

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: World Clergy Leaders Condemn Japan's Attacks on Family Fed

Knut Holdhus
April 28, 2026



Archbishop George Augustus Stallings speaking at a symposium of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom (ICRF), April 27, 2026, in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, Japan



Church seizures and dissolution order condemned at Tokyo religious freedom symposium as faith leaders speak out against authorities doing what communist states do

Tokyo, 28th April 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

U.S. Religious Leaders Criticize the Japanese Government

ICRF Holds Symposium on Dissolution of Family Federation

by editorial staff of [Sekai Nippo](#)



An organization of experts working to promote freedom of religion, the International Coalition for Religious Freedom (ICRF), held a symposium chaired by Wakō Higashi (東和空) in Tokyo on 27th April on the theme of the dissolution of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)). Following the Tokyo High Court's [dismissal](#) on 4th March of an [immediate appeal](#) against the [dissolution order](#), criticism was raised over the situation in which church facilities across the country [were seized](#) on the same day.

Archbishop George Stallings of the United States strongly condemned the Japanese government, saying it was "madness to think that the government knows better than believers what a church should be." Expressing his concern, he added,

"At the core of religious freedom is the right to choose for oneself whom to worship. The idea that the government, rather than individuals, decides how much one should donate or contribute turns the government into a 'monster'."

He further appealed to religious leaders at the venue:

"If the government can dissolve the [Family Federation](#), then you are next. We must pray together, stand together, and not overlook the actions of the government."



Venerable Wakō Higashi



Pastor Hiroshi Kurose of the Tokyo West Baptist Church

Pastor Hiroshi Kurose (黒瀬博) of the Tokyo West Baptist Church emphasized,

"[Closing church buildings](#) and [confiscating property](#) are exactly what communist states have done - it is a national crime."

Addressing members of the [Family Federation](#), he urged,

"You should record your experiences for the future. Someday, people in the future will surely deliver a proper judgment."

Participants from the Buddhist community also stated that "Japan's religious world is in a dire state." They expressed their views, including describing the [Tokyo High Court's decision](#) as "judicial suicide".

In addition, members of the [Family Federation](#) gave reports on the actual situation surrounding the dissolution. Kimihiro Okamitsu (岡光君啓), who is in charge of a church facility in Shinjuku, Tokyo, pointed out that not only access to church facilities but also believers' marriages and funerals have been affected. He stated,

"It is a fundamental human right to wish to conduct life's most important rites at the center of one's faith."

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On 27th April 2026, the liberal South Korean daily Hankyoreh carried a [news article](#) penned

by Kim Su-yeon (김수연) about [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), a former high-ranking [Family Federation](#) leader, receiving a heavier sentence in the appellate court.



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The court delivered a significant ruling in what it terms a high-profile "political corruption case" involving [Yoon](#) and figures connected to the country's 2022 presidential election. The case centers on the former senior official of the religious movement in Korea often called [Unificationism](#) (통일교) – formally known as the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#). He was accused of attempting to influence political outcomes and gain government favor through unlawful financial activities and luxury gifts.

In the second trial (appeal), the Criminal Division 6-1 of Seoul High Court, with Kim Jong-woo (김종우) as Presiding Judge, increased [Yoon's](#) prison sentence to one year and six months. This marked a longer sentence than the one year and two months he received in the [initial trial](#). The reason for the increase was that the appellate court found [Yoon](#) guilty of an additional charge – occupational embezzlement – which had not been fully recognized in the [first ruling](#).



Min Joong-gi (민중기), the head of an army of special prosecutors with extensive investigative powers. Image: Grok xAI, Jan. 2026.

The [Yonhap News Agency](#) reported the same day that the legal team of special prosecutor Min Joong-gi (민중기) had demanded that [Yoon](#) be sentenced to four years behind bars. Critics view the harshness of the request by the special prosecutors appointed by the current left-leaning administration as part of its revenge on the former administration and its supporters. Former president [Yoon Suk-yeol](#) (윤석열) was on 19th February this year



sentenced to life imprisonment.

According to the [Hankyoreh article](#), the court concluded that [Yoon](#) had engaged in multiple forms of unlawful conduct. These included violations of South Korea's [Political Funds Act](#) and the [Improper Solicitation and Graft Act](#) (often referred to as the [Anti-Graft Act](#)). Specifically, he was sentenced to six months in prison for illegally providing political funds, and an additional year for bribery-related offenses and embezzlement tied to his

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for bribery-related offenses and embezzlement tied to his use of **Unificationism** resources.

