FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Juraj Lajda on Hak Ja Han - Nobel Prize Case for Courage and Peace

Knut Holdhus
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Hak Ja Han, Mother Han 14th August 2022 in Gapyeong, South Korea

Dr. Juraj Lajda, Doctor of Philosophy, lecturer and publisher, former political prisoner under the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, Photo (2024)

Peacebuilding in the face of adversity: Hak Ja Han and the Nobel's legacy of courage

A Courageous Voice Under Pressure

Why Hak Ja Han Deserves the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize

Op-ed by PhD. Juraj Lajda

Prague, 16th September 2026: In early October, the Norwegian Nobel Committee will decide to whom this year's Peace Prize will be awarded. Among the 287 nominees is Hak Ja Han, globally recognized as the "Mother of Peace". Her candidacy is highlighted today by a stark contrast: while her decades-long devotion to global reconciliation earns widespread international praise, she and her movement are currently facing an unprecedented storm of political and legal hostility in her home country of South Korea.

See also Mother Han Nominated for Nobel Peace Prize 2026

The Nobel Committee has a long-standing tradition of honoring peacebuilders who labor against severe headwinds. When the Austrian activist Bertha von Suttner - born here in Prague - became the first woman to win the prize in 1905, her award was justified "for her audacity to oppose the horrors of war." Throughout history, the prize has continually elevated leaders who utilized non-violent transformation in seemingly impossible environments. Martin Luther King Jr. fought entrenched segregation, Desmond Tutu stood firmly against apartheid, and Mother Teresa brought solace to those most rejected by society.

It is within this exact legacy of resilience that Hak Ja Han's life's work must be viewed. Born in what is now North Korea, she was forced to flee the oncoming communist regime as a young child just prior to the Korean War. This definitive personal experience shaped her lifelong dedication to the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula - a vital bridge of dialogue that experts recently warned South Korea must preserve rather than dismantle.

As the leader of a global movement, she has established massive practical initiatives, including the Women's Federation for World Peace and the worldwide Peace Road project. Her vision remains anchored in the core principle that humanity is one family under God, a philosophy she has shared directly with heads of state, academic networks, and interfaith leaders across the globe.

Bertha von Suttner, at the time of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1905

Yet, what makes Hak Ja Han's candidacy most compelling right now is her refusal to abandon her role as a peacemaker while under intense personal persecution. The ongoing legal campaigns against her in South Korea have sparked growing international outcry, with prominent human rights observers pointing out the dangerous weaponization of politics and a glaring lack of objective proof. The fact that an 83-year-old leader faces such heavy state pressure, yet continuously responds by preaching reconciliation, unity, and love instead of hatred, mirrors the profound moral strength of the historic laureates who walked before her.

Selecting a single winner from hundreds of noble candidates is an unenviable task. However, if the Nobel Peace Prize is to remain a beacon that illuminates dark political landscapes, recognizing Hak Ja Han this year would send a powerful signal to the world: that building true peace requires immense courage - especially when the storm hits closest to home.

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PhD. Juraj Lajda

Doctor of Philosophy, lecturer and publisher, former political prisoner under the communist regime in Czechoslovakia.

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Growing international outcry over sentencing of octogenarian Mother Han as it sparks religious freedom alarm over South Korea's backsliding

Tokyo, 14th September 2026 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper Sekai Nippo. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. Original article

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International Concerns Mount Over Prison Sentence for Hak Ja Han

NEWS Close-Up

by the International Affairs Department of Sekai Nippo

Religious Leaders and Human Rights Advocates Protest

Concerns are mounting in the international community over the prison sentence handed down by South Korean judicial authorities to Hak Ja Han (한학자), leader of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (FFWPU, formerly the Unification Church). Politicians, religious leaders, and human rights advocates have successively criticized the South Korean authorities and called for a review of the verdict, citing concerns over freedom of religion, human rights, and due process.

See also Hak Ja Han: A Nobel Case for Courage and Peace

Former U.S. Senator Sam Brownback, who served as *U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom* during President Donald Trump's first administration, pointed out [On X on 2nd September],

> "South Korea's backsliding on religious freedom should be concerning to everyone."

Sam Brownback, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom 2018-2021. Photo: Sekai Nippo

Referring to the fact that the allegations forming the basis of the guilty verdict against Hak Ja Han came from a former senior official who had already been expelled from the organization, Brownback expressed concern that this "alarmingly shows that its judicial system is failing to live up to democratic standards."

He further criticized the treatment of Hak Ja Han as though she were a serious criminal, despite having no prior criminal record and suffering from serious health problems.

Brownback also referred to reports that the Chinese Communist Party is supporting the campaign to prosecute Hak Ja Han, saying that Hak Ja Han and the Family Federation have long been known for their anti-communist activities, and the South Korean government should be wary of Chinese efforts to exert influence.

Voices defending Hak Ja Han have also emerged from religious circles. Rev. Mark Burns, one of President Trump's religious advisers, expressed [on X on 3rd September] "grave concern" over the verdict.

Pointing out that Hak Ja Han is

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Rev. Mark Burns in October 2025 outside Seoul Detention Center, where Mother Han has been held. Screenshot from video by FFWPU

Pointing out that Hak Ja Han is an international religious leader who has influenced millions of people around the world, Burns emphasized, "Governments must be extremely careful that criminal law is never used in a way that becomes a weapon against religious leadership, religious organizations, or people of faith."

He further noted that the freedom to worship, organize, speak out, and participate in public life are fundamental human rights, and called on the South Korean government to guarantee due process for Hak Ja Han and a fair and transparent appellate trial.

Burns also appealed to religious leaders of all faiths – including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism – to stand together in defense of religious freedom, transcending their differences in religious belief. He said,

> "Religious freedom cannot depend upon whether we agree with another person's theology. You do not have to share someone's beliefs to defend their right to believe them."

Human rights organizations have likewise issued strong criticism.

The U.S.-based *Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice*, headed by Katrina Lantos Swett, accused the South Korean government of targeting Hak Ja Han and described the verdict as "an unmistakable injustice".

Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, president of the Washington, D.C.-based Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice. Photo: Sekai Nippo

After questioning the credibility of testimony that triggered the prosecution resulting in the conviction, the foundation stated [on X on 3rd September],

> "It is shameful to witness a democratic government hounding and persecuting an 83-year-old religious leader like a criminal."

The foundation further argued that Hak Ja Han's "real crime" appears to be her principled opposition to communism. It also expressed serious concern over reports that the *Chinese Communist Party* is backing the prosecution, urging those who value religious freedom and democracy to closely monitor developments.

The foundation called on the South Korean government to uphold the values of a democratic nation committed to protecting religious freedom and argued that Hak Ja Han should be released while her appeal is being heard.

In South Korea, authorities have targeted not only Hak Ja Han, leader of the Family Federation, but also Pastor Son Hyun-bo (손현보) of the Presbyterian Segyero Church (세계로교회) and Lee Man-hee (95 – 이만희), chairman of Shincheonji Church of Jesus, for investigation or prosecution. Against this backdrop, former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have also

Gingrich and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have also expressed concern over the prison sentence imposed on Hak Ja Han, making the issue of religious freedom in South Korea a matter of growing international attention.

See also Hak Ja Han: A Nobel Case for Courage and Peace

***Featured image** above: Rev. Mark Burns, Sam Brownback, and Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett. Photo: Sekai Nippo*

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