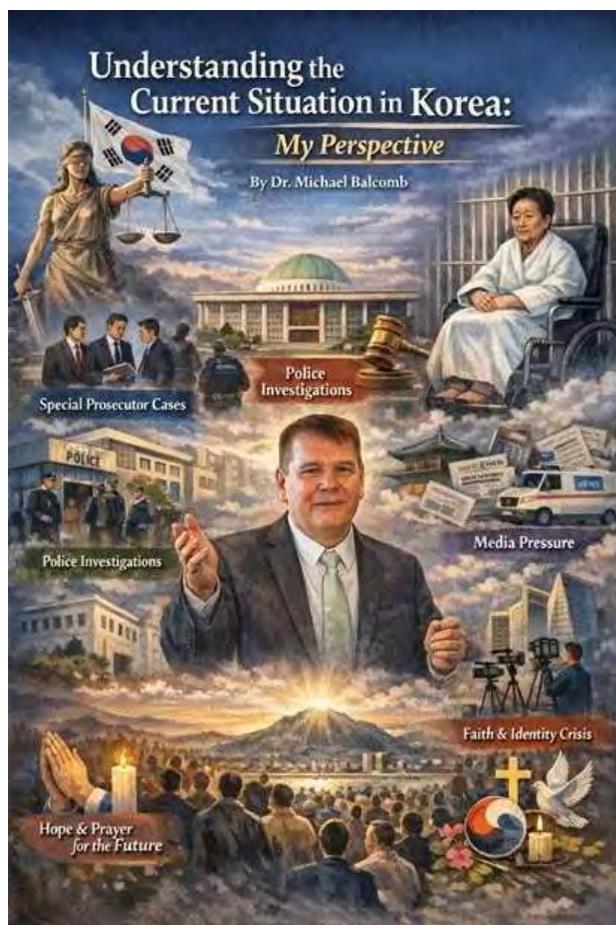


FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Michael Balcomb clarifies today's Korean issues

Knut Holdhus
January 30, 2026



Artistic impression of the content of Dr. Michael Balcomb's message January 28, 2026. Illustration: ChatGPT



Dr. Michael Balcomb, January 29, 2026

Understanding today's complex situation in South Korea: A well-informed observer's overview of recent developments

Extracts from a message by Dr. Michael Balcomb, President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) in Europe and the Middle East, given at an international prayer meeting for [Family Federation](#) members on Zoom 28th January 2026. Edited version.

See also [Court: Prosecutors' Overreach in Politicized Case](#)

Several people have asked me recently, "Can you explain what is happening in Korea?" Today is a good time to offer an overview, especially given the rapid developments in the news. I want to

emphasize that what follows is my personal interpretation based on publicly available information, some translated materials, and my own observations. It is not an official statement.

At present, there are several parallel issues unfolding in Korea - not just one. Five major areas are relevant to us: two Special Prosecutor investigations, a separate National Police inquiry, a legislative initiative concerning religious organizations, and an ongoing media narrative.

More broadly, I believe Korea is experiencing a deep national struggle over identity and direction. From a spiritual perspective, it is not surprising that significant tension arose after [True Mother](#) spoke about the [providential](#) role of the Korean people. In moments like this, opposing forces often intensify, but I remain hopeful that Korea will ultimately move toward a positive future.

The First Special Prosecutor Investigation

The first Special Prosecutor case was primarily focused on the former First Lady, Kim Keon-hee (김건희). According to publicly reported information, investigators examined whether gifts - including a handbag and a necklace - had been improperly provided. Former lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동)

was also investigated for allegedly receiving funds.



Former First Lady of the Republic of Korea Kim Keon-hee posing for a photo, April 2023, in the White House



Yoon Yeong-ho, Dec. 6, 2020

This investigation did not directly involve [True Mother](#). Earlier today (28th January), the Seoul Central District Court issued its rulings. The court found that the First Lady had received the items and imposed a 20-month prison sentence. Prosecutors had sought a longer term and have stated their intention to appeal.

