

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Holy Mother Han Appeal Tests S Korean Prosecutorial Authority

Knut Holdhus
September 7, 2026



[Mother Han](#) appeal testing prosecutorial authority. Illustration: Chat GPT



Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#), aka. [Mother Han](#), as she appeared at Seoul Central District Court August 31, 2026

Mother Han appeal to reexamine convictions and prosecutorial authority as defense seeks acquittal, prosecution seeks harsher sentence

The first-instance verdict against [Hak Ja Han](#), leader of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - commonly referred to in South Korea as [Unificationism](#) - has now been challenged by both the defense and the prosecution. According to South Korean media reports published on 7th September 2026, she filed an appeal on 4th September against her [two-year prison sentence](#).

The special prosecutor's team, headed by Min Joong-gi (민중기), filed [its own appeal](#) the

same day, seeking a more severe outcome. The case will therefore proceed to the appellate court, where both sides will challenge different aspects of the Seoul Central District Court's ruling.



Yonhap News, South Korea's designated public news agency and the country's largest wire service

The reports also make clear that the [first-instance judgment](#) was considerably narrower than the full range of allegations brought by the special prosecutor. While the court found [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) - also called [Mother Han](#) - guilty of several offenses connected with political funds, gifts to former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희) and occupational embezzlement, it acquitted her on some embezzlement allegations and dismissed other charges on jurisdictional grounds, finding that they lay outside the special prosecutor's legally defined investigative mandate.

[Yonhap News](#): Both sides appeal

[Yonhap News](#), in a report by Lee Seung-yeon (이승연), states that [Mother Han](#) submitted her appeal to

the Seoul Central District Court's Criminal Division 27 on 4th September. Former [Family Federation](#) World Headquarters Director-General Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호), former Chairman's Office Director Jeong Won-ju (정원주), and former Finance Director Lee also appealed that day.

[Yonhap](#) explains that the special prosecutor's team had likewise [appealed on 4th September](#), arguing that the first-instance court had made errors in its interpretation of the law and had imposed inappropriate sentences.

The [article](#) summarizes the [punishment](#) imposed on [Mother Han](#) as one year for violating the Political Funds Act and a further year for violating the Anti-Graft Act and committing occupational embezzlement. At the same time, the court rejected some of the embezzlement allegations and dismissed charges concerning alleged obstruction of evidence destruction and alleged embezzlement related to election funding for foreign politicians. In these cases, the judges concluded that the allegations fell outside the scope of the special prosecutor's statutory authority.

[Yonhap](#) also reports that, on the day after the 31st August [sentencing](#), the court extended [Mother Han's suspension of detention](#) until 30th September at 6 p.m., citing her health. The special prosecutor's team has separately appealed [this decision](#). Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호) received a six-month prison sentence, while Jeong Won-ju and the former Finance Director received suspended prison terms.

[News1](#): Details of the alleged political lobbying



News1 (뉴스1), South Korea's largest private news agency and wire service

[News1](#), in a report by Han Su-hyeon (한수현), provides more detail about the allegations underlying the convictions. According to the article, [Mother Han](#), Jeong Won-ju (정원주) and Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호) were accused of providing 100 million won in political funds to former People Power Party lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동) in January 2022, as well as arranging approximately 144 million won in split donations to People Power Party lawmakers and others.

The [report](#) also describes the allegation that [Mother Han](#) and Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호) were involved in providing luxury goods worth more than 80 million won to Kim Keon-hee, including a diamond necklace from the British jeweler Graff. These purchases, together with the political contributions, formed part of the prosecution's broader allegations that [Family Federation](#) funds had been misappropriated for political purposes.

[News1](#) further reports that [Mother Han](#) and Jeong Won-ju (정원주) were accused of obtaining information in October 2022 about an investigation into overseas casino gambling in Las Vegas and subsequently instructing Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호) to destroy evidence.

 <i>Suspended sentence for Jeong Won-ju here on Jan. 19, 2025</i>	 <i>Six months: Yoon Yeong-ho, former director general of the international headquarters of the Family Federation, February 11, 2022</i>
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The [article](#) gives additional information about the other defendants' sentences. Jeong Won-ju (정원주) received eight months' imprisonment, suspended for two years, for each of the Political Funds Act and Anti-Graft Act/occupational embezzlement charges. Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호) was sentenced to six months in prison, while Yoon's wife received six months, suspended for one year.

[News1](#) also provides background on [Mother](#)

[Han's](#) detention status. She was placed under suspension of detention on 27th March, after health problems, and the measure was repeatedly extended. Following the 31st August verdict, the court granted [another extension](#), while the special prosecutor's team appealed against the [decision](#).

What the appeals mean

The 7th September reports collectively show that the [first-instance ruling](#) is far from the end of the case. [Mother Han](#) and the other defendants are challenging the convictions and sentences, while the special prosecutor is [seeking a harsher punishment](#) and contesting the court's interpretation of the limits of its investigative authority.

The appellate court will therefore be asked to examine both the convictions themselves and the scope and severity of the first-instance judgment. An important feature of the appeal is that the prosecution is not simply arguing that the two-year sentence was too lenient; it is also challenging the court's treatment of several allegations that were dismissed because they were considered outside the special prosecutor's statutory remit.

For the time being, [Mother Han](#) remains outside custody under the court's [suspension-of-detention order](#), which is currently scheduled to remain in force until 30th September at 6 p.m., unless that [decision](#) is altered on appeal.

The 7th September reports do not indicate when the appellate court is expected to deliver its ruling.

