

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Asia Today Editorial - Avoid Detention of Clergy

Knut Holdhus
November 29, 2025

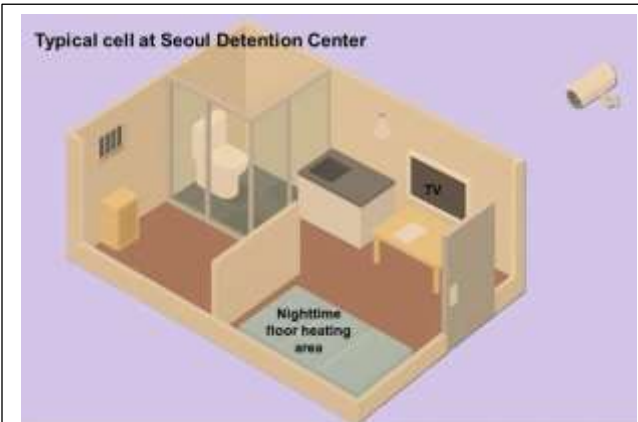


Illustration of the Asia Today editorial November 28, 2025



Days before hearing on Mother Han's request for bail, South Korean editorial urges caution in detaining religious leaders

On 28th November, the mainstream South Korean daily newspaper Asia Today published an editorial headlined "[In Trials of Religious Leaders, Non-Detention Is Preferable](#)".



A typical cell at Seoul Detention Center where [Mother Han](#) is being held, po



President Donald Trump hosts a bilateral meeting with President Lee Jae-myung of the Republic of Korea, August 25, 2025, in the Oval Office. Official White House

The piece emphasizes that the relationship between state power and religious authority has always been delicate, and in democratic societies it is especially important to prevent even the appearance of repression. When law-enforcement actions involve religious figures, the consequences often extend far beyond the individuals at the center of the investigation.

The [article published in Asia Today](#) highlights this tension, arguing that the Korean justice system must handle cases involving religious leaders with heightened caution. The core principle emphasized is that investigations and legal proceedings should, as far as possible, be conducted without pre-trial detention.

Detaining a cleric - someone who symbolizes and represents a faith community - can easily be perceived as a broader attack on the religious group itself, regardless of the formal justification offered by prosecutors.

The [editorial](#) underscores how sensitive these issues are not only within Korea but also internationally. Foreign governments and religious freedom observers tend to monitor closely any actions that could be interpreted as limiting religious activity.

This point was illustrated earlier when U.S. President Donald Trump, ahead of his Korea-U.S. summit with President Lee Jae-myung

(이재명), [stated](#) that he had heard about "[vicious raids](#) on churches" in South Korea.



Pastor Son Hyun-bo (August 2025)

Following his remarks, several American political figures echoed similar concerns, warning that religious liberty in Korea might be under threat. Because of the global attention that religious freedom issues attract, the article argues, Korean authorities must avoid actions that could spark unnecessary controversy or misinterpretation on the world stage.

Despite this, the [article](#) notes that real-life practice has sometimes failed to reflect this needed restraint. One example cited is the ongoing investigation into Pastor Son Hyun-bo (손현보) of the Busan Segyero mega-church, who has been accused of violating the Public Official Election Act. The Busan Metropolitan Police sought to detain him, claiming a risk of flight and possible destruction of evidence. Critics, however, reacted strongly, arguing that a pastor delivering sermons - which are already recorded - poses no realistic threat of disappearing or tampering with evidence. For them, detaining a clergy member under such circumstances constitutes disproportionate punishment and borders

on religious oppression.

This broader debate forms the backdrop to an upcoming legal milestone involving another prominent religious figure. On 1st December, the Seoul Central District Court is set to open the formal trial of [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), President of the [Family Federation](#), also called [Mother Han](#). A hearing on her request for bail will be held the same day. While acknowledging that the trial must proceed impartially and according to law, the [Asia Today article](#) stresses that the decision about whether she remains detained during proceedings is a separate question. Because she is the head of a major religious movement, detaining her could inflame public perceptions of religious discrimination or political targeting.



Posters in support of [Mother Han](#) outside Seoul Detention Center November 29, 2025

The humanitarian dimension is also highlighted. [Mother Han](#) is elderly and reportedly suffers from heart disease and other ailments. The editorial warns that if bail is denied and she is forced to endure prolonged detention, the government would assume full responsibility for any deterioration in her health or potential medical emergencies.

Finally, the [article](#) appeals directly to President Lee Jae-myung's leadership and character. It notes that he has overcome many hardships throughout his life and therefore understands suffering on a personal level. Because of this, the [article](#) suggests, he is uniquely positioned to make a compassionate decision that promotes national harmony. Allowing [Mother Han](#) to await trial under bail rather than detention would help dispel concerns about religious persecution, reinforce South Korea's commitment to civil liberty, and contribute meaningfully to social unity.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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November 21, 2025

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Photo (2025):
Segye Ilbo

religious figures – specifically **Hak Ja Han** (한국자) – by many referred to as **Mother Han** – the current leader and Co-Founder of the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification**, also known as the **Unification Church**.