The court also found [Dr. Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호) guilty in relation to providing the items and funds, sentencing him to [14 months](#) - less than the sentence prosecutors requested. Importantly, the court dismissed a charge related to alleged evidence destruction, stating that the Special Prosecutor did not have authority over that matter.

Finally, the court ruled on Representative Kweon's case, issuing a two-year sentence with an order to return the funds. He has indicated he will appeal.

As to motives, prosecutors alleged that [Dr. Yoon](#) was seeking political goodwill to support three initiatives: Korean government backing for a potential UN office in Asia, development of an economic zone in Cambodia, and the acquisition of a broadcast outlet. As I have said before, these goals, in themselves, are not improper; whether any personal benefit became involved remains unproven.

Much of the activity occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, when severe restrictions limited access to [True Mother](#) and reduced normal oversight mechanisms. The court has acknowledged that inadequate internal controls contributed to the situation. Steps have since been taken to prevent similar vulnerabilities.

Public commentary has sometimes portrayed the [Family Federation](#) as motivated solely by self-interest, but those familiar

with our history know of our longstanding commitment to interfaith cooperation, peacebuilding, and Korean unification.



The interfaith cooperation the movement of [Father Moon](#) and [Mother Han](#) is so well-known for: Here, from an interreligious conference in Seoul August 7, 2025

The Second Special Prosecutor Investigation

The second Special Prosecutor inquiry does involve [True Mother](#) directly. From my perspective, the broader political environment appears highly charged, and various religious leaders and civil society figures have faced scrutiny recently. Even large and well-established churches have experienced investigations or media pressure.

As most of you know, [True Mother](#) voluntarily responded to questioning but was later detained. As of

today, she has been held for 128 days. Her trial began on 1st December and is expected to continue several more weeks. Although some people have speculated about an imminent conclusion, this is not supported by available information.



Hak Ja Han, True Mother, at the beginning of her detention in September 2025



Raided by special prosecutors: The Korean HQ of the Family Federation in Cheongpa-dong, Seoul, here at the inauguration in May 2005



According to media reports, identified by President Lee Jae-myung as "pseudo-religion": the Shincheonji Church of Jesus

Due to concerns about her health - including reports that she has suffered falls in detention - another bail application has been submitted. A decision has not yet been announced.

National Police Investigation

A separate National Police probe commenced recently after [Dr. Yoon](#) stated that financial contributions had been made to individuals across the political spectrum. In response, opposition parties called for a broader inquiry, and a joint task force was formed.

Last week, additional searches were conducted at [Federation](#) facilities and related sites, including the detention center. It is expected that more individuals may be questioned, although no formal charges have been filed to date.

Political analysts in Korea have offered differing interpretations of these developments. Some suggest the administration wishes to demonstrate a strong anti-corruption stance; others highlight the complexity of ongoing legal processes. It is publicly known that various figures across major parties have previously faced corruption allegations.

Legislative and Policy Initiatives Concerning Religion

Recent government discussions have included possible legislative changes affecting smaller or unpopular religious groups. Some legal experts and commentators have expressed concern about the constitutionality of certain proposals, particularly regarding religious freedom. I will not make a legal judgment, but I note that these debates have generated significant discussion within Korean civil society.

Earlier this year, the President of South Korea held a luncheon with representatives of several major religious bodies and stated that they supported reforms. He specifically mentioned the [Unification Church](#) and Shincheonji [See editor's note below] as examples of organizations requiring oversight. Again, some public voices have raised concerns about potential overreach and the role of government in evaluating religious legitimacy.

These issues remind me of Pastor Martin Niemöller's well-known warning about remaining silent when minority groups are targeted. The principle is that restrictions placed on any religious group ultimately affect all.

The Media Environment

Media coverage of religious organizations has been intense, with many stories about the [Family Federation](#) appearing among the most-read articles today. A common theme in coverage is the suggestion that religious institutions should refrain entirely from political engagement. However, under the Korean constitution, religious believers have the same civic rights as all other citizens, including freedom of expression and association.

