

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Spiritual Advisor as Diplomatic Intermediary

Knut Holdhus
March 22, 2026



Paula White addressing the IRF Summit in Washington DC 2nd February 2026

세계일보

[Segye Ilbo](#)

Kim Min-seok, Prime Minister of South Korea since July 4, 2025

Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (2025)

Religious freedom and backchannel diplomacy: How a spiritual advisor helped broker surprise meeting linking faith and foreign policy

The South Korean [report](#) also connects White's earlier remarks to a more recent political development. She has reportedly played a role in facilitating a meeting between Kim Min-seok (김민석), the Prime Minister of South Korea, and President Trump. According to Kim's explanation, the meeting was not originally scheduled but occurred after he first met with White in her capacity as head of the White House Faith Office.

An [article](#) published on 16th March by the South Korean newspaper [Segye Ilbo](#) sheds light on an unusual diplomatic moment involving Donald Trump, South Korean Prime Minister Kim Min-seok (김민석), and a key intermediary: Paula White. The [report](#) focuses not only on a "surprise meeting" between the two political leaders but also on the broader theme of religious freedom, which played a central role in the encounter.

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At the heart of the story is Paula White, a prominent American pastor and long-time spiritual advisor to Trump. She currently serves in a role connected to the White House's faith outreach efforts and has been known for her close personal relationship with the president, spanning nearly three decades. Because of this relationship, she is widely described as one of Trump's most trusted religious confidants - someone who can offer both personal and spiritual counsel.

The [South Korean paper](#) describes how Prime Minister Kim later explained why he sought out Paula White in the first place. He emphasized that her long-standing and close relationship with Trump made her a uniquely valuable bridge for establishing both direct and indirect connections with the former president. Kim also noted that White remains one of the few individuals who can maintain ongoing personal and spiritual dialogue with Trump,

making her influence particularly significant.



Son Hyun-bo pastor of the Segyero Church in Busan, South Korea

According to the [article](#) by religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su, White was instrumental in arranging an unexpected, informal meeting between Prime Minister Kim and Trump during Kim's recent visit to the United States. The meeting reportedly took place immediately after Trump concluded another engagement in the Oval Office. White confirmed Trump's willingness to meet and quickly facilitated the encounter, which lasted about 20 minutes and was conducted without an interpreter. This detail is notable, as it suggests a level of direct communication and urgency that is not typical of carefully choreographed diplomatic meetings.

However, the meeting was not solely about building personal rapport. Kim indicated that he also had a strategic objective: addressing what he described as misunderstandings in the United States regarding religious freedom in South Korea. In recent years, some conservative American political and religious groups have raised concerns about whether religious communities -

especially conservative ones - face discrimination or suppression in Korea. Kim sought to counter these perceptions and reassure U.S. audiences that South Korea upholds the principle of separating religion and state while protecting religious rights.

This concern had already surfaced in earlier diplomatic discussions. During a January meeting, U.S. Vice President JD Vance reportedly mentioned that certain figures in the United States viewed a specific case involving Son Hyun-bo (손현보), pastor of the Segyero Church in the port city of Busan, as a potential violation of religious freedom. He urged careful handling of the situation to prevent tensions or misunderstandings between the two countries. In response, Kim reiterated that South Korea maintains a strict separation between church and state and clarified that ongoing investigations into religious organizations were based on alleged unlawful activities, not on religious beliefs themselves.



Paula White addressing the IRF Summit in Washington DC February 2m 2026

The [article](#) also highlights Paula White's public stance on religious freedom, particularly her remarks at the "[International Religious Freedom Summit](#)" held in Washington, D.C. in early February. At this event, White delivered a keynote speech emphasizing the universal importance of protecting religious liberty as a fundamental human right. Her comments extended beyond general principles and included expressions of personal support for [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) - also called [Mother Han](#) - the leader of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), often referred to in South Korea as [Unificationism](#) (통일교).

White spoke warmly about her personal connection to [Mother Han](#), stating that she felt a deep sense of solidarity with her efforts to unite people of different faiths and defend religious freedom globally. The spiritual advisor also expressed concern for [Mother Han](#)'s well-being, dignity, and rights, framing these concerns within a broader call for international vigilance in protecting religious liberties.

Importantly, White did not limit her message to a single country. She called on Japan, South Korea, and

all nations to uphold religious freedom in a manner that is "complete, fair, and consistent". This phrasing underscores a key theme of the [article](#): the idea that religious freedom should not be selectively applied or influenced by political considerations but rather treated as a universal and non-negotiable standard.

The [article](#) notes that White has made similar statements in the past, including at the previous year's IRF Summit. Her repeated emphasis suggests that this is a core issue in her public advocacy and one that intersects with her political connections.

For a non-Korean audience, the significance of this story lies in the intersection of religion, diplomacy, and perception. It illustrates how informal networks - such as personal relationships between political leaders and religious figures - can play a meaningful role in international relations. It also highlights how concerns about religious freedom can influence diplomatic dialogue, even between close allies like the United States and South Korea.

Ultimately, the [article](#) portrays Paula White as a pivotal figure operating at the crossroads of faith and politics. Through her relationship with Trump and her advocacy on religious freedom, she has become an influential intermediary capable of shaping both high-level meetings and broader conversations about human rights on the global stage.

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Testimony Dispute Takes Center Stage In Trial

March 21, 2026 • Knut Holdhus



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](#).



Logo of News1

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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

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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.



Yoon Yeong-ho, here 5th December 2021. Screenshot from live transmission from an international rally by *FFWPU*.

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.

Another point of contention involved a 2021 event hosted by



Donald Trump delivering his video message 12th Sep. 2021 at Rally of Hope held in Gapyeong, South Korea. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission via *PeaceLink*

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



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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.



Dr. Hak Ja Han honored for her peace work, receiving an honorary doctorate on 14th August 2022 from Francisco Rojas Aravena, President of University of Peace in Costa Rica, an international university established by the UN General Assembly in 1980. Photo: Graeme Carmichael.

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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Featured image above: Artistic impression of [Hak Ja Han](#) in court hearing. Illustration: ChatGPT, 21st March 2026.

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