FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Russia Quashes of Non-Governmental Faiths

Knut Holdhus
November 3, 2026



Collage describing the content of the Izvestia article on 1st November 2026. Illustration: ChatGPT

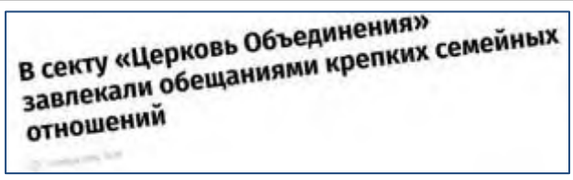
ИЗВЕСТИЯ iz
Russian daily newspaper Izvestia

A wave of searches following an undesirable-organization designation highlights mounting pressure on religious groups with international connections

An investigation targeting the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), formerly known as the Unification Church, has raised concerns about religious freedom in Russia. The operation comes amid a continuing campaign against groups regarded by the authorities as undesirable, including Jehovah's Witnesses.

Russian law enforcement authorities have launched searches targeting members and premises associated with the Family Federation, in seven regions of the country. The operation, reported on 1st November 2026 by the major Russian newspaper Izvestia, represents a significant escalation of pressure on the religious movement.

According to the newspaper, the organization's headquarters in Moscow is located in a small cultural center in the southern part of the capital. Security personnel reportedly searched premises connected with the religious community in several regions. Particular attention was allegedly paid to folders containing detailed personal information about members, including their health conditions, food preferences and personal habits. The newspaper described these files as extensive dossiers containing information about hundreds or even thousands of people.


В секту «Церковь Объединения» завлекали обещаниями крепких семейных отношений
Izvestia headline on the raids 1st November 2026

The report also included an interview with a man who said he had first been approached by representatives of the movement with a question about whether he was interested in developing healthy family relationships. After completing a questionnaire, he was invited to visit the organization's premises. The Russian paper writes that in his view, the group preaches Christianity.

The way the recruitment encounter was presented is significant. Rather than focusing on any specific allegation, the report placed considerable emphasis on how the religious community approaches potential members and the personal information it collects.

Founded in 1917, Izvestia (Известия, meaning approximately "The News") is one of Russia's oldest and

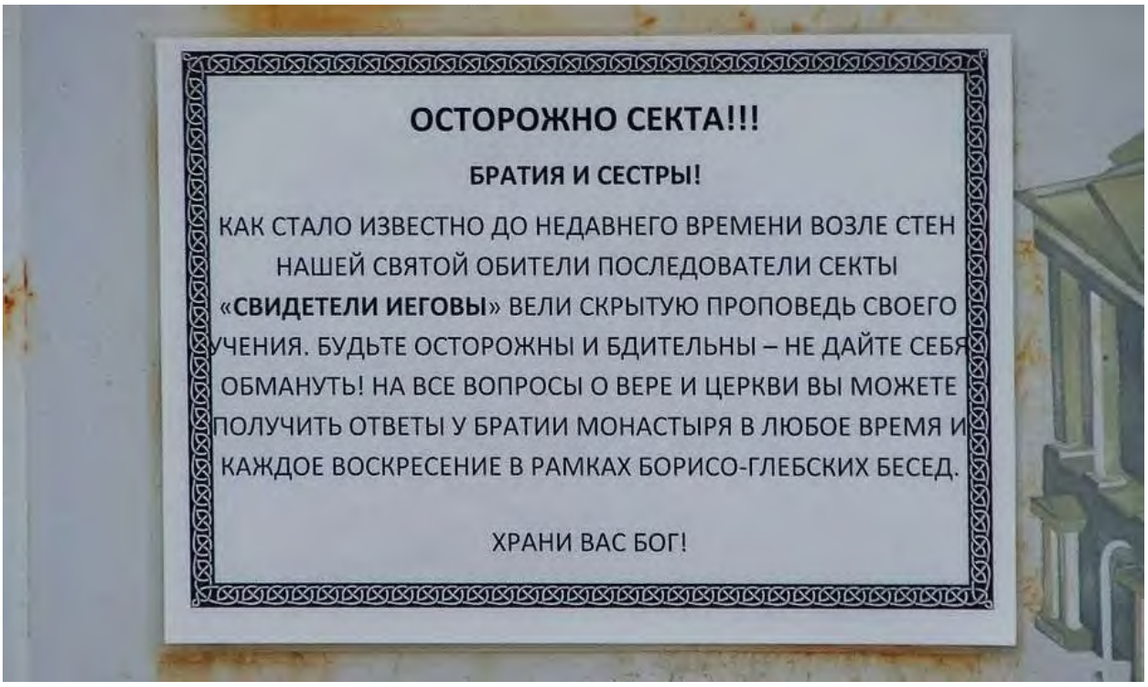
best-known national newspapers. During the Soviet era, it was an important official newspaper of the Soviet government. Today, it is part of the National Media Group, a major Russian media holding with close connections to the Kremlin. The European Union has also identified the group as part of Russia's government-aligned media environment. In May 2024, the EU included Izvestia among Russian media outlets accused of spreading Kremlin propaganda.

