

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Global Clergy Visit Wrongly Detained Holy Mother Han

Knut Holdhus
February 26, 2026



Participants in the World Clergy Prayer Meeting are taking a commemorative photo on 25th February in Seoul



Drawing attention to religious freedom in South Korea, global religious leaders visit Seoul amid Mother Han's ongoing detention

Over 70 Global Religious Leaders Visit Korea

Met President Hak Ja Han in Detention and Announce Petition for Religious Freedom

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Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (2025)

Segye Ilbo, the South Korean daily, [reported on 26th February](#) on a visit by more than 70 Christian clergy and religious leaders from around the world. According to the [article](#) by Jeong Seong-su, they traveled to Seoul to participate in the "2026 World Clergy National Prayer Rally". The gathering was organized by the World Clergy Leadership Conference (WCLC) along with partner groups. While the event focused on prayer and religious cooperation, it also became closely linked to a highly visible issue in Korea: the detention of [Hak Ja Han](#) - also called [Mother Han](#) - the widow of the late Rev. [Sun Myung Moon](#) and a prominent religious leader in her own right.

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Among the visiting delegation was Bishop Luonne Rouse from the United Methodist Church in New York, who, together with other international clergy, visited the Seoul Detention Center on 26th February to meet [Mother Han](#). According to the report, she had been in custody for 157 days at the time of their visit. [Mother Han](#) is widely known as the leader and co-founder of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), a global religious movement from South Korea.

One of the most outspoken visitors was Archbishop Johannes Ndanga, an Apostolic Christian from Zimbabwe and President of the African Christian Council International (ACCI). Reflecting on the visit, Ndanga drew a symbolic comparison between Korea today and biblical history.

He recalled that when [Rev. Moon founded](#) what is now called the [Family Federation](#) in 1954, he declared that one day "the whole world will come to see Korea." Ndanga suggested that this prediction is now being realized, as religious figures from many nations are traveling to Korea. He compared the situation

to Christians visiting Israel to retrace the life of Jesus. In his view, the present circumstances - specifically the detention of a [religious leader](#) whom he considers innocent - echo the persecution of Jesus in ancient times.



Bishop Luonne Rouse speaking at a large prayer meeting in Gapyeong, South Korea February 27, 2026



Archbishop Johannes Ndanga speaking at a large prayer meeting in Gapyeong, South Korea February 27, 2026

Ndanga described feeling emotionally burdened during the visit to the detention center where [Mother Han](#) is being held. However, he said that [Mother Han](#) herself appeared calm and resolute, speaking to the visiting leaders and expressing determination to continue fulfilling what she sees as [God's](#) will. He expressed confidence that, in time, both Korea and the broader international community would come to understand the larger meaning of these events.

Following the visit, Bishop Rouse and other members of the delegation announced a joint petition. The document calls for what they describe as humanitarian consideration and the protection of fundamental freedoms. The petition outlines three main points: first, that the health rights of [Mother Han](#) - an elderly woman in her 80s - should be safeguarded; second, that universal religious freedom must be defended; and third, that reconciliation and social harmony should be prioritized as values essential for national unity.



World religious leaders hold up a petition they each signed on February 25, 2026

Bishop Rouse emphasized that the petition should not be interpreted as a political endorsement of any specific religious organization. Instead, he framed it as an appeal grounded in general principles of justice, freedom of conscience, and human rights. The organizers stated that they intend to submit the petition formally to Korean judicial authorities and to share it with international human rights organizations in order to raise global awareness and support.

In addition to the detention-center visit, the clergy participated in other events during their stay in Korea. On 25th February, they attended a special lecture in Seoul organized by the Korean Council of Religions under the theme "The Chosen Korean People and Their Mission". The program explored Korea's historical and spiritual role from the perspective of participating religious groups.

The delegation's schedule also includes a visit to Imjingak, a site near the Demilitarized Zone that symbolizes the division of the Korean Peninsula. At the Unification Observatory there, they plan to hold a

special prayer service for peace and reunification between North and South Korea. The group is scheduled to depart Korea on 28th February, concluding a visit that combined religious ceremony, political sensitivity, and a public appeal for religious freedom.

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reported 25th February on the 13th trial of **Hak Ja Han** (한학자) – also called **Mother Han** – the leader of **Unificationism** (통일교), a religious movement founded in the 1950s. The hearing took place at *Seoul Central District Court* and centered not only on allegations of unlawful political activities, but also on a deeper dispute about religion, public perception, and the boundaries of what a criminal court should consider.

