

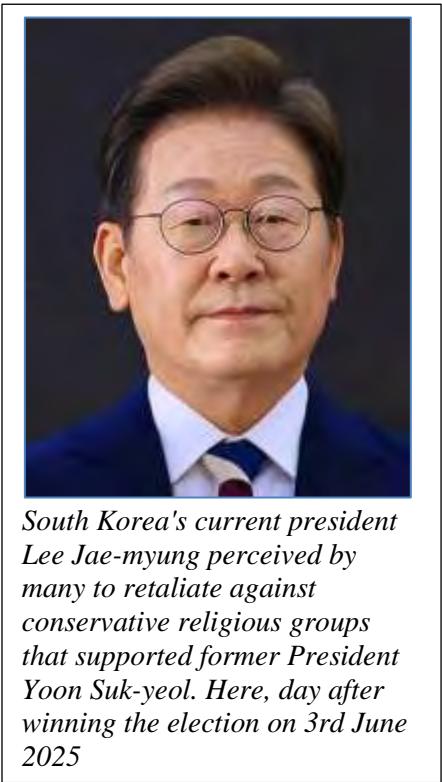
FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Trial Day 1: Holy Mother Han Denies All Allegations

Knut Holdhus
December 1, 2025



[Family Federation](#) members and observers from the USA outside Seoul Central District Court December 1, 2025

Mother Han (82) denies all allegations on day 1 of high-profile trial in Seoul amid disputes over alleged church-state collusion



South Korea's current president Lee Jae-myung perceived by many to retaliate against conservative religious groups that supported former President Yoon Suk-yeol. Here, day after winning the election on 3rd June 2025

The first full trial of [Family Federation](#) President [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) - by many called [Mother Han](#) - was held on 1st December at the Seoul Central District Court. The proceedings opened with firm denials from [Mother Han](#)'s legal team in response to a series of allegations involving unlawful political contributions, luxury gifts to figures connected to the presidential office, and what prosecutors describe as a pattern of improper church-state dealings.

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According to the large news agency Reuters, [Mother Han](#) (82) sat quietly through the proceedings, sometimes with closed eyes. She told the court she was not interested in politics,

"I had no interest in politics in this country [...] Every politician, people in religious and academic communities know me as a mother of peace."

The case, brought by the special counsel of prosecutors appointed by the current Lee Jae-myung (이재명) administration to

investigate matters connected to former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희), has drawn significant public attention due to its intersection of politics, religion, and questions about the misuse of religious funds.



The large daily Chosun Biz published 1st Dec. a report with the long headline "[Suspicion of Church-State Collusion - Unification Church President Hak Ja Han Denies Charges at First Trial - 'Actions Were Yoon Yeong-ho's Doing Alone'](#)". According to the article, [Mother Han](#)

was indicted and detained as part of a broader investigation into suspected "church-state collusion"

between senior figures in the [Family Federation](#) and individuals linked to the Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열) administration, the losing side in the June national snap election.



The specially appointed prosecutors allege that [Mother Han](#) and several close aides provided political funds to members of the People Power Party that governed the country from 2022 to 2025. It is alleged that the funds were part of an attempt to cultivate influence through concealed financial transactions and the provision of luxury goods. These actions, prosecutors argue, were aimed at securing political access and favorable treatment.



People Power Party lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong, here Dec. 23, 2024

According to Chosun Biz, the trial centers on several key accusations. Prosecutors claim that in early January 2022, [Mother Han](#) conspired with her then-chief secretary Jeong and former headquarters director Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호) to deliver 100 million won (US \$68,000) in cash to People Power Party lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동).

Additional allegations assert that organizational funds from the [Family Federation](#) were mobilized during March and April of the same year to provide over 140 million won (US \$95,300) in donations to various provincial party chapters. Furthermore, the special counsel contends that in July 2022, Yoon and others attempted to send luxury items - including a high-end Chanel bag and an expensive Graff necklace - to the First Lady through a figure known publicly as "Geonjin Beopsa", or Jeon Seong-bae (전성배), a spiritual adviser with connections to political elites.



Yoon Yeong-ho, Dec 6, 2020

The Chosun Biz writes that [Mother Han](#)'s legal team rejected every allegation during the opening session of the trial. They argued that the transactions and gift-giving described by prosecutors were not orchestrated by [Hak Ja Han](#) but were instead the unilateral actions of Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호), whom they characterized as someone driven by personal ambition rather than institutional loyalty. According to the defense, Yoon acted independently, failed to report his activities to senior [Family Federation](#) leadership, and continued to engage in questionable political dealings even after leaving the organization. [Mother Han](#)'s counsel insisted that she had no involvement in or knowledge of the alleged donation schemes or gift arrangements.



