FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Americans Demonstrate in Japan - Give Japanese Right to Believe

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May 9, 2026

Hebangja Kisile from Chicago street preaching in Shibuya, Tokyo on April 29, 2026

Sekai Nippo

"We will not be silent": U.S. pastors and Family Federation believers rally for religious freedom in Tokyo

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[News Close-Up]

"Shock" at Japan's Dissolution Verdict

U.S. Pastors and Family Federation Believers Visit Japan

by Takahide Ishii (石井 孝秀)

American and Japanese members of the Family Federation at Shibuya, Tokyo on April 29, 2026

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Two months have passed since the Tokyo High Court upheld the dissolution order against the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly the Unification Church). During this period, the religious organization filed a special appeal with the Supreme Court. Amid growing protests from believers, Christian pastors and Family Federation members from overseas have traveled to Japan one after another, voicing objections to the Japanese government's response while also encouraging members in Japan.

"In these difficult circumstances, I'm deeply moved by the courage and determination shown by second-generation believers in Japan. From an American perspective, it's unimaginable that something like this could happen."

Those were the candid remarks of Naokimi Ushiroda (後田直君), a second-generation believer who has lived in the United States for approximately 40 years.

Following news of the dissolution of the religious corporation in Japan, around 100 second-generation believers from the American branch of the Family Federation visited Japan together with Christian pastors in late April. According to Ushiroda, the initiative was devised by the American side only about two weeks earlier and was made possible through support from American believers.

Many of the visiting second-generation believers were Japanese Americans, and although Ushiroda himself is an American citizen, his parents are Japanese. He explained:

"There are many Japanese believers in the United States as well, and there is a strong desire to support Japan."

Members of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification from the United States during panel discussions with members from Japan in Tokyo on April 29, 2026

On 29th April, the American second-generation believers held a gathering in Shibuya, Tokyo together with members of the "Association of Second-Generation Believers Protecting the Human Rights of Believers," a group formed by second-generation believers in Japan. They exchanged opinions and participated in panel discussions.

Many participants wore white shirts bearing the words "FAITH FREEDOM PEACE," renewing their resolve to seek religious freedom.

During the panel discussion, an American participant, Jinil Fleischman, asked:

"How are believers in Japan continuing to maintain their faith under these circumstances?"

In response, association member Sayaka Kurahashi (倉橋紗弥香) said:

"Our faith has not changed, nor have the communities and relationships we have built among believers. Every day we continue striving with the determination to preserve them."

The group's representative, Nozomi Kojima (小嶌希晶), commented:

"Through this experience, second-generation believers in Japan have had an opportunity to seriously reflect on why they have faith and why they believe in God."

Five Christian pastors from the United States also attended the gathering and shared their perspectives.

Bishop Ron Thomas, who traveled from Nevada, stated that he felt "a strong sense of shock" regarding the Japanese government's decision.

He then encouraged the second-generation believers present by saying:

"Looking back at biblical history, persecution has always become an opportunity for the expansion and growth of the church. Whenever the church has faced trials, God's providence has continued to advance."

Bishop Edward Barnett from Greater Grace Family Ministry, Washington D.C. at symposium in Tokyo on April 29, 2026

Bishop Edward Barnett, who came from Washington DC to attend the gathering, pointed out that only the corporate entity as a "business organization" could be dissolved. He emphasized:

"The church itself is not an organization created on paper. It is something born through the spirit of God, and it can never truly be dissolved."

He further stated:

"Religious freedom is the right to unrestricted access to God. It is an inalienable supernatural right - the freedom to worship, praise, pray, teach, and learn without interference from anyone."

Afterward, the American second-generation believers joined "NABI", a campaign group centered on Japanese second-generation believers, to begin street preaching in front of Shibuya Station.

Participants carried red heart-shaped balloons while making their appeals in front of the famous scramble crossing crowded with holiday pedestrians.

One American second-generation believer declared:

"We understand there are forces trying to silence us. But we will not remain silent. We will continue raising our voices and continue praying."

Another member offered a prayer in English:

"We want to melt the coldness remaining in the hearts of people in Japanese society and through every effort possible, help them understand the true nature of the Family Federation."

Genryu Kageyama (影山権龍) referred to the various negative reactions believers have experienced in Japanese society following the judicial decision to dissolve the organization. However, he stressed:

"In return, we gained something very important: pride in our faith."

Regarding the arrival of many believers from the United States, he added:

"We realized that we are never alone. No matter how much persecution or religious oppression comes from the state, our faith will not change."

Reported by Takahide Ishii (石井 孝秀)

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When Believers See A Mother, Not A Manager

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Kingdom Is Here And Advancing: Bishop's

for ordinary corporations or businesses”

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

세계일보

The logo of the Segye Ilbo

The South Korean daily Segye Ilbo published on 8th May 2026 an article titled *“The Sacred Weight of Motherhood and Religious Assets in Our Time”*. The opinion piece by religion reporter Jeong Seong-su (정성수) is a strongly sympathetic commentary defending Hak Ja Han (한학자 against ongoing scrutiny by South Korean investigative authorities regarding the management and use of religious funds.

The author argues that government investigators are making a serious mistake by evaluating the finances of a charismatic religious movement according to the standards used for ordinary corporations or businesses. To the writer, this approach misunderstands the spiritual nature of religious leadership and ignores the emotional bond between believers and their leader.

In South Korea, religion often occupies a uniquely influential place in public life. A religious leader is not always viewed simply as administrator of an institution or manager of an organization, but may be regarded by followers as a spiritual parent whose authority is deeply personal, symbolic, and emotional.

