

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan Tried to But Failed to Kill Our Church

Knut Holdhus
April 5, 2026



AI illustration of [Family Federation](#) members gathering on a Sunday in a park in Japan after [ban on the use of hundreds of church properties](#)



After ban on use of hundreds of church properties, members gather in bingo halls, parks, and living rooms and talk of stronger bonds in hard times

Tokyo, 4th April 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

[Part 1 of a Series] In Search of a Spiritual Anchor - One Month After the Dissolution of the Family Federation

Bonds of Faith Strengthen as Churches Close

Believers Shocked by Sudden Arrival of Liquidators

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

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See part 2 of the series: [Transparency Concerns: Non-Disclosure of Records](#)

It has been one month since the [Tokyo High Court upheld the order](#) to dissolve the religious corporation of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), and [liquidation procedures](#) began. While believers have [lost their places of worship](#) and prayer, some say that "the bonds between members have grown even stronger." This report follows developments among those connected to the group and its followers.

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On Sunday, 29th March, as cherry blossoms began to bloom, a group of people gathered on blue tarps in

a park somewhere in the Kanto region for a flower-viewing party. "Long time no see," they greeted one another warmly. Among the group - comprising several dozen people - were slightly older men and women, couples with small children, and university-aged young people. A man in his forties who appeared to be a leader encouraged the group, saying, "These are difficult times, but today let's enjoy games and lunch together," lifting everyone's spirits.



AI illustration of Sunday worship service held by [Family Federation](#) members in a park in Japan 5th April 2026

Those gathered were members of the [Family Federation](#), who until February had attended Sunday services at a local church facility. However, following the [High Court decision](#) on 4th March, a court-appointed liquidator seized the group's [religious facilities](#) nationwide.

On social media, many believers posted about the [loss of their churches](#) and the inconvenience it caused. At the same time, some reported holding services in each other's homes or renting spaces such as event rooms or karaoke rooms to gather.

As the timing coincided with the graduation and school entrance season, events celebrating children were also held in various locations. A woman in her 30s living in the Tokyo metropolitan area, whose child participated in a graduation event, said,

"My child will start elementary school this spring, so they seemed very happy. I want to make a fresh start and do my best."

In some cases, liquidators arrived at church facilities less than an hour after the [High Court decision](#) was reported.

"It was a huge shock that something so ordinary - gathering together and sharing meals - suddenly became impossible," said Kimihiro Okamitsu (岡光君啓 - 46), who served as the head minister of the Shinjuku Family Church (Takadanobaba, Tokyo), which had more than 400 members.

On 4th March, about 20 believers were watching a live broadcast from in front of the Tokyo High Court in the church sanctuary. When the [announcement of the group's dissolution](#) came shortly after 11 a.m., Okamitsu recalled, "The atmosphere was suffocating. No one in the sanctuary could move or speak for a while." At that moment, a staff member informed him that "15 to 20 representatives of the [liquidator](#) had already arrived and had been shown into the building," leaving him stunned.

The lawyers representing the liquidator explained that they would take over all bankbooks and cash in safes, verifying them against accounting records and data. They also announced that entry into the church facility would be prohibited. However, there was one issue: funerals for believers had been scheduled for the following two days.

Okamitsu negotiated with the representatives, and as an "exception" for funerals, permission was granted to proceed as planned - but with many restrictions. "We were told that as staff we were prohibited from conducting religious ceremonies, so we should participate only as individual believers," he said.

One believer asked to offer prayers in the prayer room during the funeral, thinking access might be allowed, but this request was denied. There were also negotiations to use the church facility as a relay venue for couples unable to travel to South Korea for a [mass wedding](#) ceremony scheduled in May, but permission for that was also denied.

Currently, Okamitsu has been instructed by the liquidator to remain at home, with little additional guidance. "Religious activities as individuals are not prohibited," he noted, so they have been managing by filming sermons on Sundays in borrowed homes for believers to watch online.



AI illustration of Sunday worship service held by [Family Federation](#) members in a park in Japan 5th April 2026

Regarding the difficulty of obtaining permission to conduct religious activities in church facilities, Okamitsu speculated,

"If it were solely the liquidator's decision, it's hard to imagine to be rejected to this extent. They may be trying to avoid having people gather at church facilities due to public opinion."

Kyoko Niiyama (66, pseudonym), a female believer with over 40 years of faith who has belonged to the same church since her marriage in 1992, emphasized,

"The emotional bonds among believers who are hurting have actually grown stronger."

On 20th March, Niiyama attended a barbecue event organized by believers. About 180 members gathered at a park in Tokyo. Many were seeing each other for the first time since the [dissolution was finalized](#), and Niiyama felt a strong sense of relief. She said with a smile.

"Some people were so moved that they spontaneously hugged each other. We may have [lost the building](#), but it made us realize that the foundation of our faith was right here."

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A 2026 Nobel Nomination And Democratic Maturity

April 4, 2026 • Knut Holdhus



Hak Ja Han’s Nobel nomination and international recognition spark reflection on South Korea’s democratic maturity and social complexity

On 31st March 2026, the Korean newspaper *Segye Ilbo* published a [religious affairs column](#) reflecting on a recent and somewhat controversial development: the [nomination](#) for the *Nobel Peace Prize* of Hak Ja Han (학자장) leader of the *Family Federation for*

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Mother Han Nominated For Nobel Peace Prize 2026

March 31, 2026

Prize of **Hak Ja Han** (한옥자), leader of the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** – in Korea often referred to as **Unificationism** (통일교). Rather than focusing narrowly on whether she deserves the prize, the **article** uses this moment to explore a broader and more meaningful question – what this **nomination** reveals about the current state and maturity of South Korean society.

