

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Massimo Introvigne on Mother Han's Arrest and Purge of Korean Faiths

Knut Holdhus
September 23, 2025



TV coverage of Mother Han's case on a large screen in Seoul's Yongsan Station



Dr. Massimo Introvigne,
Geneva, Switzerland June 16,
2025

Unreasonable detention of octogenarian religious leader is part of systematic purge of religious voices as prosecutorial system's extraordinary powers are used for political manipulation

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On 22nd September 2025, [Bitter Winter](#) published an article by Italian sociologist and religious liberty scholar Dr. Massimo Introvigne entitled [The Arrest of Mother Han: Korea's Unholy War on Religion and Reason](#). The essay examines the recent arrest

of Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#) - widely known as "[Mother Han](#)" and spiritual leader of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)).



Introvigne argues that the arrest is legally baseless, politically motivated, and representative of a broader campaign of state persecution against religious communities in South Korea that supported the now-disgraced administration of former President Yoon Suk-yeol and his People Power Party (PPP).

Far from being an isolated scandal, Introvigne frames the case as a textbook example of what he calls "religiocide" - a state-led assault on religion cloaked in judicial formalities. Through a close analysis of the arrest warrant, the specific charges, and the broader political context, the [article](#) advances a stark thesis: this is not a corruption case, but a purge of dissenting religious voices, with profound implications for democracy and freedom of belief in South Korea.

The [article](#) is divided into three sections: (1) the legal grounds of the arrest, (2) the substantive charges, and (3) the political and religious context. Each section seeks to show the discrepancy between official claims and political reality, portraying the indictment of [Mother Han](#) as both implausible in detail and alarming in scope. In the following analysis, we will provide a critical summary of Introvigne's arguments, explore their implications, and situate them within wider debates on religion, politics, and judicial power in South Korea.

1. Legal Grounds: The Fragile Basis of Detention

The first part of [Introvigne's article](#) examines the judicial rationale for [Mother Han](#)'s arrest. South Korean law, consistent with democratic norms, permits pre-trial detention only when there is a risk of flight or destruction of evidence. According to the author, neither criterion is remotely applicable.



[Hak Ja Han](#) (82) and aggressive reporters Sep. 17, 2025.
Illustration by ChatGPT

[Mother Han](#) is 82 years old, recovering from heart surgery, and subject to a travel ban since March 2025. The notion that she could escape justice is therefore implausible. Likewise, the charge of potential evidence destruction appears hollow: prosecutors had already raided her residences and church offices, seizing documents and digital records. As Introvigne quips, the only thing left for her to "destroy" would be her own memories.

By dismantling the rationale for pre-trial detention, Introvigne suggests that the arrest warrant was "built on sand". In effect, the state bypassed its own legal safeguards, signaling that the arrest was not about legal necessity but about political symbolism. This critique resonates with longstanding concerns in South Korea about the prosecutorial system's extraordinary powers and its 95% conviction rate, which critics argue fosters abuse and political manipulation.

2. The Charges: Implausibility and Political Theater

The second section dissects the charges contained in the arrest warrant. Four specific allegations are addressed:

a. Bribery through Rep. Kweon Seong-dong

Prosecutors allege that [Mother Han](#) funneled ₩100 million (roughly \$73,000) through an executive to gain influence. Introvigne highlights the absurdity of this claim: in a political culture where corruption often involves millions of dollars, the idea that such a modest sum could buy influence over a G20 government is unrealistic. Moreover, the supposed "benefits" - a wire agency acquisition, Cambodian investments, and VIP inauguration seats - either failed to materialize or were beneath the stature of a global religious leader who regularly hosts summits with world leaders.

b. Gifts to the First Lady

[Mother Han](#) is accused of gifting luxury items - including a diamond necklace and Chanel handbags - through an intermediary. The total value, about \$57,000, pales in comparison to typical political bribery scandals in Korea. Furthermore, [Mother Han](#) denies involvement, arguing that a rogue church executive was responsible. Introvigne points out that this same executive has motives to shift blame and save himself.

c. Embezzlement

Here, prosecutors claim misuse of [Family Federation](#) funds. Introvigne notes that in religious movements where leaders are revered as messianic figures, distinctions between personal and organizational expenditures often blur. For followers, giving to the [religious organization](#) and giving to [Mother Han](#) may be one and the same. Framing such practices as embezzlement ignores the theological and cultural dynamics of religious giving.

d. Destruction of Evidence

The final charge concerns alleged attempts to suppress evidence of gambling in Las Vegas dating back decades. Introvigne calls this implausible, since these allegations have been public knowledge for over forty years and have already been weaponized by critics. Why attempt to bury something already thoroughly exposed? Moreover, [Reverend Moon](#) himself had framed his presence in Las Vegas as evangelistic outreach to sinners, complicating simplistic interpretations of wrongdoing.