See also **Mother Han: Prosecutors' Narrative Hard to Prove**

See also **Gingrich Pressures Seoul to Free Mother Han (82)**

See also **Asia Today Editorial: "Avoid Detention of Clergy!"**

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The author argues that contemporary debates about **Mother Han's** political position, motives, and alleged misconduct risk collapsing a complex historical record into simplistic partisan narratives. For Western readers unfamiliar with South Korean political culture and the institutions referenced in the **article**, several contextual elements are important to fully understand the author's point.

One of the central examples the **article** uses is the "Jeong Yun-hoe (정윤희) document" scandal of 2014. To appreciate its significance, one must recognize the institutional environment of South Korea at that time. South Korea's executive branch operates from the **Blue House** (Cheong Wa Dae), the former presidential office and residence analogous to the White House in the United States. Under then-President Park Geun-hye (박근혜), a conservative leader whose administration would later collapse amid a major corruption scandal, internal discipline and control within the Blue House were notoriously tight, and accusations of behind-the-scenes influence carried heavy political weight.



Park Geun-hye (박근혜) – President of South Korea 2013–2017). Photo (2013): Foreign and Commonwealth Office / Wikimedia Commons. License: **OGL v1.0**. Cropped

Against this backdrop, **Segye Ilbo** – a newspaper affiliated with the **Family Federation** – published a leaked internal government document alleging that Jeong Yun-hoe (정윤희), a former aide to Park, was improperly exerting influence over state affairs through an informal network. In Western terms, this was akin to a major newspaper revealing that a personal friend of the president was secretly shaping governmental decision-making without holding any official position. The report ignited a political firestorm and placed the newspaper in direct confrontation with the highest levels of the sitting conservative government.

The significance of this episode in the **article's** argument cannot be overstated. For critics who today portray **Mother Han** as having consistently aligned with or supported certain political factions, the 2014 report represents a counterexample that defies easy categorization. Rather than serving the interests of the ruling party, the **Family Federation**-aligned newspaper published an exposé that embarrassed and provoked the conservative administration, raising questions about internal power struggles and the abuse of state authority. According to contemporaneous reporting, **Mother Han** herself endorsed the newspaper's decision on the grounds that "the media must fulfill its public responsibility."

The Segye Ilbo **article** uses this history to challenge the notion that **Hak Ja Han** or the **Family Federation's** institutions have operated merely as extensions of any political camp. The author suggests that **Mother Han's** leadership has been motivated more by religious, ethical, and peace-oriented principles than by partisan objectives. Journalist Jeong



Mother Han motivated by religious, ethical, and peace-oriented principles rather than by politics.

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Seong-su points to decades of initiatives pursued by the [Family](#)

Here, speaking in Harare, Zimbabwe 21st November 2018. Screenshot from live transmission by PeaceTV.

[Federation](#) – interfaith dialogue, North-South Korean engagement, and international peace projects – to argue that such activities are not readily reducible to conventional left-right political metrics.

For Western readers, it is important to recognize that South Korea's political polarization is intense and often deeply personal. Allegations of political favoritism or ideological allegiance can become powerful rhetorical weapons. Religious movements, especially those as publicly visible as the [Family Federation](#), often find themselves scrutinized through the lens of political loyalty rather than through their broader civic or spiritual missions. The article therefore positions itself as a corrective to these tendencies, contending that one cannot fairly assess [Mother Han](#)'s past without situating it within the full complexity of South Korea's shifting political landscape.

The [article](#) also touches on the legal charges currently facing [Hak Ja Han](#), noting that any judgment on their validity should be determined through judicial processes rather than public speculation. While it refrains from discussing the specifics of the case, the author warns against reducing a leader's decades-long public activities to the narrow frame of contemporary legal disputes. This argument rests on a broader theme: that historical context and long-term patterns of action must be evaluated alongside present controversies.

From a Western analytical standpoint, the article exemplifies a common tension in societies marked by deep partisan divides. Leaders – whether political, religious, or civic – are frequently assessed not on the full arc of their actions but on how they appear to align with the immediate concerns of the moment. The author pushes back against such reductionism, urging readers to examine the documentary record, to acknowledge episodes like the 2014 exposé that complicate easy narratives, and to judge [Mother Han](#)'s leadership in light of stated values such as public responsibility, interfaith collaboration, and peacebuilding.

Ultimately, the article is less a defense of [Mother Han](#) in a narrow sense and more an argument about how public memory and perception should operate in a polarized society. It urges a more nuanced and historically grounded approach – one that considers not only accusations or political climates, but also evidence, consistency of values, and the broader public impact of a leader's actions.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: [Mother Han](#) addressing a large prayer rally for the salvation of Korea and a unified Korean peninsula, 9th January 2022 in Cheonshim Peace World Center, Gapyeong, South Korea. Screenshot from live transmission by PeaceLink TV.

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