

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Disputed Testimony Takes Center Stage in Trial

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Artistic impression of [Hak Ja Han](#) in court hearing. Illustration: ChatGPT



Testimony contradictions shape high-profile Unificationism trial as Seoul court hears conflicting accounts

The South Korean news agency [News1](#) published on 20th March an update on a high-profile court case involving [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) - also called [Mother Han](#) - the co-founder and current leader of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - formerly the [Unification Church](#). In the Korean original, the name of the organization was Tongilgyo (통일교) - [Unificationism](#).

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Yoon Yeong-ho December 5, 2021

Writing for [News1](#), reporter Moon Hye-won (문혜원) 2026, described details of the same day's proceedings which highlighted a sharp and public clash between [Mother Han](#)'s attorneys and a key witness, former senior [Federation](#) official [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), whose testimony directly contradicts her defense.

The case revolves around accusations that [Hak Ja Han](#) and her associates improperly funneled money into South Korean politics, to members of both the conservative People Power Party (PPP) and the current governing Democratic Party of Korea (DPK). Prosecutors allege that [Family Federation](#) funds were used to make unlawful political contributions, including so-called "split donations" - a tactic in which fairly large sums are broken into smaller amounts and distributed under multiple names to bypass legal limits and disclosure requirements. In addition, special prosecutors appointed by the Lee Jae-myung

(이재명) administration accuse [Mother Han](#) of approving or directing the use of [Unificationism](#) funds to purchase expensive gifts for politically connected individuals.



Donald Trump delivering his video message 12th Sep. 2021 at Rally of Hope held in Gapyeong, South Korea

As [reported by News1](#), during the hearing at the Seoul Central District Court 20th March, [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호) appeared as a witness. Once a high-ranking official within the [Family Federation](#), he has become a central figure in the case due to his earlier statements to investigators. [Yoon](#) had previously claimed that many of the alleged unlawful activities were carried out under [Mother Han](#)'s direct instructions. However, his testimony in court was marked by a careful and somewhat defensive tone, as he sought to clarify his role while maintaining his earlier claims.

A key moment in the proceedings came when [Hak Ja Han](#)'s defense team questioned [Yoon](#) about whether she had explicitly ordered him to

carry out unlawful acts, such as delivering 100 million Korean won (approximately \$75,000 USD) in cash to a sitting lawmaker or supporting local party organizations. [Yoon](#) responded by denying that he personally initiated the scheme, insisting instead that he had acted in line with broader expectations and pressures within the [organization](#). He emphasized that he would not have acted independently in such serious matters, stating that he was now speaking "according to his conscience".

According to the [News1 article](#), [Mother Han](#), visibly engaged in the proceedings, interrupted at one point to directly challenge [Yoon](#)'s claims, asking whether she had ever explicitly instructed him to commit unlawful acts. Her interjection underscored the central dispute of the trial: whether the alleged wrongdoing was directed from the top leadership or carried out independently by subordinates.



Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#) honored for her peace work, receiving an honorary doctorate on August 14, 2022 from Francisco Rojas Aravena, President of University of Peace in Costa Rica, an international university established by the UN General Assembly in 1980

Another point of contention involved a 2021 event hosted by [Unificationism](#) that featured a congratulatory speech by former U.S. President Donald Trump. Prosecutors have suggested that approximately \$1 million was spent to secure Trump's participation. [Yoon](#) testified that he had reported both the event and its cost to [Mother Han](#), adding that the high expense had caused internal difficulties. She, however, disputed this account, stating that she had not been aware of the specific amount involved.

[Yoon](#) further argued that it would have been impossible for him to authorize such a large expenditure without approval, suggesting that he would have faced immediate dismissal if he had done so independently. This claim directly challenges [Mother Han](#)'s defense, which portrays [Yoon](#) as a rogue actor whose personal misconduct should not be attributed to the top leadership of the [religious organization](#).

Beyond the issue of political donations, the case also includes allegations that luxury items - such as a high-value diamond necklace from a British jeweler - were delivered to South Korea's First Lady, Kim Keon-hee, in connection with requests or favors related to projects advocated by [Unificationism](#). These accusations, if proven, could have significant

political implications, as they suggest a direct link between a [religious organization](#) and the highest levels of government.

Mother Han's legal team has consistently denied all charges, arguing that any unlawful actions were the result of [Yoon](#)'s personal decisions and not part of any coordinated effort by the [Family Federation](#). They

maintain that the [organization](#) itself did not engage in wrongdoing and that [Mother Han](#) did not authorize any unlawful conduct.

As the trial continues, it is likely to remain a focal point of public attention in South Korea, raising broader questions about the relationship between religion and politics. Most of the media coverage has viewed the case from a purely legal standpoint. The key issue has been whether funds were used in violation of South Korea's political finance and anti-corruption laws.

This is no doubt how the the current administration of Lee Jae-myung prefers the case against [Mother Han](#) to be covered. There is a perception among observers that political finance violations are being pursued more aggressively now. Relationships between private organizations (including religious ones) and politicians are under tighter scrutiny.

Of course, the mission of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - including global peacebuilding and unification - does not exempt it from political finance regulations.

An important point absent in the South Korean media is, however, the interpretation of intent. The defense may argue that actions were part of international outreach or peace-building, and not intended as political interference. This could influence how the court evaluates intent, which sometimes matters in sentencing or in distinguishing between negligence and deliberate wrongdoing.

In South Korea, the case is often framed as "religion - politics collusion". But supporters of the movement may frame it as legitimate global engagement being misunderstood or politicized.