This cultural and religious context is important for understanding Jeong’s opinion column about Hak Ja Han, the co-founder and leader of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*, which in Korea often is referred to simply as Unificationism (통일교).

The article begins with a reflection on the meaning of parenthood, especially motherhood, in Korean culture. May in Korea is associated with family celebrations such as Parents’ Day, and the author uses this atmosphere to evoke feelings of gratitude and longing toward parents who sacrifice themselves for their children. Parents are portrayed as people who willingly suffer hardship so their children can live more comfortably. This idea of selfless, downward-flowing love becomes the central metaphor of the essay.

The writer then connects this idealized image of motherhood to Hak Ja Han herself. Many members of her religious movement refer to her as “True Mother” or “Mother of Peace”, titles that reflect a theological understanding of her role. According to the article, followers around the world feel pain and sadness when they see her investigated by authorities because they view the investigation not simply as a legal matter, but as an attack on a maternal and spiritual figure they deeply revere.

A

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A woman offering a donation at a meeting. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 10th February 2025.

major argument in the opinion piece concerns the nature of religious money. The author emphasizes that funds within founder-centered religious movements cannot be understood in the same way as the finances of ordinary companies. In a corporation, money belongs to shareholders or legal entities and is managed through standardized accounting systems. But in charismatic religious communities, the writer argues, donations are given not merely to maintain offices or pay salaries. Instead, believers see their contributions as offerings dedicated to a spiritual mission, a vision for peace, or the fulfillment of sacred purposes associated with the movement's goals, the founder's vision, and religious leadership.

The article describes these funds as "providential funds" (섭리 자금), meaning money devoted to carrying out a divine or spiritual mission. From this perspective, the resources controlled by the religious leader are not personal luxury assets, nor are they ordinary corporate accounts. Rather, they are viewed as part of a sacred trust between the leader and the believers.

Religion reporter Jeong further argues that many religions throughout history were not fully institutionalized while their founders were alive. During the lifetime of a founder, movements often rely more on personal authority, charisma, and symbolic leadership than on rigid administrative systems. Only after the founder's death do many religious organizations become more bureaucratic, regulated, and corporate in structure. Therefore, the author claims, it is historically and religiously naïve to apply modern business standards too rigidly to a living religious movement led by a charismatic figure.

The article also warns that such investigations could create dangerous precedents. If governments use ordinary corporate accounting logic to judge religious organizations without considering their theological and historical context, the writer fears this could eventually become a political tool for targeting unpopular or controversial religions.

At the House of Slaves on the island of Gorée in Dakar, Senegal on 19th January 2018, Hak Ja Han, Mother Han, praying for the liberation of the souls of the estimated 10-12 million victims of the Atlantic slave trade. According to UNESCO, from the 15th to 19th century, Gorée was the largest slave trading centre on the African coast. Photo: FFWPU

To strengthen the portrayal of Hak Ja Han as a

To strengthen the portrayal of Hak Ja Han as a humanitarian and maternal figure, the article highlights several examples of her international activities. One major example is her visit to Gorée Island in Senegal, a place historically connected to the Atlantic slave trade. According to the article, she wept there as though mourning children abandoned in the suffering of history. The author interprets her emotional response not as political theater, but as an expression of universal motherhood and compassion for humanity.

The essay also points to humanitarian efforts connected to her leadership, including the donation of a relief ship called *Peace Wings* to help residents of the island who lacked adequate medical services. The author uses this example to argue that financial resources under her management have been used for humanitarian purposes rather than personal gain.

Another major example discussed is the *Sunhak Peace Prize*, an international award established to honor individuals who contribute to peace, human welfare, and future generations. The article presents the prize as evidence that religious wealth can serve broader public purposes beyond the interests of a single organization. In the author's view, this demonstrates that Hak Ja Han sees herself not as an owner of wealth, but as a caretaker temporarily entrusted with resources meant to benefit humanity.

The column also refers to painful legal disputes within her own family over church-related assets. Rather than interpreting these disputes as evidence of internal corruption or personal greed, the writer frames them as proof of her determination to protect what followers believe are sacred public assets built through the sacrifices and devotion of believers worldwide. The article emphasizes that she often prioritized missionaries and suffering people over even her own biological family members, reinforcing the image of self-sacrificing motherhood.

Toward the end, the tone becomes more openly political and cautionary. The author argues that the investigation risks appearing like a "targeted investigation" aimed at damaging the symbolic legitimacy of the movement while harming ordinary employees and families connected to it. Although the article acknowledges that law enforcement must remain impartial, it insists that authorities should also exercise restraint and respect toward the unique historical and religious character of faith communities.

Ultimately, the article is less about accounting or legal technicalities than about competing ways of understanding religious authority. One side sees financial management primarily through the lens of legal accountability and institutional transparency. The other sees religious leadership through the lens of spiritual symbolism, sacrificial motherhood, and collective mission. The writer clearly favors the latter interpretation and urges society to look beyond stereotypes or public hostility toward religious groups that may be controversial.

For non-Korean readers, the article offers insight into how religious devotion, Confucian-influenced ideas of parenthood, charismatic authority, and modern legal institutions can collide within contemporary Korean society. Whether one agrees with the article's arguments or not, it reflects a worldview in which religion is not merely organizational, but deeply familial, emotional, and symbolic.

***Text**: Knut Holdhus, editor*

Featured image *above: Hak Ja Han, Mother Han 14th August 2022 in Gapyeong, South Korea. Photo: Graeme Carmichael*

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