The **article** begins with a simple but important observation: evaluating any prominent individual is rarely straightforward. This is especially true for figures whose lives intersect multiple domains such as religion, politics, and international activism. Such individuals tend to attract a wide range of opinions, often shaped by differing values, cultural contexts, and historical experiences. In this case, the **nomination of Hak Ja Han** – also called **Mother Han** – is not presented as a definitive endorsement of her legacy, but as a lens through which to examine how diverse perspectives coexist within a modern democratic society like South Korea.

A key point emphasized is that being **nominated** for the *Nobel Peace Prize* does not mean one will win it. Thousands of nominations are submitted annually, and Nobel Peace Prize nominations are not officially public. Publicizing a nomination is often regarded as a self-promotional or advocacy act by nominators or affiliated groups. That might be one reason why there has been little mention of the **nomination of Mother Han** in South Korean mainstream media.

Still, religious affairs correspondent Jeong Seong-su (정성수), the writer of the **Segye Ilbo column**, regards the **nomination** process itself as significant because it reflects, as he puts it, “evaluation grounded in values and standards shared by the international community.” The person who **nominated Mother Han**, Ján Figel, is highlighted as someone with considerable international credibility:

“Dr. Ján Figel served as the chief negotiator for Slovakia’s accession to the European Union and later became the country’s first European Commissioner – an influential figure. Furthermore, he has worked as the European Union’s Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief, addressing issues of religious freedom and human rights in the international community.”



Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (정성수). Photo (2025): [Segye Ilbo](#)



Jan Figel, European Union’s Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief 2016-2019, here in July 2023. Photo: [FOREF](#)

The **article** suggests that his background in European politics and his role in promoting religious freedom lend weight to his decision. His **nomination** should not, however, be seen simply as personal support, but as an assessment grounded in internationally recognized values such as peacebuilding, interfaith dialogue, and human rights.

According to the **column**, Figel’s **nomination** letter praises **Mother Han**’s lifelong efforts in promoting global peace, encouraging dialogue between religions, and advocating for strong **family values** as a foundation for social cohesion. The **nomination** letter also notes her involvement in

initiatives related to peace on the Korean Peninsula, as well as her **organization**’s engagement in cultural and diplomatic activities aimed at fostering international understanding. One specific example mentioned is the **Women’s Federation for World Peace**, an organization she founded, which holds consultative status with the *United Nations Economic and Social Council* (ECOSOC). This detail is used to illustrate how a **movement** that originated in Korea has gradually gained recognition within established international institutions.

However, the **article** does not ignore the fact that **Mother Han** and her **organization** remain controversial within South Korea. There are ongoing **legal issues** and continued public debate surrounding the **group**’s activities and influence. These domestic criticisms are

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the [group's](#) activities and influence. These domestic criticisms are presented not as contradictions to the [nomination](#), but as part of a larger democratic process. The author argues that disagreements and scrutiny are natural in a society where multiple value systems coexist. In fact, the presence of such debates is framed as evidence of South Korea's institutional strength and resilience. Over time, Korean society has developed mechanisms – legal, political, and social – for addressing complex and sensitive issues involving religion and public life.

The [column](#) encourages readers to view the [nomination](#) not as a final judgment, but as a meeting point of different evaluative standards. On one side are international perspectives that may prioritize certain contributions to peace and global cooperation. On the other side are domestic viewpoints shaped by local history, media coverage, and personal experiences. Rather than forcing a single conclusion, the article suggests that acknowledging this diversity of perspectives is itself a sign of a mature society.

This idea is further expanded by placing the discussion in the broader context of South Korea's rapid development. Within a relatively short period, the country has transformed from a war-torn nation into a major economic power with a well-established democratic system. Throughout this transformation, religion has played varied and sometimes conflicting roles. It has contributed to social unity in some instances, while in others it has been a source of controversy or division.

The important point, according to the [article](#), is that these experiences have collectively strengthened society's ability to handle complexity. Instead of suppressing differences, there has at least until recently been a growing tendency to address them through open discussion and formal procedures. Hopefully, such a situation is allowed to continue in spite of the current Lee Jae-myung (이재명) administration seemingly taking the country in an [authoritarian direction](#).

Finally, the [article](#) reflects on how South Korea today operates at the intersection of domestic and global standards. As the country becomes more integrated into the international community, it increasingly encounters situations where external evaluations differ from internal perceptions. These differences, however, are not necessarily harmful. The author argues that they can serve as opportunities for mutual reflection. International viewpoints can prompt Koreans to reexamine their own assumptions, while domestic experiences can provide deeper context for outsiders trying to understand Korean society.

The [nomination](#) of [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) is presented not as a simple story about one individual's achievements or controversies, but as a moment that highlights the complexity and maturity of South Korea as a society. It raises important questions about how different values are balanced, how public debates are conducted, and how a nation positions itself within a global framework.

Regardless of whether the [nomination](#) leads to an award, the [article](#) suggests that the real significance lies in how people, media, and institutions respond to what some may perceive as a controversial nomination. By “engaging thoughtfully with differing perspectives”, the writer is pointing to norms like open debate, tolerance of disagreement, and critical scrutiny. A controversial [nomination](#) is a stress test for democratic maturity. If society responds with reasoned debate rather than reflexive polarization, that's more valuable than the award outcome itself. The [nomination](#) becomes a case study in democratic culture rather than just a question of merit.

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Aggressively taking the country in an authoritarian direction:
Lee Jae-myung,
President of South Korea since 4th June 2025.
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Featured image above: [Mother Han speaking at a large peace rally in Seoul Olympic Stadium 11th November 2017](#). Photo: Graeme Carmichael

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