

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: S Korea's Lobbying Probe Witch Hunt

Knut Holdhus  
December 14, 2025



A modern-day South Korean witch hunt. Illustration: Grok xAI



[Segye Ilbo](#)

**South Korean editorial warns against political interference, prosecutorial credibility, and religious bias in lobbying probe**

On 14th December, [Segye Ilbo](#), a major South Korean daily, published an editorial headlined "[The Investigation into Yoon Yeong-ho's Lobbying Must Not Be Influenced by Political Calculations or Religious Prejudice](#)". The piece addresses a rapidly expanding political and legal controversy involving allegations of lobbying by [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), a senior former official of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (also known as the [Unification Church](#)). At its core, the [editorial](#) argues that the investigation must be conducted strictly according to legal principles, free from political maneuvering, public hysteria, or prejudice against minority religions.



Investigated and detained long-term, since Aug. 12, 2025:  
Former South Korean First Lady  
Kim Keon-hee, here in  
Washington DC July 10, 2024

The [paper](#) writes that the case has gained national attention because it intersects with three sensitive areas in South Korean society: political corruption, the integrity of criminal investigations, and the delicate relationship between politics and religion. According to the [editorial](#), the controversy intensified after a special prosecutor's office – originally tasked with investigating allegations involving First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희) – was found to have delayed action on testimony suggesting that [Yoon](#) had lobbied figures from the ruling political camp as well as the opposition. When the special prosecutor later transferred the case materials to the police without explanation, accusations of selective or politically motivated investigation followed.

In Korea, special prosecutors are appointed precisely to avoid political interference, and their credibility rests on independence and impartiality. The [editorial](#) stresses that this credibility has been seriously damaged. If investigators appeared reluctant to pursue politically inconvenient leads, the entire investigation risks being seen as compromised. The [paper](#) therefore urges the National Police Agency's National Office of

Investigation to treat the special prosecutor's missteps as a warning and to reestablish public trust by conducting a thorough, unbiased inquiry focused solely on facts and evidence.



*Yoon Yeong-ho, Dec 6, 2020*

Beyond procedural concerns, the editorial expresses unease about the broader social atmosphere surrounding the case. It notes that unverified claims, rumors, and speculative interpretations are circulating freely, often amplified by media commentary.

While allegations that [Yoon](#) violated campaign finance or political funding laws are legitimate matters for investigation and adjudication, the [editorial](#) criticizes what it describes as guilt by association. Individuals are reportedly being stigmatized simply for having met [Yoon](#) socially or for participating in events organized by the [Family Federation](#), such as delivering congratulatory speeches. The [paper](#) characterizes this as a modern form of "witch hunt", warning that such behavior undermines the presumption of innocence.

A key theme of the [editorial](#) is concern over religious discrimination. The [Family Federation](#) is a minority religious group in South Korea and has long faced persecution. The [editorial](#) argues that treating interactions between politicians and religious leaders as inherently suspicious – solely because the religion is unpopular or unfamiliar – reflects intolerance rather than democratic maturity. It suggests that the scandal is being exploited either to score political points or to deliberately tarnish the image of the [religious organization](#) itself, rather than to pursue justice.



*President Lee Jae-myung, here, 25th August 2025, in the Oval Office*

The controversy escalated further when President Lee Jae-myung (이재명) during an official meeting publicly mentioned the possibility of dissolving religious corporations. Although he did not explicitly name the [Family Federation](#), the [editorial](#) notes that the context made the target clear.

This remark drew criticism because [Yoon](#)'s criminal case has not yet concluded even at the trial court level. In South Korea, where separation of powers is constitutionally emphasized, presidential comments on ongoing investigations or trials are highly sensitive. The [editorial](#) reminds readers that the Supreme Court has historically exercised extreme caution when dealing with the dissolution of religious entities, precisely to protect freedom of religion – a core constitutional value. Against this backdrop, the president's remarks are portrayed as ill-timed and potentially inappropriate.

The [editorial](#) also addresses the response of the [Family Federation](#) itself. Its Korean affiliate recently issued a [public apology](#),

acknowledging responsibility for causing public concern. The [organization](#) pledged to formalize political neutrality, improve transparency in its governance, and strengthen accountability within its leadership. It also promised to engage more openly with Korean society in an effort to rebuild trust. While the [editorial](#) welcomes these commitments, it cautions that they must not be superficial or merely tactical responses to public pressure. Instead, it calls for sustained, concrete reforms carried out with genuine resolve.

In conclusion, the [editorial](#) reiterates its central message: the truth of the [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) lobbying allegations must be determined through rigorous legal processes, not through political calculation, media sensationalism, or public prejudice. Allowing religious bias or partisan interests to influence investigations would not only distort justice in this case, but also weaken democratic norms more broadly. For the rule of law to prevail, the editorial insists, restraint, fairness, and institutional integrity must guide every step of the process.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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## S. Korea: Federation Pledges Reform After Apology

- December 13, 2025
- Knut Holdhus



In statement to South Korean media 11th Dec. 2025, Family Federation admits oversight failures, vows political neutrality and transparency

A statement in Korean issued by the [Family Federation](#) in South Korea to the Korean media on 11th December 2025. Many national media outlets commented on the press release and quoted from it. Translated from the [text on the Korean language website](#) of the [Family Federation](#).

### Statement by the Korean Branch of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification on Apology and Reform Plan

We offer our deepest apologies to the people of this nation for the great disappointment and concern we have caused.

