FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Pompeo, Holy Mother Han Targeted for Her Faith

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Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

Sekai Nippo

Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo portrays the sentencing of religious leader Hak Ja Han as betrayal of South Korea's hard-won democratic values

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Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo Criticizes Two-Year Prison Sentence for Hak Ja Han as "Religious Persecution"

Family Federation Says Cash Found at Home Was "Not Embezzled"

by Yuya Kawase (川瀬 裕也)

Dr. Hak Ja Han, aka. Mother Han, being wheeled into the courtroom by her grandson Moon Shin-chul at Seoul Central District Court August 31, 2026

Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has criticized the two-year prison sentence imposed on Hak Ja Han, leader of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU, formerly the Unification Church) in South Korea, saying that it could lead to "religious persecution." In connection with the case against Han, approximately 26 billion won (about $19 million US dollars) in cash was found in a safe and elsewhere at her home, and investigative authorities subsequently brought additional charges alleging that she had embezzled funds belonging to the religious organization. The Family Federation, however, has rejected the allegation, arguing that the money constituted "religious offerings" and that there was no evidence that Han had diverted the funds for personal use.

See also: Mike Pompeo Calls Probe of Co-Founder "Lawfare"

On 31st August, the Seoul Central District Court sentenced Han to two years in prison for violations including the Political Funds Act and the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act, in connection with alleged efforts to influence former President Yoon Suk-yeol.

Following the verdict, Pompeo, who served as secretary of state during the first Trump administration, issued a statement saying that the ruling was "deeply troubling for anyone who cares about religious liberty and free expression."

He further asserted, "The evidence suggests that Dr. Han was targeted for her religious and political beliefs."

Pompeo also referred to the fact that Han, an elderly woman with health problems, has been subject to detention for nearly a year. He criticized this as "a betrayal of South Korea's hard-won democratic values." He called on the South Korean government to reconsider the case during the appeals trial and expressed his hope that South Korea "does not go further down the path of religious persecution."

Joint Investigation Headquarters, Illustration: ChatGPT

Meanwhile, on the same day, the Joint Investigation Headquarters into Corruption Involving Church-State Ties, comprising South Korean prosecutors and police, announced that it had additionally indicted Han on charges including occupational embezzlement. According to the investigators, approximately 26 billion won in cash was seized from safes installed in the bedroom of Han's residence, as well as from travel bags and other locations.

Investigators believe that funds belonging to the religious organization were converted into cash and concealed in Han's personal safes and elsewhere. They allege that approximately 10.5 billion won was embezzled through methods including false accounting, in which the money was recorded as being intended for purposes such as financial support for overseas missionaries.

In response, the Korean Headquarters of the Family Federation issued a statement strongly objecting to the application of the embezzlement charge. It described the prosecution's approach as "an unreasonable application of the law that ignores the essence of religious offerings and the legal requirements necessary to establish the crime of embezzlement."

The Family Federation argued that the funds in question were "religious gifts voluntarily offered to Hak Ja Han by believers and various organizations within the religious movement as expressions of their religious faith and devotion."

It maintained that there was no evidence that Han had used the money for personal purposes, explaining that the funds had instead been used for public purposes, such as missionary activities, in accordance with the intentions of those who had made the offerings.

Furthermore, the Family Federation expressed deep concern, arguing that the investigative authorities were applying ordinary legal standards without taking account of the specific context of the traditions and autonomy of religious devotion, thereby distorting the context specific to the faith and treating the funds as personal embezzlement.

The Family Federation said that "it is difficult to accept an expedient conviction based on an abuse of the state's power to impose criminal punishment," and indicated that it would challenge the allegations in court.

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Special Prosecutor Appeal For Harsher Sentence

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***Aggressive lawfare, pursuing harsher sentence and end of hospital treatment for** Mother Han**: Min Joong-gi** (민중기), the head of an army of special prosecutors with extensive investigative powers. Image: Grok xAI, Jan. 2026.*

Han (한학자), leader of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* – often referred to in South Korean media as Unificationism (통일교) – entered a new phase on 4th September, when the **Kim Keon-hee** (김건희) **Special Prosecutor's Team** led by Min Joong-gi (민중기) formally appealed the *Seoul Central District Court*'s first-instance judgment. The court had sentenced Hak Ja Han (한학자) – also called Mother Han – to a total of **two years in prison** on 31st August in a case concerning alleged political dealings between the religious organization and figures associated with the former Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열) administration.

See also Pompeo: Mother Han (83)

Targeted for Her Beliefs

A large number of South Korean media outlets reported on 4th September on the appeal.

Special Prosecutor: the sentence was too lenient

Yonhap News gives the most detailed account of the Special Prosecutor's legal objections and reports that they appealed on two principal grounds: **"unfair sentencing"** and **"misinterpretation of the law concerning the scope of the investigation".** The prosecution argues that the two-year sentence does not adequately reflect the seriousness of the case.

The logo of Yonhap News, South Korea's designated public news agency and the country's largest wire service.

One of its main objections concerns the first-instance court's consideration of the activities of Mother Han in promoting world peace as a mitigating circumstance. According to Yonhap, the Special Prosecutor's Team characterized this as a **"vague and abstract"** reason that should not have been given significant weight in sentencing.

The prosecution also objects to the court's assessment of the motive behind the alleged offenses. The court regarded the expansion of the Family Federation's religious and political influence, rather than personal enrichment, as a favorable consideration. The Special Prosecutor's Team considers this reasoning inappropriate.

