

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Korea uses Law as Weapon against Hak Ja Han

Knut Holdhus
September 24, 2025



Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#) on the way into the pre-trial detention warrant hearings on September 22, 2025 in Seoul, South Korea. Illustration: ChatGPT



Justice or persecution? The rigid application of law in the case of frail 82-year-old Hak Ja Han

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Dr. Hak Ja Han addressing a large rally in a football stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa December 7, 2019

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The South Korean daily [Segye Ilbo](#) published on 24th September a column which in English would carry the headline "[The 'Mother of Peace' Standing in the Shadow of the Law](#)". The opinion piece by Religious Affairs Correspondent Jeong Seong-su (정성수), reflects both the shock and sorrow felt by countless individuals around the world at the news of Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#)'s arrest.

As co-founder of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) and lifelong partner of the late Rev. [Sun Myung Moon](#), [Dr. Han](#) has stood for over half a century as one of the most visible women leaders in international faith and peace movements. To many, she is not only a religious figure but also a moral voice who has consistently dedicated her life to

advancing reconciliation, education, cultural exchange, and the vision of "One Family Under [God](#)." Against this backdrop, her detention raises pressing questions not merely about the application of law, but about the balance between legal procedure, human dignity, and the broader pursuit of peace.

The [article](#) highlights four charges brought against [Dr. Han](#), including alleged violations of political funding and anti-graft laws. Yet, the [piece](#) quickly underscores that to many observers, the legal scrutiny appears excessive, especially in light of her age, frail health, and unimpeachable record of service to humanity. The writer questions whether it was justifiable to request and grant an arrest warrant under such circumstances, noting that [Dr. Han](#) herself has steadfastly declared her innocence.



Far from retreating into self-defense, she is portrayed as continuing her mission of prayer and intercession for the nation and the world, even in the midst of personal trial. This imagery not only reinforces her moral stature but also frames her ordeal in continuity with the historical suffering of religious leaders who endured misunderstanding, betrayal, and persecution in the pursuit of truth.

The [column](#) places [Dr. Han](#)'s life and work into a broader historical and spiritual context. It recalls her unique role as "Mother of Peace" - a title earned through her tireless leadership of global initiatives, including international [marriage blessing](#) ceremonies and peace summits spanning over 190 nations. The article reminds readers that she has consistently advanced a universal vision: that humanity, regardless of culture or creed, is one family under [God](#).

Likewise, through projects such as dispatching the Little Angels cultural troupe to thank the nations that made up the UN forces that rescued South Korea during the [Korean War](#) (1950-1953), she has expressed gratitude and advanced reconciliation on the world stage.



The Little Angels singing in Gapyeong, South Korea 9th August 9, 2020

The [article](#) does not shy away from acknowledging the immense challenges [Dr. Han](#) has faced. Following [Rev. Moon](#)'s passing in 2012, many doubted that she could continue to lead such a vast and complex global movement. Yet, for 13 years she has not only held the [Family Federation](#) together but has extended its reach.

The writer interprets her present difficulties through the lens of religious history: as Jesus himself was betrayed by Judas and denied by Peter, so too do great spiritual leaders often suffer through the disloyalty or folly of their followers. Rather than interpreting these struggles as failures, the [article](#) views them as evidence of the steep price of walking a righteous path.

Crucially, the [article](#) in the [Segye Ilbo](#) calls for balance and discernment in the application of law. While affirming that the principle of equality before the law is indispensable, it warns against blind or overly rigid applications that fail to account for historical and social contexts. In an era where media sensationalism and political bias can distort truth, the prosecution of a religious leader can easily become

weaponized, threatening both freedom of faith and the stability of democratic society. The writer insists that justice must serve not only legality but also higher principles of fairness, dignity, and peace.



Judas Iscariot about to hang himself, painting from 1611 by Abraham Bloemaert (1564-1651), Dutch painter

In closing, the [opinion piece](#) appeals directly to the conscience of government and judicial authorities: do not allow this case to derail or diminish the peace activities of [Dr. Han](#)'s global movement. Millions of followers and countless supporters see in her a spiritual mother and guiding light. The responsibility now lies with institutions of power to ensure that justice is not only done but seen to be done in a way that upholds peace rather than undermines it.

Thus, the [column](#) serves not only as a defense of [Dr. Han](#) but also as a reminder of the fragility of peace when weighed against political expediency and narrow interpretations of law. Its message is clear: the pursuit of world peace should not be overshadowed by the punitive application of legal codes, and the legacy of one of the world's most prominent women leaders must be honored with fairness, compassion, and respect.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor, written based on the English translation of the Korean text

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September 17, 2025

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Logo of *Bitter Winter*, the leading international news site on religious liberty and human rights

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



Dr. Massimo Introvigne, here in Geneva 16th June 2025. Screenshot

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.

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**.



Hak Ja Han (82) and aggressive reporters 17th Sep. 2025. Illustration by ChatGPT 20th Sep. 2025.

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:

1. 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**

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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.

2. 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.**

3. 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.

4. 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”



Another religious organization being cracked down on in South Korea: **Yoido Full Gospel Church**, here 4th Dec. 2016. Photo: Striker9498 / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain](#) image

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.

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.**



Mike Pompeo @mikepompeo · Sep 3



The lawfare being directed at religious leader Dr. Hak Ja Han in South Korea is deeply troubling.

The intensifying assaults on religious liberty are a betrayal of the democratic principles that South Korea is meant to espouse.

212

1.8K

2.5K

132K



One of the international voices condemning the crackdown:

Screenshot from Mike Pompeo’s X account 3rd September 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.

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**

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

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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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: TV coverage of Mother Han's case on a large screen in Seoul's Yongsan Station. Photo: Massimo Introvigne / [Bitter Winter](#)

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