**1) Despite our respect for the constitutional order, we failed to prevent individual misconduct.**

See also [Lobbying Probe Risks Becoming a Witch Hunt](#)

The [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) in Korea has been educated to clearly uphold and respect the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and the separation of religion and state as guaranteed by the [Constitution of the Republic of Korea](#), and we are a faith community that abides by these principles. We believe that the moment religion colludes with political power to pursue its own interests, it loses its essential nature. This has been an immutable core value that we have upheld



The Constitution of the Republic of Korea. Here, the first version enacted in 1948. Photo: NZ 토끼들/Wikimedia Commons.

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Our **religious organization** has never, at the institutional level, had any plan or intention to collude with political power or to gain benefits by supporting a specific political party. What the **Family Federation** genuinely seeks is harmony within the family, society, nation, and humanity – an objective that is unrelated to supporting or opposing any particular political party.

Nevertheless, we failed to properly manage and supervise our organization to ensure that these principles functioned effectively in actual operations.

The actions of former Headquarters Director Yoon Yeong-ho, which recently caused public controversy through his courtroom testimony, were an individual's unilateral and aberrant conduct. However, it is unquestionably the responsibility of the organization that such misconduct was not detected and prevented in advance.

As a result of this incident, the trust built over more than 70 years has been damaged, and most of all, we have deeply disappointed the people of this nation.

*Yoon Yeong-ho, here 9th August 2020. Screenshot from video by FFWPU*

**2) We deeply acknowledge our responsibility for inadequate internal management.**

Through this incident, our **Federation** has painfully recognized that our internal systems and management mechanisms for detecting and controlling misconduct within the organization were severely insufficient

Due to management failures at the global headquarters level of the **Family Federation**, the values of our teachings that have been upheld for more than 70 years have been undermined, and the faith and dedication of millions of believers around the world have been unjustly denigrated.

Most importantly, we solemnly acknowledge that we have caused disappointment and distrust among the public.

**3) We will undertake fundamental reforms to restore trust.**

Taking this incident as a painful lesson, the Korean **Family Federation** will place "the restoration of trust with Korean society and the recovery of public accountability" as the highest priority in the governance of our **religious organization**. To this end, we promise the public the following courses of action:

*The Korean HQ of the Family Federation in Cheongpa-dong, Seoul, here at the inauguration in May 2005. Photo: FFWPU*

**■ First, we will strictly uphold political neutrality.**

We will clearly declare organizational political neutrality and institutionalize regulations that operate a transparency verification system involving external experts, thereby fundamentally and systematically blocking any possibility of political intervention.

**■ Second, we will establish financial transparency and a sound governance structure.**

We will address the absence of internal oversight systems, which was the root cause of this incident, and dramatically strengthen monitoring mechanisms. We will entrust accounting audits to independent external institutions and introduce independent audit systems for key organizations to ensure transparency.

**■ Third, we will place public interest and social responsibility as the highest values in organizational governance.**

As a member of Korean society, we will further expand the scale of our social contribution activities in order to regain public trust, and we will thoroughly implement compliance education and strengthen ethical guidelines.

Dear citizens,

Our **Family Federation** will faithfully fulfill its social responsibilities.

Under the Constitution of the *Republic of Korea*, we are members of Korean society who have raised our children on this land, helped our neighbors, and lived our lives together with the broader community. Countless ordinary believers have quietly

Under the Constitution of the *Republic of Korea*, we are members of Korean society who have raised our children on this land, helped our neighbors, and lived our lives together with the broader community. Countless ordinary believers have quietly continued their lives of faith here.

We will make every possible effort to ensure that this incident does not lead to a situation in which even the conscience and lives of individual believers who have lived sincerely in this country are denied. [\[See editor's note below\]](#)

We will respond with concrete changes and actions so that we may be reborn as a faith community trusted by the people.

Once again, we sincerely apologize for causing social concern and anxiety.

**Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, Korean branch**

See also [Lobbying Probe Risks Becoming a Witch Hunt](#)

**Featured image** above: Rev. Song Yong-cheon reading the **Family Federation** statement on 11th December 2025. Screenshot from video by FFWPU.

**[Editor's note]** The expression "the conscience and lives of individual believers are

**denied**", is typical in formal apologies. "Denying conscience" (양심이 부정당하다) in this context, 양심 (conscience) refers to a person's moral integrity, sincerity of belief, ethical self-understanding as a law-abiding, good-faith citizen. To say that someone's conscience is "denied" means their good faith and moral intentions are questioned or dismissed, they are collectively portrayed as immoral, deceitful, or culpable because of actions they did not personally commit, their personal sense of right and wrong is socially invalidated. It does not mean loss of inner conscience, but rather public negation of moral legitimacy.

Here, in the expression "denying lives" (삶이 부정당하다), 삶 (life) does not refer to biological life. It refers to one's lived life as a citizen, one's everyday existence: work, family, social relationships, reputation, the accumulated effort of living "sincerely" over time.

To say a person's life is "denied" means their entire life history is reduced to or judged by a single affiliation, their social identity is stigmatized or delegitimized, and they face social exclusion, discrimination, or reputational harm.

When combined, the phrase means that **individual believers may be unfairly judged as morally suspect. Their personal dignity, sincerity, and social legitimacy may be undermined. They may suffer collective blame for actions of others.**

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