

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Growing Concerns Over Religious Freedom in S. Korea

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Two religious heads in long-term detention in South Korea in flagrant violation of religious freedom and democratic rights. Illustration: Chat GPT

Growing concerns as South Korea's treatment of Mother Han and other religious leaders reveals a chilling shift - from rule of law to rule by suppressive state ideology



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Dr. Massimo Introvigne, here speaking at the UN Office at Geneva on June 16, 2025

On 10th October 2025, [Bitter Winter](#) published a powerful article by Italian sociologist and religious freedom expert Dr. Massimo Introvigne, titled "[South Korea Indicts Mother Han: A Democratic Nation's Descent into Religious Repression](#)." The piece responds to the shocking indictment of Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#) - revered worldwide as Mother of Peace and co-founder of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU).

Dr. Introvigne frames the indictment not as an isolated legal event, but as a turning point in South Korea's democratic trajectory. He argues that the prosecution of [Mother Han](#) represents an alarming escalation in a wider campaign against independent religious movements, and a direct assault on religious liberty, pluralism, and human dignity. In his analysis, what is unfolding in Seoul is not merely a courtroom drama - it is a moral and political crisis that could define South Korea's future as either a free democracy or an ideologically controlled state.

Dr. [Introvigne's article](#) functions on two levels: as an investigative commentary on the legal case, and as a broader warning about the erosion of religious freedom under the current South Korean administration.

The Legal Charges as a Political Weapon

Introvigne calls the indictment "a house of cards", meticulously dismantling the prosecution's narrative. The charges - ranging from bribery to embezzlement - are presented as politically motivated fabrications. He highlights inconsistencies such as the dramatic reduction of alleged politically motivated memberships of the opposition People Power Party (PPP) from 110,000 to just 3,500, and the absence of any evidence that [Mother Han](#) personally directed or benefited from the alleged transactions.



Chief Special Prosecutor Min Jung-ki who summoned [Dr. Hak Ja Han](#) and Pastor Son Hyun-bo for questioning. Min is the head of a huge team of special prosecutors with extensive investigative powers. Image by Chat GPT

The piling on of new accusations, Introvigne notes, fits a classic prosecutorial strategy: when the original case weakens, add more charges to maintain public pressure and justify detention. This tactic, he suggests, reveals not judicial independence but institutional bias and an intent to neutralize a religious leader who represents a large and internationally respected movement.

Targeting Faith and Dissent

Beyond the courtroom, Introvigne connects the indictment to a broader ideological purge within South Korea's public sphere. By comparing the treatment of [Mother Han](#) to that of other religious figures - such as Pastor Son Hyun-Bo - he underscores a pattern of systematic repression of conservative or faith-based voices. This pattern, he warns, signals the emergence of an authoritarian model that tolerates religion only when it aligns with state ideology.

The Family Federation's True Identity

One of the [article](#)'s most striking interventions is its insistence on reframing public perception of the [Family Federation](#). While critics often reduce it to media caricatures - mass weddings, political controversy - Introvigne reasserts its global mission of peacebuilding, [family values](#), and interfaith cooperation. He situates [Mother Han](#)'s life work within decades of humanitarian leadership and dialogue, highlighting the absurdity of treating such a figure as a criminal conspirator.



Also detained: Pastor Son Hyun-bo, here August 2025

A Warning to the World

Finally, Introvigne situates the case within a global struggle over the meaning of democracy. His closing lines - "This is not how democracies behave. This is how democracies die." - echo the rhetoric of historical warnings about authoritarian drift. He urges international observers to hold South Korea accountable, arguing that silence in the face of religious persecution emboldens repression everywhere.

Conclusion

Dr. Massimo Introvigne's [Bitter Winter article](#) is both a defense of [Mother Han](#)'s integrity and a call to global conscience. It urges readers to recognize that the stakes of this case go far beyond one religious movement - they concern the moral identity of South Korea itself.

For supporters of the [Family Federation](#), the message is clear: the fight for religious freedom, due process, and dignity is not just a legal matter, but a moral and civic duty. As Dr. Introvigne powerfully concludes, what is being tested now is not the guilt or innocence of one woman, but whether South Korea retains the courage to protect the freedoms that make it a true democracy.

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A group of demonstrators in front of Seoul Detention Center 1st Oct. 2025, protesting the detention of [Mother Han](#). Photo: Masataka Asaoka.

Extracts from a message delivered by Yeon-a Moon at a prayer vigil in [Capyeong](#), South Korea 10th October. She had the day before visited her mother-in-law, [Hak Ja Han](#), known as [Holy Mother Han](#), at the Seoul Detention Center, where she has been held since 23rd September while investigations are going on into alleged violations of political funding and anti-graft laws. Translated from the transcription of the original Korean. Slightly edited.

