

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: So. Korean Court Criticizes Prosecutors Seeking Glory Not Justice

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South Korean judges. Illustration: Chat GPT



South Korea's judiciary delivers sharp criticism of the country's prosecutorial culture with prosecutors in pursuit of glory - disguised as justice - and a system that can easily resort to coercion and threats to reach ambitious goals

The recent [Segye Ilbo](#) editorial titled "[Court Says 'Prosecutors' Separate Investigation Distorted the Truth'... Investigative Authorities Should Take Heed](#)" (22nd October 2025) marks a rare and striking rebuke from South Korea's judiciary toward the nation's prosecutorial culture.



Korean businessman Kim Beom-su. Photo (2012)

The [piece](#) reflects not only the court's sharp criticism of the prosecutors' methods in the Kim Beom-su (Kakao) - SM Entertainment case but also a broader institutional anxiety over the direction of state power, especially under the newly empowered special investigation units. At its heart lies a familiar warning: that the pursuit of prosecutorial glory - disguised as justice - can easily curdle into coercion and institutional overreach.

The [editorial](#) recounts how the Seoul Southern District Court acquitted Kakao founder Kim Beom-su (김범수), rejecting the prosecution's case as built upon coerced and untrustworthy testimony obtained through "separate investigations" - a term referring to the practice of opening ancillary or tangential cases to pressure suspects or witnesses in the primary case. The court's explicit language - that such methods "distort the truth" and lead to "unjust results" - is unusually strong for a judicial ruling. Even

more significant is the paper's interpretation: this was not an isolated incident but a symptom of a deeply rooted prosecutorial habit, one born from "ambition and self-promotion" among officials eager for personal advancement rather than genuine public service.

Institutional Patterns and the "Special Prosecutor Syndrome"

The [editorial](#)'s critique extends well beyond the Kakao affair. It draws attention to a disturbing continuity in South Korea's investigative culture - one that transcends administrations and political camps. The

practice of coercive, separate, and highly publicized investigations has long served as a proving ground for ambitious prosecutors, who seek to demonstrate effectiveness through arrests and indictments rather than fair process or evidentiary soundness. Even after successive reforms, the [paper](#) notes, the practice persists across all major investigative bodies, including the Prosecution Service, the National Police, the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials (CIO), and now the special prosecutors' offices.



One of the many ambitious prosecutors: 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 generated by Chat GPT



Being investigated while detained: Former South Korean First Lady Kim Keon-hee, here in Washington DC 10th July 2024



Also detained: Pastor Son Hyun-bo (1962-), here August 2025

The [editorial](#) explicitly connects this dynamic to ongoing special investigations, particularly the Kim Keon-hee (김건희) case, where more than half of the 14 individuals arrested so far have reportedly faced charges unrelated to the First Lady herself. Such statistics bolster the perception that these probes, while politically explosive, often become sprawling fishing expeditions - designed to manufacture leverage or public spectacle rather than to uncover narrowly defined wrongdoing. The [Segye Ilbo](#) warns that when prosecutors begin to conflate institutional momentum with moral legitimacy, the rule of law is imperiled.

This pattern of prosecutorial expansionism - what some scholars term the "special prosecutor syndrome" - thrives on political polarization. When society is divided, the investigative apparatus becomes a convenient instrument of both moral theater and bureaucratic self-interest. In such an environment, truth risks being overshadowed by narrative, and justice by ambition.

The Human Cost: The Cases of Hak Ja Han and Pastor Son

It is in this broader climate that the cases of [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), the 82-year-old religious leader widely known as "[Mother Han](#)," and Pastor Son Hyun-bo (손현보 - 63) acquire particular resonance. Both have reportedly been subjected to prolonged interrogation sessions and extended pre-trial detention, despite advanced age and deteriorating health. Their circumstances echo the editorial's central concern: that prosecutorial institutions, driven by internal and external pressures to "produce results," may lose sight of proportionality and humanity.

While the details of their ongoing cases differ from the Kim Beom-su or Kim Keon-hee investigations, the underlying mechanisms of coercion - excessive questioning, selective detention, and reputational targeting - reflect the same pathology identified by [Segye Ilbo](#). When prosecutors treat individuals as instruments toward a larger institutional goal, rather than as citizens entitled to dignity and due process, the justice system ceases to serve the public and begins to serve itself.

The [editorial](#)'s implicit call for introspection - urging investigative authorities to "refrain from separate investigations" - therefore resonates far beyond one court ruling. It amounts to a warning that the instrumentalization of law enforcement for personal or political ends corrodes both legitimacy and compassion.