See also *Global Clergy Visit Detained Mother Han*



Hak Ja Han, Mother Han. Photo: FFWPU

To understand the significance of the day’s exchanges, some background may be necessary. Since the death of **Sun Myung Moon** (문선명), her husband, in 2012, she has led the organization, now named the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*, which operates globally and maintains religious, educational, and peace-building networks. According to the *OhmyNews* article, in South Korea the **Federation** has frequently been criticized by mainstream Protestant groups as a “heresy”, a label that carries strong social stigma.

Mother Han is currently on trial along with two former senior **Federation** officials: **Yoon Yeong-ho** (윤영호), a former World Headquarters director, and **Jeong Won-ju** (정원주), her



Jeong Won-ju, here 19th January 2025. Screenshot from FFWPU video.



Yoon Yeong-ho, here 9th August 2020. Screenshot from video by FFWPU

former chief of staff. Special prosecutors appointed by the current left-leaning Lee administration have charged the three with violations of the *Political Funds Act* and the *Improper Solicitation and Graft Act*, among other offenses. At issue are allegations that **Federation** funds or networks were used to channel money or gifts to politicians and politically connected figures.

Reporter Lee Jin-min (이진민) writes for *OhmyNews* that the 25th February hearing revealed two parallel strategies from **Mother Han’s** legal team. The first involved a procedural dispute about terminology and religious prejudice. The second involved shifting responsibility onto **Yoon Yeong-ho** (윤영호) for allegedly improper political contacts.



Topographic map of Korean Peninsula. Text added. Illustration: Ksiom / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp

misunderstanding such terminology could unfairly shape perceptions of intent. They claimed that widespread media

During the afternoon session, **Hak Ja Han’s** lawyers objected to the way a specific term used by the **religious organization** – “national restoration” – appears in the indictment and in earlier testimony. In the internal language of **Unificationism**, this phrase carries theological meaning tied to the **movement’s** vision of moral and spiritual renewal. The defense argued that the term’s meaning has not been clearly defined in the legal documents and may be misunderstood by the court or by the public.

According to **Mother Han’s** lawyers,

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portrayals of the **Family Federation** as a heretical or fringe sect might bias judgments about guilt. To address this, they asked the court to call a professor – described as a doctrinal expert – to testify about the **movement's** theology and clarify the meaning of “national restoration”.

However, the presiding judge, Woo In-seong (우인성), firmly rejected the request. He stated that the courtroom is not a venue for doctrinal lectures. In his view, the purpose of the trial is to determine whether specific laws were violated, not to evaluate whether **Unificationism** is orthodox, heterodox, or socially stigmatized. If the defense wished to clarify terminology, he suggested, they could submit written materials instead of calling a live expert witness.

Mother Han's legal team pushed back. They argued that former director **Yoon** had interpreted her intentions through the lens of **Unificationist** doctrine, and that the disputed term connected to subsequent actions – such as an alleged 100 million won (approximately 70,000 U.S. dollars) payment to conservative lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동) and donations to regional branches of the *People Power Party*. Because theology allegedly informed **Yoon's** understanding of **Mother Han's** direction, they said, doctrinal explanation was directly relevant.

OhmyNews points out that Judge Woo again declined. He suggested that if the defense wished to clarify **Mother Han's** intentions, it would be more appropriate to question her directly rather than rely on a third-party interpretation of doctrine. He emphasized that the court is not examining whether **Unificationism** is heretical; it is examining alleged criminal conduct. After further insistence from the defense, the judge reaffirmed his refusal.

This exchange highlights a key tension in the case. **Mother Han's** side appears concerned that broader social hostility toward the **Family Federation** could color the court's interpretation of evidence. The judge, by contrast, is attempting to keep the proceedings narrowly focused on statutory violations rather than theological debates.

The second major theme of the hearing was the defense's continued effort to assign primary responsibility to **Yoon Yeong-ho** (윤영호). **Mother Han's** team has consistently argued that if improper political contacts occurred, they were driven by **Yoon's** personal ambition rather than by instructions from **Mother Han**.

To support this narrative, the defense pointed to events after **Yoon's** dismissal from the **Family Federation**. They noted that in 2024, a youth organization called the *GPD Foundation* – established by **Yoon** after his removal – held an event that received congratulatory remarks from lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동). The implication was that **Yoon** independently cultivated political ties for his own purposes.

