

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Family Fed Korea Response to Pilgrimage by Ferry Claim

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The Gapyeong ferry on an early May evening in 2024



Seoul Shinmun, a South Korean daily newspaper

In statement to South Korean media 28th Dec. 2025, Family Federation rebuts distorted media reports that claim ferry project is a "religious pilgrimage business"

A statement in Korean issued by the [Family Federation](#) in South Korea to the Korean media on 28th December 2025. Translated from the [text on the Korean language website](#) of the [Family Federation](#).



The North Han (Bukhan) River flowing through Gapyeong, South Korea, on its way from the Taebaek Mountains in North Korea to Yangpyeong where it joins the South Han River to form the Han River that passes through Seoul before merging with the Imjin River and ending in the Yellow Sea (2002)

**Rebuttal to the 26th December 2025 Seoul Shinmun Report**

On 26th December 2025, Seoul Shinmun published an article titled "Photo of Hak Ja Han Used in 15 Billion Won Taxpayer-Funded Project... 'Unification Church Pilgrimage by Ferry?'" [15 billion won is ca. 10 million US dollars]. The report distorted and labeled the project as a "religious pilgrimage business" of a specific religion based solely on fragmentary circumstances and a biased perspective, while disregarding the background, structure, and operational realities of the project. Furthermore, the article raised allegations of preferential treatment without providing

the parties involved any opportunity to present a rebuttal.

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The article stated:

"Since 2020, approximately 8.5 billion won [USD 5.8 million] has been invested in the Bukhangang Millennium Waterway project promoted by Gapyeong County. From May of last

year, when full-scale operations began, through November of this year – a period of about 19 months – the revenue earned by Gapyeong County amounted to only 456 million won [ca. USD 315,000]. Considering that the total investment amounts to 15 billion won, it is expected to take more than 30 years for the county to recover the investment...

Criticism has also emerged that the current route is effectively a '[Unification Church](#) pilgrimage.' Tourists aboard the cruise must pass by the HJ Cheonju Cheonbo Training Center, where [Unification Church](#) members gather. Large photographs of the late Rev. [Sun Myung Moon](#), the founding president of the [Unification Church](#), and [President Han](#) are displayed on the exterior walls of the building, making them unavoidable throughout the cruise. Kim (65), a resident who has lived in Gapyeong County for over 40 years, said, 'When you take the cruise, all you see are things related to the [Unification Church](#) – it's no different from a pilgrimage,' adding, 'People say it feels like you're looking at religious facilities rather than enjoying nature.'

In addition, while using a screenshot from a Makada TV YouTube video, the report stated:

"The total budget invested by Gapyeong County in the Bukhangang Millennium Waterway project, which has devolved into a [Unification Church](#) profit-making venture, amounts to 15 billion won [ca. USD 10 million]. As soon as operations of the HJ Cruise, run by the [Unification Church](#), began, large hanging photographs of Rev. [Sun Myung Moon](#), founder of the [Unification Church](#), and current president Han Hak-ja appear between buildings."

However:

**1. The Seoul Shinmun report distorted and defined the project as a "pilgrimage business" without properly verifying its background, structure, or operational reality, relying only on fragmentary circumstances.**



*The starting point for the Gapyeong ferry river cruise*

This project is a public - private partnership aimed at building water-based tourism infrastructure, a long-standing aspiration of Gapyeong County.

The "Bukhangang Millennium Waterway" is a long-stay tourism initiative that Gapyeong County has envisioned for more than a decade, designed to connect major tourist attractions along the Bukhan River through a water transportation network. Gapyeong's tourism industry has long faced the challenge of

short visitor stays due to the dispersal of attractions such as Nami Island, Jara Island, and Petite France. Establishing a water-based transportation network to connect these sites has been a key issue in regional tourism development.