This background is relevant when assessing the newspaper's coverage of religious movements. It does not mean that every report is inaccurate, but readers should distinguish between independently established facts, official allegations and the newspaper's editorial framing.

According to the 1st November report, "security forces" conducted the searches. The Russian term "security forces" used in the report is siloviki (силовики). It is a broad expression referring to personnel and institutions exercising state coercive or security powers.

The expression "operational-investigative measures", also used in the Russian reporting, can encompass surveillance, searches, questioning, evidence collection and other investigative activities.

There are substantial reasons to view the operation against the Family Federation in the context of a broader pattern of increasing state pressure on religious minorities and independent religious organizations in Russia.



Persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia: A public warning against the Jehovah's Witnesses in the town of Torzhok in Tver Oblast, Russia in 2012. The headline says "Caution, sect!!!" The text goes on to say, "Brothers and sisters! As became known recently, near the walls of our holy monastery, followers of the sect Jehovah's Witnesses secretly preach their teachings. Be careful and vigilant! Don't let yourself be fooled! You can get answers to all questions about faith and the Church from the brotherhood of the monastery at any time and every Sunday within the framework of Boris-Glebsk conversations

The most prominent example is the treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses. In April 2017, the Russian Supreme Court banned the legal entities of the Jehovah's Witnesses as extremist organizations. Since then, thousands of homes have reportedly been searched, hundreds of believers have faced criminal prosecution, and many have received prison sentences for participating in religious activities.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled in June 2022 that Russia's ban violated the European Convention on Human Rights. In October 2025, the Court's position was upheld in a further judgment.

The pressure has not ended. In July 2026, a Moscow court ordered the confiscation of 123 properties belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses, transferring them to the Russian state.

Nor are Jehovah's Witnesses the only religious community experiencing pressure. The SOVA Research Center, which monitors religious freedom and discrimination in Russia, has documented increased administrative pressure on unregistered religious associations, including Baptist communities. Muslim organisations have also faced inspections and interruptions of religious services.

The Family Federation case may indicate that the authorities are extending their scrutiny to another religious movement with international connections.

There is, however, an important distinction: the Family Federation has not necessarily been subjected to the same legal measures as Jehovah's Witnesses, and the 1st November operation alone does not establish that a nationwide prohibition is being prepared.

Why has this happened now?

One particularly important development provides a possible explanation for the timing.

According to Russian media reports, in October 2026 the Prosecutor General's Office declared three foreign non-governmental organisations associated with the Family Federation undesirable in Russia:

> The Universal Peace Federation (UPF).
>
> The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification.
>
> The Women's Federation for World Peace.

This designation appears to have preceded the 1st November searches.



Russian version of the Unification Principles, published in 1998 as Божественный Принцип (Divine Principle)

The designation of an organisation as undesirable is particularly serious under Russian legislation. It can make participation in its activities, cooperation with it or the provision of support to it a criminal matter under certain circumstances.

The Russian authorities have increasingly portrayed organizations with international connections as potential instruments of foreign influence. This tendency has become particularly pronounced since the beginning of the war against Ukraine. Religious organizations with international headquarters, overseas funding or networks of affiliated NGOs can consequently become targets of suspicion.

The Family Federation's international structure and its associated organizations may therefore have attracted particular attention.

The October undesirable-organisation designation may have provided the authorities with a legal and administrative basis for intensifying investigations into the Russian activities of the movement. The November searches could represent the next stage in implementing that decision.

The Russian state has increasingly emphasized national unity, traditional values and loyalty to the state. Independent organizations, particularly those with international affiliations and activities involving young people, can be portrayed as potential threats to social cohesion or national security.