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Today, I visited [True Mother](#) for the first time in six days. [...] Only five people were allowed in, so I joined them in order to report back to all of you.



A group of demonstrators in front of Seoul Detention Center 1st Oct. 2025, protesting the detention of [Mother Han](#). Photo: Masataka Asaoka.

When [Mother](#) entered, we could see her complexion and how she was moving. She came in and left in a wheelchair, so it was hard to judge how comfortable her movements were. Still, just by seeing her face, I could tell she was in much more pain and exhaustion than before. I remember hearing before that she was very tired, but this time it was even clearer.

Even when she hadn't slept for hours, [Mother's](#) face had always remained bright and graceful. But this time, there were deep bluish shadows under her eyes – something I had never seen before – and it made me feel how difficult things truly are for her.

Her once-radiant complexion looked dull and sunken, and her cheeks seemed hollow.

I know that our family members have been offering prayers and devotion outside the detention center, wanting to share in [Mother's](#) hardship and give her strength, but seeing her today truly broke my heart.

I want to share this on behalf of everyone who couldn't be there. I can't claim to feel everything that she is enduring, but through what I could see, I realized just how hard it's been for her. [...]

Eun-jin Moon then asked about [Mother's](#) eyes and knees, whether she was in pain. [Mother](#) replied that her eyes have been giving her trouble – as you all probably know – and that her knees also hurt when she sits and stands, especially given her age.

She has to live sitting on the floor in a small space, so her movements are limited. Still, even though it's difficult, she said she tries to move around a little bit and



Photo of Eun-jin Moon's painting of [Mother Han](#), September 2025. In the painter's words: "It is just my interpretation of what is going on"

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exercise as much as she can.

[...] **Mother** looked at us and said:

"Do not worry. Heaven is alive. The truth will be revealed. I didn't expect something like this to happen, but the truth will surely be revealed."

Those were her first words to us. You've heard her say this before. **Mother** knows the truth and believes that it will be made known not only in Korea but throughout the world. It may take time, but she is certain of it.

So we must wait patiently, work diligently, and unite so that the truth can be revealed as soon as possible. That is the path of true filial piety.

Mother also said,

"Through this time, the members have become one. The whole world has become united."

She believes in us that much. Even though we feel sorry for not being enough, she keeps encouraging and trusting us.

"Brothers and sisters", there are many painful rumors circulating, both outside and within our community. But please remember – **Mother** believes in us. She knows that we are becoming even more united through this trial. So let us focus only on our Heavenly Parent and **True Parents**. Let's set aside unnecessary talk and follow **Mother's** words and wishes, so we can overcome this period together.

At the end, I must also say this: **Mother's** once-clear, beautiful skin now has red, rash-like patches, almost like heat bumps. She said it might be from sweating due to poor ventilation and the damp, cold floors (since the heating wasn't on yet).

It made me realize how much her immune system has weakened. And yet, despite everything, she smiled and encouraged us. Her final words were:

"I am in a lot of pain, but I will get through it thanks to your love."



From a spontaneous prayer vigil 25th September 2025 outside Seoul Detention Center, where **Mother Han** has been held since 22nd Sep. Photo: Masataka Asaoka.

"Brothers and sisters", we all love **Mother** deeply. We know she suffers, and we feel frustrated and angry that we can't do more. But let us hold onto her words. Let's stay calm, trust one another, and do our best with sincere hearts.

This past week, I kept thinking how frustrated you all must feel – wanting to know more, wanting to help, wondering why there isn't more information.

I too struggled with whether to speak or stay silent. I worried that if I spoke carelessly, my words could be twisted and end up hurting **Mother** rather than helping her. Because the outside world is watching us closely and ready to distort anything. So I decided: better to stay cautious, even if people misunderstand or blame us for not speaking. We even agreed among the leaders: Let people complain that we are silent – our priority is **Mother's** safety. Even if we are misunderstood for a while, we will endure it for her sake.

Dear "family", though the news about **Mother** is painful, we are now entering a more serious stage of preparing for the trial. Until the special investigation period fully ends, we must move forward carefully, one step at a time, aligning our hearts with Heaven and **Mother's** heart – not with what we think she wants, but what she has truly asked of us.

Please endure just a little longer, give a little more strength and devotion. **Mother** believes in the power of the spiritual world and in **Heaven's** power to bring about the truth. She also believes that even

Father's support from the other side. Let us also believe that our sincerity will empower them to help her.

There's so much I want to say, but I'll stop here. Let's express our faith not only in words but through our actions – by living honorably, working sincerely, and serving society. [...] You've endured so much already. Let's hold on a little longer, recharge our hearts, and move forward together with renewed strength.

Thank you.

Featured image above: **Yeon-a Moon** delivering her message at a prayer vigil in [Gapyeong](#), South Korea 10th October 2025. Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#).

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