Although the current attention can feel overwhelming, it also means that almost everyone in Korea now knows about [True Mother](#), the Cheonwon complex [in Gapyeong], and our activities.

Even headlines about unrelated political matters sometimes link back to the [Federation](#), for better or worse.

Conclusion and Spiritual Perspective

Despite the challenging circumstances, I believe opportunities remain. [True Mother](#) has long expressed the desire to reach one third of the world's population, and historically, periods of adversity have sometimes produced unexpected breakthroughs. We can reflect on figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, [True Father](#) in Danbury, and even the Apostle Paul - individuals whose imprisonment became part of a larger narrative of transformation.



From a large prayer vigil in Gapyeong, South Korea in September 2025, soon after [Mother Han's](#) detention started

Yesterday, Ken Doo visited [True Mother](#), and she emphasized the importance of increased prayer at this time. Many of you join the daily vigil prayers, and I encourage you to continue.

We must also share the truthful and spiritual perspective behind these events. This is both a spiritual and societal struggle, and [True Mother](#) remains steadfast. From what I understand, she seeks not merely release, but clarity, vindication, and the establishment of truth.

Let us continue to pray for a fair process, especially concerning the pending bail decision. There is no compelling reason for continued detention, particularly given the dismissal of certain charges.

Thank you for allowing me the time to share my understanding of the current situation. Although the news is difficult, I remain hopeful, and I believe more developments are still to come in the weeks ahead.

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Text: Dr. Michael Balcomb

[Editor's note: Shincheonji, officially known as Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony, is a new religious movement founded in South Korea in 1984 by Lee Man-hee, who claims to be the promised pastor mentioned in the Bible's Book of Revelation. Shincheonji teaches that the Book of Revelation is being fulfilled through its church and that Lee Man-hee has received divine revelation to interpret it.]

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Court: Prosecutors' Overreach In Politicized Case

- January 29, 2026
- Knut Holdhus



How a Seoul court curtailed a high-profile investigation characterized by prosecutorial overreach into matters unrelated to the case

In an article 29th January, the large South Korean daily *Chosun Ilbo* pointed out how the special prosecutors went beyond their given authority by investigating matters unrelated to the case. The article by reporters Kim Eun-gyeong (김은경) and Lee Min-gyeong (이민경) was headlined "[Exclusive] Special Counsel Criticized Even in Yoon Yeong-ho Ruling: 'Separate Investigations Not Permitted Even if There Is Great Public Interest'".

朝鮮日報

The logo of the Chosun Ilbo

See also [S. Korea's Troubling Pattern of Selective Probes](#)

See also [Current Korean Situation: Context and Key Issues](#)

This *Chosun Ilbo* piece reports on a significant South Korean court ruling that places firm limits on the powers of a special prosecutor appointed to investigate allegations involving the country's former First Lady. At its core, the case highlights a tension common in democratic systems: how far prosecutors may go when public interest is intense, but the law narrowly defines what they are allowed to investigate.

To understand the issue, it is first necessary to explain what a "special counsel" (or special prosecutor) is in South Korea. Unlike ordinary prosecutors, a special counsel is appointed through a specific law passed by the National Assembly to investigate a defined set of politically



Former First Lady of the Republic of Korea Kim

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sensitive allegations. The law establishing the special counsel sets out, often in great detail, exactly which incidents, actors, and types of conduct may be investigated. The intention is to ensure independence from the regular prosecution service while also preventing an open-ended or politically motivated investigation.

Keon-hee (김건희). Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int

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In this case, the relevant statute is commonly referred to as the “Kim Keon-hee Special Counsel Act.” Kim Keon-hee (김건희) is the wife of former President Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열). The law authorized a special prosecutor to investigate specific allegations related to her alleged involvement in improper influence, election interference, or abuse of state power. Importantly, the law does not grant the special counsel general authority to investigate all misconduct that might be politically embarrassing or indirectly connected to powerful figures. Its scope is intentionally narrow.



Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호), here 30th January 2020. Screenshot from transmission by FFWPU.