At the heart of the case is the allegation that the **Family Federation** sought to expand its political influence during South Korea's 20th presidential election in March 2022. According to the court, the leadership of the **religious organization** viewed the election as a strategic opportunity. It allegedly supported a candidate who would be favorable to its interests, offering organizational backing and resources in return for future policy support and influence once that candidate took power.

The court described this as a deliberate and organized effort, led from the top levels of the **religious organization**. The broader goal, the appeals court claimed, was to secure government support for projects linked to **Unificationism** and to strengthen its long-term political influence in South Korea. Even if these efforts did not ultimately succeed, the court emphasized that the attempt itself was serious enough to damage public trust.



He was given life sentence, she 20 months in what some perceive as revenge on political opponents: Former South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and First Lady Kim Keon-hee, here in Tokyo 16th March 2023. Photo: [首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

A key part of the case involved expensive gifts given to Kim Keon-hee (김건희), the wife of ousted conservative president Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열). **Yoon Yeong-ho** (not related to the former president) was found to have arranged the delivery of luxury items – including a Chanel handbag worth approximately 12.7 million won (around \$9,000 USD) and a Graff necklace worth over 62 million won (around \$45,000 USD). These items were reportedly delivered through an intermediary, identified as a shaman figure, with the intention of gaining favorable treatment for the **religious organization**.



Kweon Seong-dong (권성동), here portrait January 2025. Photo: [국민의힘TV / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

In addition, **Yoon** was convicted of unlawfully providing 100 million won (roughly \$70,000 USD) in political funds to Kweon Seong-dong (권성동), a lawmaker from the ruling *People Power Party*, in January 2022, shortly before the presidential election. This payment was allegedly linked to a request for support for a **Unificationism**-related event, further reinforcing the prosecution's argument that **Yoon** was attempting to use money and influence to shape political outcomes.

One of the most important differences between the **first** and second trials concerned the charge of occupational embezzlement. In the **original ruling**, the court had

acquitted **Yoon** of part of this charge. The reasoning was that, at the time one of the gifts was delivered, Kim Keon-hee (김건희) was not yet officially the spouse of a sitting public official, but rather the spouse of a president-elect. Because of this technicality, the *Anti-Graft Act* was considered not to apply.

However, the appellate court rejected this reasoning. It argued that the timing of the gift – whether before or after the presidential inauguration – did not meaningfully change the nature of the act. Using funds from a **religious organization** to give gifts intended to influence a future president, the court said, is inherently problematic regardless of formal titles.

The judges further stated that it would be unreasonable for criminal responsibility to hinge on such timing details. Even if certain legal provisions did not strictly apply in a narrow sense, the broader legal and ethical implications remained serious. From the perspective of maintaining a fair and trustworthy legal system, such conduct could not be accepted.

At the same time, the court did acknowledge some mitigating factors. **Yoon** had cooperated with investigators and had testified in related cases, helping authorities better understand the broader network of activities. This cooperation was taken into account when determining his final sentence.

Not all charges were upheld, however. The court maintained an earlier decision to dismiss allegations that **Yoon** had been involved in destroying evidence related to separate suspicions about overseas gambling by a senior **Unificationism** leader. It ruled that those matters fell outside the scope of the special prosecutor's investigation. The court also rejected claims from **Yoon's** defense that certain evidence had been obtained illegally, as well as arguments from both sides that the sentencing was unfair.

Overall, the ruling underscores South Korea's strict stance on political corruption, especially when it involves powerful organizations perceived to have supported the former conservative administration and made attempts to influence elections and government policy. It's worth noting, however, that in a related case involving a leading politician from the current leftwing administration, the case was closed for "lack of prosecutable evidence".

Even among the supporters of current President Lee Jae-myung (이재명), there are those who are afraid that his revenge on the former administration, and anyone suspected of supporting it, has gone too far. The governing coalition controls the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, at the same time that Lee has a steel grip on his own party. But if you wield power like a sword to cut down your opponents, it will inevitably be stained with blood – and may, in time, turn back and wound you.

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Using the control of all branches of government to take South Korea in an authoritarian direction?

Lee Jae-myung,
President of South Korea
since 4th June 2025.

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