This does not mean that every organization targeted by the authorities is necessarily politically active or opposed to the government. Religious independence itself, however, can become problematic when the state expects civil society organizations to operate within increasingly narrow political and ideological boundaries.

The Washington Times

According to The Washington Times, reporting from Seoul 2nd November a staff member from the Family Federation in South Korea, speaking off the record, admitted they were caught off guard by the abrupt restrictions from Moscow. According to the source, the Russian government had treated them very well for a long time, and they likely even received government grants for certain projects.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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Dispute Over Mother Han's Hospital Restriction

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South Korean media reports on dispute whether outings from designated hospital constitute a breach of bail



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The building housing Seoul High Court, where Mother Han's appeal is being tried, and where also Seoul Central District Court is located. Image: Grok xAI, Nov. 2025.

Several major South Korean news outlets reported on 2nd November 2026, that the *Seoul High Court* was investigating whether *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (FFWPU) leader Hak Ja Han (한학자) – also known as Mother Han – had violated the conditions of her bail by leaving the hospital where she is required to reside. The reports followed allegations that she had travelled from Seoul Asan Medical Center to Family Federation facilities in Gapyeong, north-east of Seoul, during her period of release on medical grounds.

The issue raises an important legal question: does a court-imposed restriction requiring a defendant to reside at a particular hospital automatically prohibit leaving the premises for visits elsewhere? While the prosecution appears to interpret the restriction strictly, the Family Federation argues that an occasional outing does not constitute a change of residence and therefore cannot, in itself, amount to a breach of bail conditions.

The *Seoul High Court* has now requested information directly from the hospital and asked the prosecution to monitor compliance. However, as of 2nd November, the court had not announced a final determination that Mother Han had violated her bail conditions.

Court Requests Information from Hospital

Logo of Newspim (뉴스핌), a prominent South Korean economic and financial news agency and multimedia company based in Seoul.

According to NewsPim, in an article by Park Min-gyeong (박민경) published 2nd November, the 13th Criminal Division of the *Seoul High Court*, presided over by Judge Kim Moo-shin (김무신), disclosed during Mother Han's appeal proceedings that it had sent an official request to *Seoul Asan Medical Center*.

The court wants the hospital to report on Mother Han's medical treatment and whether she has left the premises since being granted bail.

The judges explained that some documents sent to the hospital, including an application to amend the indictment, had not been delivered because the intended recipient was reportedly absent. This prompted the court to ask Mother Han's legal representatives whether she was complying with the residence restriction imposed as a condition of her release.

Her lawyer answered that she was complying with the conditions and promised to investigate whether the failed delivery of documents resulted from an administrative problem at the hospital.

The court also addressed Mother Han directly, reminding her that she must understand and strictly observe the bail conditions. Appearing in court wearing a black jacket over her hospital clothes and a face mask, she removed the mask and answered affirmatively.

The judges further asked the special prosecutor's team to exercise appropriate supervision of her compliance.

Different Interpretations of What Constitutes a Violation

Several outlets reported that the underlying controversy began with a report by JTBC, which alleged that Mother Han had left *Seoul Asan Medical Center* and travelled to the Family Federation's Cheongpyeong facilities in Gapyeong, Gyeonggi Province.

The logo of Kookje Shinmun (국제신문), a major Korean-language regional daily newspaper based in Busan, South Korea.

Kookje Shinmun, in an article by Heo Shi-eon (허시언), went further in its headline, describing the alleged departures as unauthorized visits to the Family Federation's facilities. Its report stated that the court would directly investigate whether Mother Han had violated her bail

The logo of JTBC News (Joongang Tongyang Broadcasting Company), a prominent South Korean private cable television network launched in 2011. Known for its influential general programming, it features highly rated dramas, popular variety shows, and an impactful news division.

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Kookje Shinmun also highlighted the Family Federation's response. Through its lawyers, the organization acknowledged that Mother Han had left the hospital for outings but rejected the allegation that this constituted a violation.

The Federation's argument was that bail fundamentally involves the release of a defendant from detention. A person who remains resident at the designated address but occasionally goes outside has not necessarily changed their residence. Consequently, the organization maintains, such outings should not automatically be regarded as violations of bail conditions.

Logo of MBC News, the news division of the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), one of South Korea's four major nationwide television and radio networks.