The special counsel, however, offered a sharply contrasting view. Park Ju-min (박주민) writes for Reuters that one of the prosecutors portrays [Mother Han](#) much like anti-religious activists do, as the "absolute power holder of the [Unification Church](#) at the top", claiming that not a single penny "can be moved without her approval."

Prosecutors maintained that the defendants had misused their positions to divert contributions from members of the [religious organization](#) into politically motivated expenditures. It was argued that using believers' money for such purposes constitutes a grave breach of trust and corrodes representative democracy by allowing private religious authority to attempt to shape public power through unofficial channels. Representative democracy assumes that each citizen has roughly equal political influence, and elected officials should respond to voters, not powerful institutions.

As the trial began, [Mother Han](#) appeared in court wearing a mask and arriving in a wheelchair, weeks after a brief [medical release](#) early in November for eye surgery. Her legal team requested periodic recesses due to her health condition. Despite the courtroom's strict seating limits - 33 places - more than a hundred [Family Federation](#) members and supporters gathered outside, prompting the court to livestream the proceedings in an overflow room.

The case continues to attract intense scrutiny as it touches on sensitive questions about political ethics, the relationship between religion and governance, and the responsibilities of leaders who oversee large and financially powerful religious institutions. The trial's outcome may influence how such interactions are regulated and interpreted in South Korea from now on.



According to France24, there will be a separate trial on 9th December where [Mother Han](#) will face charges of violating the Political Parties Act. Prosecutors claim that she had told over 2,000 members of the [Family Federation](#) to join for former President Yoon's People Power Party in time to influence the outcome of an important party convention.

Rev. Demian Dunkley, President of the [Family Federation](#) in North America, reported on X from the courthouse that the lawyers "were basically just setting up the rules of the game for the whole trial" to begin with. The feeling in the courtroom was professional and calm.

Dunkley reported that a prosecutor read out the indictments, using a PowerPoint presentation on a large screen. Several religious leaders from the USA concerned about the religious freedom issue of the trial and prolonged detention attended the opening day at Seoul Central District Court.

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Personal Federation, has been detained for more than 60 days and goes through similar trials and difficulties that I myself and many others suffered under the anti-religious communists in what was then Czechoslovakia.

At that time 18 members were sentenced to terms ranging from one year to four years and four months. I myself was in prison for three years and two months.

See also [18 Survived Years in Communist Prison, I Did Not](#)

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We experienced a similar humiliation and persecution as True Mother does now. At first, they put us in custody.

Every day, they interrogated us for 6-7 hours. This lasted for three months until the case was closed, and the file was submitted to the judge. We were held in a 2x3 m cell, with two or three other prisoners.



In communist prison for 3 years and 2 months: Juraj Lajda, here in the early 1970s. Photo: Personal



In communist prison 4 years and 4 months, despite serious health condition: Alžbeta (Betka) Danišková, here in February 2024. Photo: FFWPU

Our national leader at the time, Betka Danišková, was taken into custody even though she had previously been in a very serious car accident. Her health condition was very serious, she had problems with her spine, could not move properly and her condition required medical care. Despite all this, she was taken into custody and interrogated. For a whole month, she refused to testify due to health problems, which the investigator had to accept, even though he constantly urged her to participate in the interrogation.

After a year of investigation, the final appeal court was held. The judge promised her a suspension of her sentence and time to recover. However,

nothing of the sort happened. Finally, she spent 4 years and 4 months in prison.

As members, we were aware of her health condition and knew that she needed medical care. During the trial, some members asked the judge, to her dismay, if they could serve the sentence imposed on Betka themselves so that she could be released.

But these are the ways of communist and totalitarian regimes. No respect for human life.

In 1948, the communists came to power in the former Czechoslovakia. The first thing they did was to persecute and liquidate believers and religious people, political opponents, and any opponents whatsoever.

Our lawyers were surprised why we were being held in custody. During the investigation, they realized that we would not escape punishment. It was only a matter of the severity of the punishment.

The entire trial was staged with the clear intention of destroying our group. That was the assignment, and the prosecutors and judges proceeded accordingly.

After the fall of communism, all charges were dropped, and we were recognized innocent."