The Family Federation's grounds for appeal

The reasons for [Mother Han](#)'s appeal received less attention in the media reports from 4th to 7th September than the special prosecutor's arguments for seeking a harsher sentence. However, statements issued by the [Family Federation](#) immediately after the 31st August verdict make the defense position clearer.



Local Segye, a South Korean online news media outlet and newspaper, founded on the editorial philosophy of "View news from all corners of the country at a single glance". It operates primarily as a sister publication of the major daily newspaper Segye Ilbo

According to the online news media outlet and newspaper [Local Segye](#) (로컬세계) on 31st August, the [Federation](#) said it could not accept the court's finding that [Mother Han](#) had directly instructed the alleged activities or had been aware of and approved their illegal purpose. It also said there was no objective evidence establishing such direct instructions and indicated that the application of the legal concept of joint criminal responsibility would be challenged in the appellate court.

This position is consistent with the defense arguments presented during the trial. Yonhap News wrote already in an [article](#) on 1st December 2025 that [Mother Han](#)'s lawyers repeatedly challenged the reliability of former World Headquarters Director-General

Yoon Yeong-ho's testimony and argued that he had acted independently. They also maintained that [Mother Han](#) had neither instructed nor been informed about the luxury gifts allegedly delivered to Kim Keon-hee (김건희). [Mother Han](#) herself stated in court in June that she had neither given Kweon Seong-dong (권성동) the 100 million won nor provided gifts to Kim Keon-hee, attributing the allegations to actions and statements by Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호).

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Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo Criticizes Two-Year Prison Sentence for Hak Ja Han as “Religious Persecution”



Logo of the
Sekai Nippo

Family Federation Says Cash Found at Home Was “Not Embezzled”

by Yuya Kawase (川瀬 裕也)



Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#), aka. Mother Han, being wheeled into the courtroom by her grandson Moon Shin-chul at Seoul Central District Court 31st August 2026. Photo: Dr. Michael Balcomb, resolution improved by ChatGPT, 6th September 2026

Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has criticized the [two-year prison sentence](#) imposed on [Hak Ja Han](#), leader of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU, formerly the [Unification Church](#)) in South Korea, saying that it could lead to “religious persecution.” In connection with the case against [Han](#), approximately 26 billion won (about \$19 million US dollars) in cash was found in a safe and elsewhere at her home, and investigative authorities subsequently brought additional charges alleging that she had embezzled funds belonging to the [religious organization](#). The [Family Federation](#), however, has rejected the allegation, arguing that the money constituted “religious offerings” and that there was no evidence that [Han](#) had diverted the funds for personal use.

See also: [Mike Pompeo Calls Probe of Co-Founder “Lawfare”](#)

See also [Mother Han Appeal Tests Prosecutorial Authority](#)

On 31st August, the [Seoul Central District Court](#) sentenced [Han](#) to [two years in prison](#) for violations including the [Political Funds Act](#) and the [Improper Solicitation and Graft Act](#), in connection with alleged efforts to influence former President Yoon Suk-yeol.

Following the verdict, Pompeo, who served as secretary of state during the first Trump administration, issued a statement saying that



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the ruling was “deeply troubling for anyone who cares about religious liberty and free expression.”

He further asserted,

“The evidence suggests that [Dr. Han](#) was targeted for her religious and political beliefs.”

Pompeo also referred to the fact that [Han](#), an elderly woman with health problems, has been subject to detention for nearly a year. He criticized this as “a betrayal of South Korea’s hard-won democratic values.” He called on the South Korean government to reconsider the case during the appeals trial and expressed his hope that South Korea “does not go further down the path of religious persecution.”

Meanwhile, on the same day, the *Joint Investigation Headquarters into Corruption Involving Church-State Ties*, comprising South Korean prosecutors and police, announced that it had additionally indicted [Han](#) on charges including occupational



Joint Investigation Headquarters (합수본).

Illustration: ChatGPT, 29th August 2026.

embezzlement. According to the investigators, approximately 26 billion won in cash was seized from safes installed in the bedroom of [Han](#)’s residence, as well as from travel bags and other locations.

Investigators believe that funds belonging to the [religious organization](#) were converted into cash and concealed in [Han](#)’s personal safes and elsewhere. They allege that approximately 10.5 billion won was embezzled through methods including false accounting, in which the money was recorded as being intended for purposes such as financial support for overseas missionaries.

In response, the Korean Headquarters of the [Family Federation](#) issued a statement strongly objecting to the application of the embezzlement charge. It described the prosecution’s approach as “an unreasonable application of the law that ignores the essence of religious offerings and the legal requirements necessary to establish the crime of embezzlement.”

The [Family Federation](#) argued that the funds in question were “religious gifts voluntarily offered to [Hak Ja Han](#) by believers and various organizations within the [religious movement](#) as expressions of their religious faith and devotion.”

It maintained that there was no evidence that [Han](#) had used the money for personal purposes, explaining that the funds had instead been used for public purposes, such as missionary activities, in accordance with the intentions of those who had made the offerings.

Furthermore, the [Family Federation](#) expressed deep concern, arguing that the investigative authorities were applying ordinary legal standards without taking account of the specific context of the traditions and autonomy of religious devotion, thereby distorting the context specific to the faith and treating the funds as personal embezzlement.

The [Family Federation](#) said that “it is difficult to accept an expedient conviction based on an abuse of the state’s power to impose criminal punishment,” and indicated that it would challenge the allegations in court.

[See also: Mother Han Appeal Tests Government Authority](#)

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Featured image above: Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.
Photo: Sekai Nippo, slightly edited by Grok xAI, 6th September 2026

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