This divide affects public opinion, even if it does not directly determine the verdict. Activities that might be tolerated or overlooked in other countries (e.g., the U.S.) can trigger legal issues in South Korea because the regulatory environment is stricter, and the political culture is less tolerant of blurred boundaries. So the same type of engagement can be "advocacy" in one country, but "illegal political involvement" in another.

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If you stood among the crowd in front of the Japanese Embassy in Washington, D.C., on 19th March – listening to the testimonies, watching families stand together, hearing prayers rise into the air – you would find it hard to reconcile what you saw with the narrative coming out of Japan.

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These were not extremists or shadowy figures. They were ordinary people: families, young adults, spouses, and believers speaking openly about their faith. And yet, they belong to the very **religious movement** the Japanese government has asked the **courts** to dissolve.

Roughly 500 demonstrators gathered that day, united by a shared concern: that Japan, a nation long regarded as a stable democracy, is now setting a dangerous precedent for religious freedom. At issue is the government's **request to disband** the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** – formerly known as the **Unification Church** – a move critics argue is driven less by law than by political pressure, media campaigns, and activist litigation.



The demonstration at the Japanese embassy in Washington DC took place at the same day that Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi met President Donald Trump at the White House. Here, when they met in Japan 28th Oct. 2025. Photo: Cabinet Secretariat of the Japanese government / Wikimedia Commons. License: **CC Attr 4.0 Int.** Cropped

This is not simply a dispute about one religious organization. It is a test case. If a government can be swayed to dismantle a religious body under public and political pressure, what does that mean for the protection of minority beliefs more broadly?

The demonstration's timing underscored the urgency. On the same day, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi met President Donald Trump at the White House. While leaders discussed

diplomacy and security, just blocks away, demonstrators appealed to a more fundamental principle: the right to believe, to gather, and to practice one's faith without fear of state intervention.

Rev. Demian Dunkley, President of the **Family Federation** in the United States, addressed this directly in an open letter to Prime Minister Takaichi, calling for restraint and a reaffirmation of Japan's commitment to religious liberty. Dunkley read out loud,

"Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi,

I write to you as a faith leader who is deeply connected to Japan. The recent decision to **uphold the dissolution order** of the **Family Federation** has been so painful to our global faith family.



Rev. Demian Dunkley, President of the **Family Federation** in the United States, speaking in front of the Japanese embassy in Washington DC 19th March 2026. Screenshot from live transmission by **FFWPU**

For many, this may appear to be a policy matter. For us, it is deeply personal. It affects real families, real communities, and people who have spent their lives trying to live for the sake of others.

For decades, Japanese members of **our movement** have quietly served around the world – with humility, discipline, and deep love. They have contributed to peacebuilding, humanitarian work, and the strengthening of families across cultures.

Prime Minister, these Japanese men and women have helped Japan shine globally.

I have worked alongside them. I have seen their sincerity. These are not people who weaken society – they are people who strive to uplift it.

Today, **our church** is asking for help.

Not for privilege, but for fairness. Not for exemption, but for understanding.

At stake is something fundamental: the freedom to believe and to practice one's faith without fear of being dismantled.

In recent years, religious organizations around the world have increasingly faced dissolution. This moment extends beyond our own community and raises broader questions about how religious freedom is protected.

For many of our members, the impact has already been deeply felt. Decades of personal sacrifice and care were suddenly swept away when **hundreds of churches** and offices were closed in a single day.

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Japan has long been respected as a nation that upholds dignity, stability, and human rights. The world is watching. The [decisions made now](#) will shape not only Japan's future, but its moral leadership on the global stage.

I ask you to consider the human side of this decision – the parents, the children, the grandparents. Families like mine. Families like those across Japan.

Respectfully, Rev. Demian Dunkley"



From the demonstration in front of the Japanese embassy in Washington DC 19th March 2026. Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#)

But perhaps the most compelling voices were those of the individuals whose lives are directly affected. Japanese believers spoke of a reality in which public gatherings have become impossible following the [closure of their places of worship](#). Others – spouses and second-generation members – gave voice to those who say they cannot speak freely in Japan today. Japanese believers shared personal testimonies, putting a human face on what demonstrators describe as an escalating crisis.

The organizers were deliberate in their tone. “This gathering is not about anger or confrontation,” they stated. “It is about standing with our family of faith in Japan and reminding the world that religious freedom matters.” And indeed, the demonstration was peaceful, measured, and resolute.

That restraint only sharpened the message.

Because what is happening in Japan should concern more than just one religious community. It raises a broader and more uncomfortable question: are democratic societies willing to uphold religious freedom even when it is unpopular, misunderstood, or politically inconvenient?

In Japan today, members of the [Family Federation](#) cannot gather publicly in the way their counterparts did in Washington. That contrast is striking. It is also telling.



More demonstrators across the street from the Japanese embassy in Washington DC 19th March 2026. Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#)

Those who demonstrated in the United States did so not only for themselves, but for the hundreds of thousands of fellow believers in Japan who currently lack that same opportunity. Their signs, their voices, and their presence carried a simple but urgent appeal: that the international community pay attention before a line is crossed that cannot easily be redrawn.

Religious freedom is rarely lost all at once. More often, it erodes – case by case, exception by exception – until the principle itself is weakened.

The question now is whether this moment in Japan will be seen, in hindsight, as one of those turning points.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: From the demonstration in front of the Japanese embassy in Washington DC 19th March 2026. Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#)

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