Taken together, Introvigne portrays the charges as weak, outdated, or grossly disproportionate, pointing toward political motives rather than genuine criminality.

3. The Context: Purge and "Religiocide"

The third and most expansive section situates [Mother Han](#)'s arrest within a broader crackdown on

religious groups that once supported President Yoon and the PPP. Introvigne identifies a systematic purge of religious voices, ranging from the [Family Federation](#) to Shincheonji and major Protestant megachurches.



Another religious organization being cracked down on in South Korea: Yoido Full Gospel Church, here Dec. 4, 2016

Prominent pastors, including those from the Yoido Full Gospel Church and the Far East Broadcasting Company, have faced raids or indictments. Their common denominator is political support for Yoon. In a striking irony, even anti-cult Protestant leaders who once opposed the [Unification Church](#) now find themselves targeted by the same prosecutorial dragnet.

For Introvigne, the key development is the fusion of political rivalry and religious persecution. What had traditionally been a "national sport" of prosecuting former presidents has now expanded into an assault on religious institutions. Any whiff of affiliation with the PPP is treated as guilt by association. This, he argues, constitutes not simply political revenge but "religiocide" - a systematic attempt to marginalize or destroy religious communities through state power.



One of the international voices condemning the crackdown: Screenshot from Mike Pompeo's X account September 3, 2025

International voices, including former U.S. President Donald Trump, have already [condemned the crackdown](#). Introvigne concludes that the issue transcends handbags and necklaces: it is about democracy, religious freedom, and the survival of pluralism in South Korea.

Grave consequences

Introvigne's [essay](#) is persuasive in its legal critique and compelling in its political framing. His analysis demonstrates how weak charges can mask broader political objectives, echoing patterns observed in other democracies under strain. By situating [Mother Han](#)'s case within a wider context of raids and arrests against diverse religious leaders, the article avoids the trap of portraying her as a unique victim and instead highlights systemic repression.

Now, also religious organizations having supported former presidents are in danger: South Korea has a long, almost uncanny pattern of post-presidency trouble - enough that some Koreans joke there's a "curse" on the Blue House. Each new administration often tries to "clean house" by prosecuting the previous one.

The presidency in South Korea has immense influence, making both abuse and backlash more likely. This has created a cycle: leaders push legal or moral boundaries while in office, then political opponents pursue them once they step down. Illustration: Knut Holdhus

FATES OF SOUTH KOREAN PRESIDENTS	
Syngman Rhee (in office 1948-1960)	– Exile in Hawaii until death
Yun Bo-seon (1960-1962)	– Convicted of treason
Park Chung-hee (1963-1979)	– Assassinated
Choi Kyu-hah (1979-1980)	– Forced out by coup
Chun Doo-hwan (1980-1988)	– Death sentence, pardoned
Roh Tae-woo (1988-1993)	– Jailed, pardoned
Kim Young-sam (1993-1998)	– Son jailed
Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003)	– Aides investigated
Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008)	– Suicide during probe
Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013)	– Jailed, pardoned
Park Geun-hye (2013-2017)	– Impeached, jailed, pardoned
Moon Jae-in (2017-2022)	– Aides probed
Yoon Suk-yeol (2022-2025)	– Impeached, removed from office

Nevertheless, the core argument stands: the selective and exaggerated prosecution of religious figures who supported one political faction undermines democratic neutrality and weaponizes the judiciary against civil society. The consequences are grave. First, South Korea's global reputation as a democracy committed to religious freedom may be tarnished. Second, the chilling effect on religious organizations - whether large Protestant churches or minority new religions - could shrink the civic space for faith communities.

Third, the personalization of legal attacks against elderly leaders like [Mother Han](#) raises humanitarian concerns about dignity, health, and proportionality in criminal justice.

Conclusion

Dr. Massimo Introvigne's [The Arrest of Mother Han](#) offers more than a defense of a single religious leader. It is a warning about the fragility of democratic norms when law enforcement is harnessed to partisan and ideological ends. The charges against [Mother Han](#) appear minor, outdated, or implausible; the legal basis for her detention is weak; and the wider crackdown on religious figures reveals a disturbing pattern of politicized justice.

Whether one admires or criticizes the [Family Federation](#), the principle at stake is broader: the right of religious communities to participate in political life without fear of retroactive criminalization. Introvigne urges international observers to see through the veneer of corruption charges and recognize a purge in progress. In his view, South Korea's credibility as a democracy and defender of religious liberty is on trial - and the outcome will reverberate well beyond its borders.