MBC News presented the issue in similar terms. It confirmed that the court had requested information from the hospital and questioned Mother Han's legal team about compliance. MBC also reported that the Federation acknowledged that Mother Han had left the hospital during her period of admission while maintaining that this did not constitute a breach of the conditions.

The distinction is important because a restriction on residence does not necessarily mean that every departure from the premises is prohibited. The precise wording and interpretation of the court's order will therefore be central to determining whether Mother Han's conduct was permissible.

Prosecutors Take a Stricter Position

A particularly significant development was reported by News1, in an article by Jang Shi-on (장시온) and Moon Hye-won (문혜원).

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

According to News1, a representative of the special prosecution team investigating the allegations involving former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희) stated that the residence restriction also included a prohibition on going outside.

The representative reportedly said that the prosecution would first establish the facts and then consider requesting the revocation of Mother Han's bail if a violation was confirmed.

This interpretation differs substantially from that advanced by the Family Federation. Whereas the Federation considers occasional outings compatible with remaining resident at the designated hospital, the prosecution appears to regard leaving the hospital itself as potentially incompatible with the restriction.

The disagreement is particularly relevant because the court's bail decision, issued on 19th October, specified *Seoul Asan Medical Center* as Mother Han's place of residence. It also required a cash security deposit of 200 million won (approximately US$140,000) and prohibited contact with people connected to the case.

News1 emphasized that the court had also prevented Mother Han from returning to her ordinary residence. The prosecution therefore appears to view the restriction as a measure designed to keep her physically within the hospital rather than merely to prevent her from establishing a different permanent address.

Hankyoreh Highlights an Important Legal Distinction

The logo of the Hankyoreh (한겨레), one of South Korea's largest and most influential daily newspapers.

Hankyoreh, in an article by Park Go-eun (박고은), offered an additional legal perspective that was less prominent in some of the other reports.

Its headline asked whether Mother Han had visited Family Federation facilities in Gapyeong while on bail, rather than presenting a violation as an established fact.

The newspaper pointed out that, in general, a court-imposed residence restriction as a bail condition does not necessarily prohibit a defendant from going outside.

This distinction could prove decisive. According to Hankyoreh, whether Mother Han's outings amounted to a violation would depend on their precise nature and circumstances.

In other words, the question is not necessarily whether Hak Ja Han (한학자) ever left the hospital, but whether the particular journeys she allegedly made were

incompatible with the residence restriction imposed by the court.

Hankyoreh also reported that the court's original bail decision included the requirement that Mother Han pay 200 million won (approximately US$140,000) in security and refrain from contacting anyone other than specifically permitted persons, such as medical professionals, lawyers and people assisting with her mobility.

If the court establishes that she violated the residence restriction, her bail could be revoked.



*Will Mother Han's bail be revoked? She may then have to return to her tiny cell. Here, a typical **cell at Seoul Detention Center** where Mother Han has been held, long-term. Image: Chat GPT, 10th October 2025.*

Background: Appeal Against Two-Year Prison Sentence

The reports also recalled the circumstances of Mother Han's prosecution.

She was taken into pretrial detention in September 2025 and indicted three weeks later in connection with allegations involving political donations and gifts to individuals associated with the former Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열) administration.

Mother Han had previously been temporarily released in November 2025 because of deteriorating health, but was subsequently returned to detention. From March 2026, enforcement of her detention was suspended while she received hospital treatment. The *Seoul High Court* eventually granted her bail on 19th October, with her place of residence restricted to *Seoul Asan Medical Center*.

An Unresolved Legal Question

The central issue remains unresolved: whether Mother Han's alleged visits to Family Federation facilities in Gapyeong constituted a breach of the specific conditions imposed by the *Seoul High Court*.

The court's request for information from *Seoul Asan Medical Center* is an important step towards establishing the facts. But until the judges have examined the circumstances and interpreted the bail conditions, reports of hospital departures should not be confused with a judicial finding that Mother Han has violated them.

Source basis: NewsPim, Kookje Shinmun, MBC News, Yonhap News, News1 and Hankyoreh (2nd November 2026).

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

***Featured image** above: Dr. Hak Ja Han, aka. Mother Han, arriving in court in wheelchair. Here, at Seoul Central District Court 31st August 2026. Photo: Dr. Michael Balcomb, resolution improved by ChatGPT, 6th September 2026*

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