Reading Dr. Juraj Lajda's account of the 1970s – long interrogations, custody despite serious illness, predetermined verdicts, and a judicial process used to "destroy" a religious group – one is struck by how specific techniques of



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one is struck by how specific techniques of repression recur across time and regimes. Comparing that account to the recent, widely discussed situation involving prolonged interrogation of [Hak Ja Han](#) and other religious figures in South Korea highlights **several worrying similarities**, even as important differences between a communist police state and a modern constitutional democracy should be kept in view.



Detained long-term in South Korea: Pastor Son Hyun-bo, here Aug. 2025. Photo: Bitter Winter

First, the tactic of long, exhausting interrogation as a means of pressure appears in both narratives. Lajda reports daily sessions of six to seven hours for months – an approach aimed at breaking down resistance, **gathering statements that can be shaped into charges**, and signaling the state’s dominance. Recent reports describe unreasonable **long hours of questioning** by special prosecutors in South Korea. Regardless of legal framework or labels attached to the investigating body, prolonged interrogation wears on the human body and mind and can create the conditions for coerced or unreliable statements. The method’s psychological effect – humiliation, exhaustion, isolation – is itself a tool that, in both accounts, serves to intimidate not only individuals but an entire community.

Second, both accounts feature the targeting of vulnerable or medically fragile individuals. Lajda emphasizes Betka Danišková’s fragile health – a prior car accident, spinal problems, inability to move easily – and how those vulnerabilities were ignored or overridden by the authorities, resulting in a lengthy prison term despite promises to the contrary.



Alžbeta (Betka) Danišková. Photo (2023): Erna Mae Leskovjansky

The parallel with [Mother Han](#)’s repeated movement in a wheelchair after surgeries brings the same ethical question into relief: how does a justice system respond when those it prosecutes are in poor health? In the Czechoslovak account, medical need was subordinated to the objective of punishment. If similar disregard is present in South Korea – through prolonged detention or repeated, strenuous procedures imposed on someone with known health limitations – the similarity is not in legal form but in human cost.

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Third, the specter of preordained verdicts and instrumentalized trials forming part of a broader political assignment binds the two stories. Lajda recalls that their lawyers realized early on that the outcome was foreordained: “it was only a matter of the severity of the punishment.” The trial was “staged with the clear intention of destroying our group.” In contemporary contexts, citizens often interpret aggressive investigation and sustained public prosecutors’ activity against prominent figures as politically animated if there is a perception that prosecutorial zeal is selective. Even in democracies, when prosecutorial processes appear directed toward a preconceived outcome – particularly when cases involve public figures or religious leaders – perceptions of instrumentalized justice can arise and erode public trust.

Fourth, both situations involve the use of legal institutions to regulate or punish religion and religious actors. Under communism, repression of religious groups was explicit state policy; in Lajda’s telling, the first acts of the new regime were to “persecute and liquidate believers.”



Died in communist prison under mysterious circumstances: Marie Živná. Photo (1973): From the archive of FFWPU Slovakia.

In a democratic setting the legal basis for action against religious actors is more likely to be framed as rule-of-law enforcement – tax, fraud, or other statutory violations. But the function can appear similar when enforcement disproportionately targets a religious movement or its leadership and when the legal process is experienced by adherents as persecution. The distinction between legitimate law enforcement and persecution can blur when procedures are opaque, when outcomes seem prearranged, and when the rhetoric surrounding investigations is charged.

In sum, Dr. Lajda’s testimony and the contemporary allegations share troubling motifs: prolonged interrogation as a pressure tactic, apparent disregard for the health and vulnerability of detainees, and

apparent disregard for the health and vulnerability of detainees, and the experience that courts and prosecutions can function as instruments of group suppression.

Those parallels are meaningful because they highlight how procedural details – hours of questioning, detention decisions, medical accommodations, and the transparency of legal process – shape whether justice feels impartial or punitive. At the same time, important structural differences remain between a one-party authoritarian state and a democratic society; preserving those democratic safeguards requires a vigilant civil society, independent courts, and institutions willing to investigate alleged abuses of prosecutorial power.

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Testimony by Dr. Juraj Lajda, additional text by Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Left: Some of the members who were imprisoned in Czechoslovakia during crackdown by Communist authorities in 1973-1974. In the middle, are the prison photos of Marie Živná, who died while in prison. Photo: Screenshot from [“The Struggle for Truth and Justice”](#) Right: Artistic impression of [Mother Han](#) in detention cell. Illustration: Grok xAI, 4th November 2025.

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