Maeil Ilbo highlights the same point in its headline, describing the two-year sentence as **"light compared with the nature of the offense".** It also draws attention to the prosecution's comparison with **Yoon Yeong-ho** (윤영호), the former director-general of the Family Federation's World Headquarters. Yoon had previously received a one-year-and-six-month sentence that was finalized by the Supreme Court and received a further six-month sentence in the present case. The prosecution argues that the resulting two years is the same as Mother Han's sentence, despite its view that her position and responsibility in the alleged activities warranted a substantially heavier punishment.

The logo of Maeil Ilbo (매일일보), a South Korean national comprehensive daily newspaper based in Seoul.

Disagreement over which charges could legally be investigated

A second major element of the appeal concerns the **scope of the**

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A second major element of the appeal concerns the **scope of the Kim Keon-hee (김건희) Special Prosecutor Act,** a piece of legislation passed by the South Korean parliament – where Lee Jae-myung (이재명) holds a super-majority – to establish "independent" directly state-appointed prosecutors to investigate corruption, bribery, and market manipulation involving the former First Lady, Kim Keon-hee (김건희). The act bypasses standard state prosecutors not trusted by the current Lee administration.

The first-instance court dismissed several charges without reaching a substantive judgment because it concluded that they fell outside the offenses that the Special Prosecutor was legally authorized to investigate. These included a charge alleging that Mother Han had **instructed the destruction or concealment of evidence**, as well as certain allegations concerning the "embezzlement" of funds allegedly connected with political financing involving politicians overseas.

Yonhap, MBC News, Kookje Shinmun, **and** Maeil Ilbo all report the Special Prosecutor's objection that the court's interpretation of the investigative mandate was legally incorrect. The prosecution describes the court's interpretation of the statutory language concerning evidence destruction as **"clearly contrary to the wording of the law".**

*Logo of **MBC News**, the news division of the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), one of South Korea's four major nationwide television and radio networks.*

The logo of Kookje Shinmun (국제신문), a major Korean-language regional daily newspaper based in Busan, South Korea.

Kukmin Ilbo, however, provides an additional argument from the Special Prosecutor's side concerning alleged embezzlement of funds from institutions affiliated with the Family Federation. The prosecution maintains that it was legitimate to investigate these funds because they **might have subsequently been provided to people on the Yoon Suk-yeol** (윤석열) **side, including Kim Keon-hee** (김건희) **and Kweon Seong-dong** (권성동). According to the prosecution, the fact that investigators ultimately failed to establish such a connection does not mean that the original investigation itself was unlawful.

*The logo of Kukmin Ilbo (국민일보), a **major national comprehensive daily newspaper** based in Seoul, South Korea, established in 1988, by David Yonggi Cho, the late pastor and founder of the Yoido Full Gospel Church – one of the largest megachurches in the world.*

This is an important distinction: the Special Prosecutors are arguing that the legality of initiating the investigation should be assessed on the basis of the information and circumstances available **when the investigation began**, rather than retrospectively on the basis of whether the suspected connection was ultimately proven.

Newspim **emphasizes the broader constitutional argument**

Newspim gives the strongest emphasis to the Special Prosecutor's characterization of the case as much more than an ordinary corruption or political-funding case. It reports the prosecution's

Logo of Newspim (뉴스핌), a prominent South Korean economic and financial news agency and multimedia company based in Seoul.

assertion that the case concerns a religious organization **allegedly joining forces with political power to interfere in state affairs**, thereby infringing constitutional principles including **the separation of religion and state and representative democracy**.

The Special Prosecutor's Team therefore argues that the social harm allegedly caused by the case, together with the seriousness of the offenses, makes the two-year sentence disproportionate to the defendants' alleged responsibility. This framing is significant because it presents the prosecution's appeal not merely as an attempt to increase an individual prison sentence, but as a challenge based on what it considers to be the broader constitutional and political significance of the case.

Appeal against continued suspension of detention

The Special Prosecutor has also appealed the court's decision to extend the suspension of detention **for** Mother Han **(83)** who suffers from several serious health issues.

***Extended the suspension of detention five times**: Presiding judge Woo In-seong. Image: Grok xAI, 30th July 2026.*

The first-instance court, with Woo In-seong (우인성) as presiding judge, had extended the suspension on 1st September, the day after the verdict, allowing her to remain outside detention until **6 p.m. on 30th September**. The decision was reportedly based in part on her deteriorating health and medical circumstances.

Newspim notes that this was the **fifth extension** of the suspension of detention. The other reports likewise emphasize that the Special Prosecutor is challenging this decision separately from its appeal against the sentence.

At present, Mother Han**'s own legal team has not filed an appeal**, according to Yonhap, MBC News, Kookje Shinmun, and Maeil Ilbo.

What the first-instance judgment actually decided

The 4th September reports also recall that Mother Han was convicted on several central charges. She received **one year for violating the Political Funds Act** and another **one year for violating the *Improper Solicitation and Graft Act* and for occupational embezzlement**, producing the combined two-year sentence.

At the same time, the court did **not** accept every allegation. Some occupational embezzlement charges resulted in acquittals, while the evidence-destruction and certain overseas political-funding-related embezzlement charges were dismissed because the court considered them outside the Special Prosecutor's statutory investigative jurisdiction.

Thus, the 4th September appeal is significant for two separate reasons: the Special Prosecutor is seeking a **harsher sentence**, but is also asking the appellate court to reconsider several fundamental **legal rulings about which charges could properly be investigated and prosecuted**.

The case therefore moves into the appeal stage with substantial disagreements remaining – not only over the appropriate punishment for Mother Han, but also over the legal boundaries of the Special Prosecutor's investigation itself.

See also Pompeo: Mother Han (83) Targeted for Her Beliefs

***Text**: Knut Holdhus, editor*

***Featured image** above: Special prosecutor appeal for a harsher sentence. Illustration: ChatGPT, 5th September 2026.*

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