In the past, several private companies, including "00 Cruise," proposed and reviewed participation in the project, but all eventually withdrew due to high investment costs and uncertainty over profitability. Under these circumstances, private operators holding ferry business licenses – such as Gapyeong Cruise, Cheongpyeong Ferry, and Namiseong – entered into technical partnerships to advance this regional tourism revitalization project.

**2. The 8.5 billion won invested is not "wasted taxpayer money" but is being returned as "public assets of Gapyeong County".**

Of the funds spent, approximately 8 billion won [USD 5.5 million] was invested in the construction of "Jaranaru," a public pier owned by Gapyeong County. This facility is a permanent public asset that improves access to Jara Island and enhances convenience for tourists.

Moreover, by having private operators construct and operate the nation's first large-scale electric cruise ships – worth approximately 40 billion won [ca. USD 27.5 million] – Gapyeong County was able to save substantial public funds while gaining the tangible benefit of an eco-friendly tourism brand.

According to media reports released by the county, Jaranaru Pier on Jara Island's southern area began



operations in May 2024 and, over 19 months through the end of November 2025, recorded a cumulative total of 93,000 users and net revenue of approximately 450 million won [ca. USD 310,000].



Importantly, beyond simple ticket revenue, the economic ripple effects of 90,000 tourists staying in Gapyeong – spending at local restaurants, accommodations, and traditional markets – must be taken into account. Claiming "waste of taxpayer money" based solely on ticket sales severely undermines the public-interest value of the project.

**3. The photographs used in the report were screenshots from a YouTube video intentionally filmed with a particular agenda.**

To label the project as a "pilgrimage business" simply because [Unification Church](#) facilities are visible from a specific area near the pier distorts the project's essence and purpose.

Selecting a site that meets requirements for water depth, rock-bed conditions, and parking infrastructure is a technical necessity for the safe docking of large electric cruise ships. The current pier location is the only site that meets these technical requirements. The visibility of certain facilities along the route is merely a natural result of geographical proximity.

Tour routes are designed around water tourism paths and natural scenery. Reviews from numerous visitors indicate that discomfort regarding a specific religion is limited to a very small minority. The fact that approximately 100 group tours operate annually further demonstrates that this project is no different from any other tourist destination.

**4. Meanwhile, Gapyeong Cruise is fulfilling its responsibility as a "public transportation service" despite operating at a loss.**

Gapyeong Cruise goes beyond operating sightseeing vessels and serves as a form of public water transportation under a ferry business license. Even though revenues have fallen short of expectations, regular routes are maintained for public-interest reasons and to honor commitments made to users.

Going forward, Gapyeong Cruise pledges to continue exploring diversified operational strategies in alignment with the project's purpose – promoting tourism development and revitalizing the local economy of Gapyeong – while striving to enhance user satisfaction.

28th December 2025

External Relations Headquarters

Korean Branch of [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)

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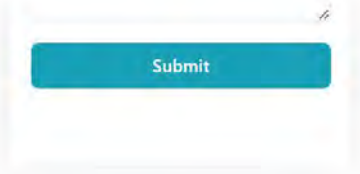




Nara City, the lay-judge trial of defendant Tetsuya Yamagami (山上 徹也 – 45), who was charged with murder and other offenses, has concluded at the Nara



Positional relationship between **former prime minister Shinzo Abe and the shooter Tetsuya Yamagami** on his assassination. Sourced from Nikkei.com. Photo: Asanagi / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY 4.0](#)



District Court. Over the course of 15 hearings, the trial drew significant public attention. This series highlights the issues revealed by the proceedings.

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More than three years and three months after the incident, the trial finally began. From the outset, the facts surrounding Abe's killing were not contested; sentencing was the sole issue. The defense was widely expected to seek leniency by arguing that Yamagami's mother had joined the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), that her large financial donations caused family hardship, and that his disadvantaged upbringing formed the background to the crime.