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Religiocide in Korea: The Attempted Assassination of a Faith

09/20/2025 MASSIMO INTROVIGNE

A+ | A-

I came to Korea not to observe only but to stand. The assault on the Family Federation should be called for what it is: religious persecution.

by Massimo Introvigne



Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon.

Let us speak plainly. If Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon is arrested, it will not be the arrest of a woman—it will be the attempted crucifixion of a religion. The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, formerly known as the Unification Church, is not merely under scrutiny. It is under siege. And the name for what is happening is religiocide—the deliberate attempt to kill a religion, a term coined by scholars who have seen this pattern before.

This is not about bribery. It is not about political donations. It is not about legal technicalities. It is about extermination.

What we see in Korea did not start there. It started in Japan. In March, the Tokyo District Court ordered the dissolution of the Family Federation, citing decades-old civil cases and vague notions of "social appropriateness." This is not justice—it is liquidation. If upheld, the ruling (which is under appeal) will strip the movement of its legal status, confiscate its assets, and silence its voice. Japan, the country where the Family Federation achieved its greatest missionary success, now seeks to erase it from public life. The assassination of Shinzo Abe, a friend of the movement, was seized upon as a pretext, though the assassin was never a member. The real motive lies deeper: a decades-long campaign by leftist lawyers, anti-cult activists, and Protestant deprogrammers who have found common cause in hatred.

The campaign, the same, has now extended to Korea, where the assault is more visceral. The special prosecutor has requested the arrest of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, accusing her of bribing the disgraced former First Lady Kim Keon-hee with luxury gifts. Twenty witnesses say otherwise: that these were the rogue actions of a single Church executive. The idea that Dr. Moon—whose initiatives have drawn presidents and prime ministers, including Donald Trump—would need to bribe a Korean leader for small favors and ceremonial seats at a presidential inauguration is not just implausible. It is insulting.

The second charge? That Dr. Moon supported the conservative People Power Party (PPP) through donations, help in the elections, and church devotees who became party

members. Even if true, it is not a crime. It is a constitutional right. Yet the Korean government now seeks to criminalize religious political engagement, targeting not only the Family Federation but jailing other religious leaders who supported former President Yoon or the PPP. This is not law—it is purge.

Who are the architects of this religiocide? Three forces converge in Korea as they did in Japan. First, Protestant fundamentalists, who see the Family Federation as heretical and sheep-stealing. Second, leftist intellectuals and politicians, who loathe its anti-Communist and pro-family stance. Third, Chinese Communist Party operatives, who covertly support anti-cult campaigns to destabilize anti-Communist religious movements in Korea and Japan.

The irony is grotesque. Evangelicals who claim to be anti-Communist now collaborate with pro-China activists to destroy a fellow religious movement. They have entered a pact with the Devil, and in Korea, it has backfired. Evangelical leaders who cheered the persecution of the Family Federation, but supported the conservative PPP, now find themselves behind bars.

Make no mistake: this is not a scandal. It is a scandalization. It is not a prosecution. It is a persecution. The charges against Dr. Moon are not about justice—they are about annihilation. The goal is to decapitate the movement in Korea and bankrupt it in Japan, while media campaigns abroad amplify the narrative.

But history teaches us: religiocide fails. From the catacombs of Rome to the gulags of Siberia, persecuted religions do not die. They rise. They grow. They endure.

I am in Korea in these days; not to observe only, but to stand. To bring comfort to the afflicted, and to remind them: this is not the end. It may be the beginning. The Family Federation has weathered storms before. It will weather this one. The Roman persecutions taught emperors more powerful than a controversial Korean president that the blood of martyrs is the seed of faith. And the fire of persecution often forges the steel of conviction.

Let the persecutors beware. You may dissolve an organization. You may jail a leader. But you cannot kill a faith that lives in the hearts of its believers.

You cannot kill a religion.

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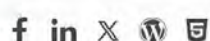


Massimo Introvigne

Massimo Introvigne (born June 14, 1955 in Rome) is an Italian sociologist of religions. He is the founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions ([CESNUR](#)), an international network of scholars who study new religious movements. Introvigne is the author of some 70 books and more than 100 articles in the field of sociology of religion. He was the

main author of the [Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia](#) (Encyclopedia of Religions in Italy). He is a member of the editorial board for the [Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion](#) and of the executive board of University of California Press' [Nova Religio](#). From January 5 to December 31, 2011, he has served as the "Representative on combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, with a special focus on discrimination against Christians and members of other religions" of the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#) (OSCE). From 2012 to 2015 he served as chairperson of the Observatory of Religious Liberty, instituted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to monitor problems of religious liberty on a worldwide scale.

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