The **article** centers on the first-instance criminal judgment of Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호), a former senior official of the **Family Federation**, a relatively large religious organization in South Korea. Yoon was accused of providing money or valuables intended to influence First Lady Kim. While the court did rule on Yoon's criminal liability, it also devoted substantial space – seven pages of its written decision – to **criticizing the special counsel's investigative approach**.

Specifically, the court found that the special counsel had gone beyond its legal authority by investigating allegations unrelated to the First Lady or to the crimes listed in the *Special Counsel Act*. One key example involved allegations that Yoon ordered the destruction of evidence related to alleged illegal overseas gambling by Hak Ja Han (한학자), the leader of the **Family Federation**, after learning that police were investigating the matter.

The judges concluded that this gambling-related conduct had no meaningful connection to the cases the special counsel was legally authorized to pursue. Even though the allegations involved influential individuals and attracted public attention, the court emphasized that public interest alone cannot justify expanding prosecutorial powers beyond what the law allows. According to the ruling, **interpreting the special counsel's mandate too loosely would violate constitutional principles, particularly those related to legality and limits on state power**.

The court underscored this point by referencing a provision of **the Special Counsel Act that imposes heavier penalties than ordinary criminal law** for obstructing the special counsel's work. Because such penalties are unusually severe, the court reasoned, the scope of the special counsel's authority must be interpreted strictly, not broadly. In other words, **when the law gives extraordinary powers or punishments, courts must be especially careful to ensure those powers are not stretched beyond their clear legal boundaries**.

Another critical aspect of the ruling is **the court's explicit statement that the Family Federation itself is not contemplated as a subject of investigation under the Kim Keon-hee Special Counsel Act**. The judges noted that the law does not treat the **religious organization** as an anticipated actor in state corruption or election interference.



Not a subject of investigation under the Kim Keon-hee Special Counsel Act: *The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification. here its logo.*



Warned not to expand inquiry into internal affairs of Family Federation: Min Joong-gi (민중기), the head of an army of special prosecutors with extensive investigative powers. Image: Grok xAI, Jan. 2026.

As a result, they warned that **investigators must exercise caution when attempting to expand an inquiry to cover the Federation's internal affairs**. Any such expansion, the court said, would require a clear and reasonable connection to the specific cases enumerated in the statute.

The court also rejected the special counsel's argument that it had jurisdiction because the case had been transferred from a regular prosecutors' office (the *Seoul Southern District Prosecutors' Office*). According to the judges, a transfer alone does not automatically grant the special counsel authority to investigate matters outside its legally defined scope. Investigative power flows from the statute itself, not from administrative handovers between institutions.

Even accepting the special counsel's factual claims as true – for example, that Yoon had close ties with the First Lady, senior ruling-party lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동), or high-ranking officials close to the former president – the court held that the alleged conduct still did not fall under any of the legally specified categories.

The judges methodically listed those categories, such as improper intervention in state affairs or personnel decisions, unlawful involvement in government contracts or administration, leakage of state secrets from the presidential office, or performing government functions without legal authority. The gambling-related evidence destruction, they concluded, fit none of them.

For a Western audience, this ruling may resemble debates seen in other democracies over special prosecutors or independent counsels. Courts often struggle to balance



People Power Party lawmaker **Kweon Seong-dong** (권성동), here 23rd Dec. 2024. Photo: 국민의힘TV / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 3.0 Unp. Cropped

independent courts. Courts often struggle to balance public demands for accountability against the rule of law's insistence that prosecutors act only within clearly defined legal limits. This decision sends a clear message: even in politically charged cases involving a president's spouse and powerful organizations, South Korean courts will enforce strict boundaries on special prosecutors' authority.

The [Chosun Ilbo article](#) is less about the guilt or innocence of any individual and more about institutional restraint. The court reaffirmed that extraordinary investigative powers must remain tethered to the law that created them, regardless of public pressure or political sensitivity.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: [Pointed out by South Korean court: Overreach by special prosecutors.](#) Illustration: Chat GPT, 29th January 2026.

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