The immediate aftermath of the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in the vicinity of Kintetsu Yamato-Saidaiji station northern entrance on 8th July 2022. Photo: Tokumeigakarinoashima / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY 4.0](#)

In its closing argument, the prosecution stated that **the defendant's upbringing – including his mother's large donations to the former [Unification Church](#) – had “an extremely limited influence on his decision-making regarding the crime.”** It described the act as “an unprecedented crime in our country's postwar history, in which a former prime minister was killed in full public view,” and emphasized that “resorting to violence in order to damage a specific [organization](#) is absolutely unacceptable in a state governed by the rule of law.” **The prosecution sought a sentence of life imprisonment.**

In response, the defense argued that “a perspective recognizing him as a victim of abuse involving religion is indispensable,” and insisted that “his upbringing is the most important mitigating factor.” **The defense maintained that the sentence should be limited to 20 years' imprisonment.**

Although only one person – former Prime Minister Abe – was killed, given the grave social impact of the incident and past precedents, many had expected the prosecution to seek the death penalty. Commenting on the decision to seek life imprisonment instead, former prosecutor and attorney Yasuyuki Takai (高井康行) criticized the prosecution, stating:

“There is absolutely no consideration of how the killing of an important political leader in front of the public during an election campaign affected democracy. This calls the prosecution's judgment into question.”

He added,

“Considering that the Nagasaki mayor shooting case sought the death penalty, it is only natural that this case should also warrant capital punishment; otherwise, the balance is lost” ([Sekai Nippo](#), 19<sup>th</sup> December).

The defendant's crime may not have been “political terrorism” with a clear ideological agenda. However, by killing Shinzo Abe – an influential politician who served the longest tenure as prime minister in constitutional history – the act was clearly intended to shock society and damage a specific [religious organization](#). That is nothing other than terrorism.



Italian sociologist of religion Massimo Introvigne has stated, based on Western precedents, that the act was “nothing other than anti-cult terrorism,” and has **criticized Japanese media for refraining from calling the defendant a terrorist.**

Immediately after the incident, many people – including





**Dr. Massimo Introvigne**, Italian sociologist of religion, founder of **CESNUR**, specializing in new religious movements and religious liberty. A prolific author, he has advised governments and international bodies, and served as OSCE Representative on combating racism, xenophobia, and intolerance against Christians worldwide and comments on contemporary religious controversies. Here speaking at the UN Office at Geneva on 16th June 2025. Screenshot from video by UPF.

politicians – condemned the attack as a heinous act and a serious challenge to democracy. However, once the spotlight shifted to issues surrounding the former **Unification Church**, the essential nature of the incident as terrorism was forgotten.

It is evident from online posts that the defendant had a strong interest in the 2019 American film *Joker*. The film depicts a clown performer who, driven by his misfortune and resentment toward society, goes on a killing spree. The character becomes a



*Joker* advert on a Malpas Road bus shelter, Newport, Wales, UK. Photo (2019): Jaggery / Wikimedia Commons. License: **CC ASA 2.0 Gen**. Cropped

kind of dark hero, inspiring others to imitate him and eventually sparking riots.

When the **head** of the **religious organization** visited Japan to give a lecture in 2019, **the defendant attempted to bring Molotov cocktails into the Nagoya venue but was unable to enter** and abandoned the plan. The day before, he had watched *Joker* in a movie theater. On Twitter, he posted about the film at least 15 times, expressing sympathy with the protagonist.

It is possible that the **defendant identified himself with the film's main character**. This influence may be a crucial factor related to his motive and to the true nature of the crime. However, it does not appear that the police or prosecutors conducted any substantial interrogation on this point.

In April 2023, less than a year after the Abe shooting, then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄) was targeted during an election campaign event in Wakayama Prefecture, where a homemade explosive was thrown at him. Despite the fact that the Abe assassination inspired such copycat crimes, the media continue to avert their eyes from the incident's essential nature as terrorism and instead emphasize sympathetic narratives about the defendant's personal circumstances.