Hak Ja Han's lawyers argued that during **Yoon's** tenure there were several controversial actions: the alleged payment of 100 million won (ca. 70,000 US dollars) to Kweon, the provision of a luxury gift to Kim Keon-hee (김건희 – a prominent public figure and spouse of a former president), the use of split donations to avoid reporting thresholds, contacts with politicians via an intermediary, and promotion of a Cambodian development project known as the MPP initiative. They asked rhetorically whether the **Family Federation** continued these projects after **Yoon's** expulsion. According to them, it did not – suggesting that the initiatives were tied to **Yoon** personally.



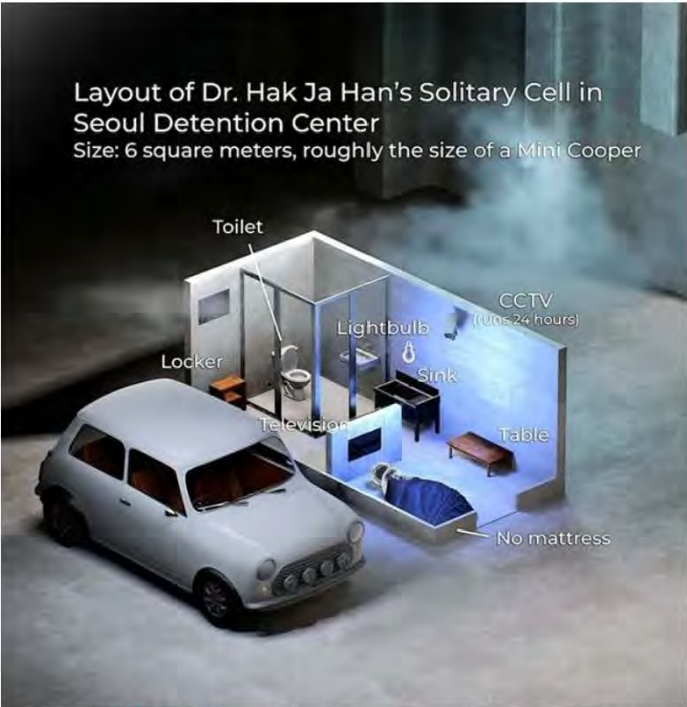
People Power Party lawmaker **Kweon Seong-dong** (권성동), here 23rd Dec. 2024. Photo: 국민의힘TV / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 3.0 Unp. Cropped



Former First Lady of the Republic of Korea Kim Keon-hee (김건희). Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int

Furthermore, the defense maintained that matters reported to [Mother Han](#) were limited to religious ceremonies and internal faith activities. They asserted that there is no evidence she gave prior instructions or approval for political activities. [Jeong Won-ju](#)'s legal team echoed this argument, also criticizing [Yoon](#) in connection with lawmaker Kweon's participation in the foundation event.

Another striking moment in the hearing involved a witness: [Yoon](#)'s sister-in-law, identified only by her surname Lee. She is believed to have purchased a Chanel handbag that prosecutors allege was later given to Kim Keon-hee's side. Defense attorneys questioned her about whether she bought the bag at the request of [Yoon](#)'s wife, who had served as a [Federation](#) finance director, and whether she had been instructed to avoid encountering [Hak Ja Han](#) at the department store. Lee did not respond to the questions, remaining silent throughout.



Layout of [Mother Han](#)'s detention cell, compared to size of a Mini Cooper. Illustration: The Monarch Report

According to the [OhmyNews article](#), finally, [Mother Han](#)'s **health and detention status** were briefly raised. Her legal team stated that after [returning to the detention center](#) on 21st February, she suffered a nosebleed the following day. They submitted an additional written opinion in support of a bail request originally filed in November. As of the hearing date 25th February, no decision on bail had been announced.

Prosecutors from the special counsel team investigating matters related to Kim Keon-hee (김건희) attended the hearing, along with a large group of defense attorneys representing [Mother Han](#).

The 25th February session at *Seoul Central District Court* did not resolve the core legal questions but clarified the strategic lines of the case. [Mother Han](#)'s defense is attempting to frame the controversy as partly shaped by misunderstanding and prejudice against her [religious movement](#), while also isolating alleged political misconduct to a [subordinate official](#). The court, meanwhile, has signaled that it intends to confine the trial to concrete legal evidence rather than broader debates about theology or reputation. The next hearing is scheduled for 6th March, when these arguments are likely to continue unfolding within the narrow procedural framework the judge has set.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Infographic summary of 13th trial of [Mother Han](#) on 25th February 2026. Illustration: Chat GPT, February 2026

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