In the cases of elderly defendants like [Hak Ja Han](#), such overreach takes on an even more troubling moral dimension. The law's humanistic purpose - to balance accountability with mercy - risks being eclipsed by bureaucratic vanity and procedural aggression.

Reform Fatigue and the Crisis of Trust

For decades, South Korea's justice system has oscillated between reformist zeal and institutional backlash. Repeated efforts to curtail prosecutorial power - by redistributing investigative authority to police or establishing the CIO - have yielded limited success. Each new reform creates new bodies that, over time, reproduce the same incentives and vices: public performance over

prudence, coercion over credibility. The [Segye Ilbo editorial](#) underscores this cycle by emphasizing that

"regardless of which agency conducts it, separate investigations must be abandoned."

Public trust in the judiciary and prosecution is fragile. When ordinary citizens perceive that the system rewards ambition more than fairness, they lose confidence not only in individual cases but in the moral foundations of governance. In this sense, the editorial's warning functions as both diagnosis and plea: the justice system must rediscover restraint before it loses the people's consent to wield authority.



[Mother Han](#) on 31st August 2025, soon before being taken into detention

Toward a Humane Standard of Justice

The [Segye Ilbo](#)'s intervention may thus be read as part of a larger moral debate within South Korea's democracy - one that pits institutional pride against constitutional principle. Its critique of "ambition and self-promotion" among prosecutors recalls similar moments in South Korean history when judicial overreach provoked public outcry, from the authoritarian decades to recent political trials. What is new today is the breadth of institutional complicity - from prosecutors to special counsels to newly empowered watchdog agencies - all operating under the same cultural logic of performance-driven justice.

If the cases of Kim Keon-hee, [Hak Ja Han](#), and Pastor Son share a common thread, it is the erosion of proportionality - a drift from truth-seeking toward spectacle, from impartial inquiry toward self-legitimizing prosecution. The judiciary's rebuke in the Kakao case offers a moment of moral clarity: that justice pursued without humility becomes indistinguishable from coercion.

In heeding the court's and [Segye Ilbo](#)'s warnings, South Korea faces a choice: to persist in the cycle of prosecutorial self-assertion, or to build a justice system grounded once again in balance, humanity, and truth.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor, written based on English translation of the original Korean article.

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Eitaro Ogawa on Family Federation Media Coverage: “No Factual Basis for Dissolution”

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The “Association of Second-Generation Members for Protecting the Human Rights of Believers”, composed mainly of second-generation believers of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU, formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)), held a public symposium on 19th October in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture.

In his keynote address, literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎) [\[See editor’s note below\]](#) stated that after investigating the matter of the [Family Federation’s](#) potential dissolution, he found that “there was zero concreteness.” Expressing his concern, he went on to say,

“I cannot see any factual basis for the claim that ‘the [Unification Church](#) qualifies for a dissolution request.’ The government that made that judgment and the mass media that fueled public opinion in that direction are committing a complete injustice.”



Eitaro Ogawa during the panel discussion at the symposium in Nagoya 19th October 2025. Screenshot from video by Association of Second-Generation Members for Protecting the Human Rights of Believers



From the panel discussion at the symposium in Nagoya 19th October 2025. Screenshot from video by Association of Second-Generation Members for Protecting the Human Rights of Believers

Ogawa also took part in a panel discussion with Nozomi Kojima (小島希晶), the association’s representative, and attorney Shinichi Tokunaga (徳永信一). When the discussion turned to media coverage of the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), Ogawa emphasized,

“For many years, television media have been dominated by an anti-Japanese, anti-Abe, left-leaning bias. Early on, they deliberately used criticism of the [Unification Church](#) to create a framework in which Abe himself was attacked alongside it.”

Ogawa stressed that the media deliberately guided public opinion “to eliminate two pillars of conservatism – Abe and the [religious organization](#)”. He called for “a thorough investigation” into this media manipulation.

Ogawa also touched on the issue of *second-generation religious followers*, stating,

“Unless we clearly define what constitutes ‘religious harm’, there is a risk that the concept will keep expanding. The time has come for both the state and religion to redefine many aspects of their relationship.”

Featured image above: Literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎) delivering the keynote speech in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, on the afternoon of 19th October 2025. Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀).

[Editor’s note: Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎) is an award-winning writer, author of several books, literary and cultural critic, President of the Japanese Peace Studies Institute, a security and culture think tank.]

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