Prime Minister Tsuyoshi Inukai (犬養毅 – 1855 – 1932). Photo: Wikimedia Commons. **Public domain** image. Cropped

This abnormal phenomenon recalls the trial following the 15<sup>th</sup> May Incident [See editor's note 1 below] of 1932, in which young naval officers assassinated Prime Minister Tsuyoshi Inukai (犬養毅). Immediately after the incident, the public sympathized with the prime minister, who had been unjustly killed. However, once the trial began and newspapers started reporting sympathetically on the defendants, public opinion shifted dramatically, and movements emerged calling the act a "righteous deed" and petitioning for leniency.

As a result, the three ringleaders – originally facing the death penalty – had their sentences reduced to 15 years' imprisonment or less. This lenient treatment of terrorists led to a succession of further terrorist acts, culminating in the 26<sup>th</sup> February Incident [See editor's note 2 below] of 1936 and the eventual collapse of party politics. The trial over the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe – a

grave challenge to democracy – must not become a "Reiwa-era [from 2019] 15<sup>th</sup> May Trial."

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**Featured image** above: Nara District Court. Photo (2007): 663highland / Wikimedia Commons. License: **CC ASA 3.0 Unp**. Cropped

**[Editor's note 1: The 15<sup>th</sup> May Incident** refers to the assassination of Prime Minister Tsuyoshi Inukai (犬養毅) on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1932, by a group of young officers of the Imperial Japanese Navy, acting in concert with civilian ultranationalists. The perpetrators opposed party politics, which they viewed as corrupt and subservient to capitalist and foreign interests, and sought to replace it with direct imperial rule guided by the military.

Inukai was shot and killed at the Prime Minister's residence. According to widely cited accounts, he attempted to reason with his attackers and asked them to "talk it over," but was killed before any discussion could take place.

Initially, public opinion strongly sympathized with the slain prime minister. However, as the trial progressed, newspaper coverage increasingly portrayed the defendants as sincere patriots driven by self-sacrifice rather than as criminals. Thousands of petitions were submitted to the court requesting leniency, some written in blood, praising the defendants' "pure motives."

Although prosecutors sought the death penalty, the court ultimately imposed relatively light sentences: the principal offenders received prison terms of **15 years or**



less. This outcome significantly weakened civilian authority, legitimized political violence in the public mind, and encouraged the belief that extralegal action could be justified if claimed to serve the nation.

The 15<sup>th</sup> May Incident is widely regarded as a critical turning point in the erosion of parliamentary democracy in prewar Japan.]

[**Editor's note 2:** The **26<sup>th</sup> February Incident** occurred on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1936, when approximately 1,400 Army troops, led by radical young officers, launched an attempted coup d'état in Tokyo. The rebels assassinated or attempted to assassinate key government and military leaders, including Korekiyo Takahashi (高橋 是清), who was then Finance Minister and had been prime minister, and occupied central government districts.

The insurgents claimed they were acting in loyalty to the Emperor and sought to purge the government of corrupt elites, restore "true" imperial rule, and implement radical reforms. Unlike the May 15 Incident, however, the Emperor firmly rejected the rebels' actions and demanded their immediate suppression.

After several days of tense standoff, the coup collapsed. The leaders were arrested, court-martialed, and many were executed. The incident marked the final failure of overt military rebellion but paradoxically accelerated the consolidation of military dominance over Japanese politics.

Following the 26<sup>th</sup> February Incident, political parties were effectively marginalized, civilian leadership was subordinated to the military, and Japan moved rapidly toward authoritarian governance and wartime mobilization. The incident is thus seen as the culmination of a trajectory that began with earlier leniency toward political violence, notably after the 15<sup>th</sup> May Incident.]



Viscount Korekiyo Takahashi (高橋 是清 1854–1936), a prominent Japanese statesman who served as Prime Minister from 1921 to 1922 and was Minister of Finance at the time of his assassination. He also held positions as a member of the House of Peers and as head of the Bank of Japan. Photo: Unknown author. [Public domain image](#)

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