House, raised concerns over what he characterized as "very vicious" raids against churches in South Korea. These include actions against the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), widely known as the Unification Church, alongside other Christian congregations accused of having political ties to former President Yoon Suk Yeol.

The Washington Post, the larger competitor of The Washington Times, wrote on the same day that before President Lee's visit, Trump signaled unease with how Lee came to office earlier this year - securing victory in the June election that followed the impeachment and removal of his predecessor, conservative leader Yoon Suk Yeol, after Yoon's short-lived declaration of martial law.

The large DC paper wrote,

"'WHAT IS GOING ON IN SOUTH KOREA? Seems like a Purge or Revolution,' Trump wrote on Truth

Social on Monday morning. 'We can't have that and do business there. I am seeing the new President today at the White House.'"

The article by Jeff Mordock and Andrew Salmon in The Washington Times underscores a disturbing pattern: religious organizations in South Korea are being targeted under the guise of political investigations. What should concern international observers is not only the fairness of these prosecutions, but also the chilling precedent they set for freedom of belief, association, and expression in one of Asia's most important democracies.

Former South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and First Lady Kim Keon-hee, here in Tokyo March 16, 2023

The article points to investigations into churches allegedly tied to political figures, particularly ex-President Yoon and his wife. For the Family Federation, the central concern is that a spiritual movement, whose global mission is to promote peace and family values, is being swept into political turmoil through accusations of bribery and undue influence. Allegations - such as gifts offered to the former First Lady - have not been substantiated in court, and the Federation has already expressed willingness to cooperate with authorities. However, the fact that raids and media sensationalism precede any judicial ruling suggests that these measures are more about political theater than due process.

Met misunderstanding and persecution even before he founded the movement in 1954: Sun Myung Moon, here in the early 1950s

President Trump's comments are significant because they echo what many within the Family Federation and allied faith communities have felt for decades: South Korea's governments, often under pressure from political rivals or activist groups, have sometimes treated religious minorities with suspicion or hostility. The raids described in the article are not mere administrative checks but aggressive interventions that risk intimidating congregations and stigmatizing entire communities. When churches like Sarang Jeil and the Family Federation are portrayed primarily as political actors rather than spiritual communities, the broader principle of religious freedom comes under attack.

The fact that this issue was raised in a White House meeting speaks to its gravity. The Family Federation is not only a Korean faith movement but also a global one, with extensive networks in the United States, Japan, Africa, and beyond. Its affiliated media, business, and humanitarian projects have long championed U.S.-Korea relations and peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula. By undermining such a movement at home, South Korea risks sending a dangerous signal abroad - that religious freedom can be curtailed for political expediency. President Trump's warning that such instability could jeopardize trade relations only underscores how these raids may damage trust between allies.

The Family Federation has experienced cycles of misunderstanding and persecution in South Korea since the movement was founded in 1954. Yet the religious organization has consistently emphasized reconciliation, family unity, and interfaith cooperation. In this light, the current accusations appear less as isolated charges and more as a continuation of a historical tendency to scapegoat the Federation during political crises. Linking the movement to corruption without due process revives old prejudices rather than addressing real issues of governance.

While President Lee insists the raids are part of investigations into past abuses of power, his government would do well to ensure that faith communities are not indiscriminately targeted or publicly defamed. The Family Federation has affirmed its readiness to cooperate with legal authorities; what it seeks is fairness, transparency, and recognition of its religious mission. Genuine dialogue with religious organizations would strengthen South Korea's democracy, while heavy-handed raids risk fracturing it further.

The Washington Times article captures a pivotal moment in U.S.-Korea relations, where concerns about trade and security overlap with deeper questions of liberty and human rights. For the Family Federation, the stakes are clear: the right to practice faith without political persecution must be defended, not only for its own members but for all religious communities in South Korea. President Trump's public acknowledgment of the issue provides a measure of hope that international attention will encourage restraint and fairness. Ultimately, South Korea's standing as a democratic ally depends not only on its economic strength or military partnership, but also on its commitment to protecting the fundamental freedoms of conscience and belief.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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Japan: Coercion In Psychiatry And Faith-Breaking

- August 26, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

The dark side of psychiatry: The hidden human rights abuses and coercion in Japan's psychiatric system compared to coercive deprogramming of members of new religious movements

Tokyo, 25th August 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper Sekai Nippo. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. Original article.

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Justifying Human Rights Violations in Psychiatric Care

Lecture by Tomoyasu Yoneda, National Representative of the

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Citizens Commission on Human Rights Japan, at the SeNichi Club

by the editorial department of Sekai Nippo

A facility of the Citizens Commission on Human Rights on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood, California, USA. Photo: User2004 / Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image

The SeNichi Club, an association of *Sekai Nippo* readers, held its regular lecture online on the 23rd. Tomoyasu Yoneda (米田倫康), National Representative of the *Citizens Commission on Human Rights* (Japan chapter), gave a talk titled *"The Archipelago of Asylums: The Dark Side of Psychiatry Without Human Rights."*

Yoneda stressed the reality of psychiatric care in Japan:

> *"Patients can be forcibly hospitalized on the basis of mere suspicion. There are 180,000 such cases annually, about 500 per day. This is a figure that shocks the international community."*

He pointed out that modern psychology and psychiatry, grounded in materialism, are based on the assumption that *"mental illness stems from problems in the brain or genes."* As an efficient means of isolating the genes of the mentally ill from society, psychiatric wards have proliferated. Yoneda warned,

> *"In the first place, psychiatric diagnoses largely depend on the subjective judgment of doctors. Despite lacking clear evidence, they hold excessive power that enables them to justify human rights violations."*

Yoneda further argued that psychiatrists in Japan have historically instilled the belief that *"mental patients are dangerous, and that forced hospitalization is the only option."* He cited cases where healthy individuals were forcibly admitted to psychiatric wards due to abuse of the system. Yoneda asserted,

> *"The issue is not merely to condemn discriminatory values of the past, but that laws and systems based on those values are still in place today. Psychiatry must be brought back under the rule of law."*

Professional faith-breaker and victim. Illustration: Grok xAI, 20th April 2025

He also touched on the connection with the issue of coercive faith-breaking [See editor's note below] targeting members of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (formerly the Unification Church). He suggested that the process of labeling new religious believers as *"brainwashed"*, disregarding their personal will, and restraining them bears similarities to the process of forcibly hospitalizing psychiatric patients.

Featured image *above: Tomoyasu Yoneda (米田倫康) delivering his lecture at the SeNichi Club. Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)*

[***Editor's note***: **Coercive faith-breaking** ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the Family Federation or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements

(Kofuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.

***Also subject to faith-breaking attempts**: Members of **Soka Gakkai**. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp. Cropped*

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

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