

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Family Fed Explains Gapyeong Development

Knut Holdhus

December 29, 2025



Part of the Cheonwon Complex of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), built in Songsan-ri, Seorak-myeon, Gapyeong-gun, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea



South Korean investigative news outlet Newstapa. The Korea Center for Investigative Journalism (KCIJ) is the first nonprofit investigative reporting organization in the country. Newstapa has had their office raided by prosecutors for publishing an interview sensitive to the authorities.

Family Federation issues clarification responding to media allegations concerning Gapyeong development based on public-private partnerships

A statement in Korean issued by the [Family Federation](#) in South Korea to the Korean media on 29th December 2025. Translated from the [text on the Korean language website](#) of the [Family Federation](#).

Rebuttal to the 26th December 2025 Newstapa Report: "A UN Secretariat in the Unification Church Palace? The 'Unification Church Special Prosecutor' Investigation Begins"

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The [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (hereinafter referred to as the "[Family Federation](#)") would like to clarify the relevant facts regarding the Newstapa report dated 26th December, as outlined below. We respectfully ask members of the media to refer to this explanation in order to ensure balanced and accurate reporting.

1. Facts Regarding the Hosting of an International Organization

[Reported Content]

"It has been confirmed that the incumbent Gapyeong County Governor has been actively cooperating in the rather absurd [Unification Church](#) project to host an international organization, a UN Secretariat, inside the [Unification Church](#) palace."

[Facts]

This claim is not true. The international organization established and currently operating at the relevant facility is the ISC Secretariat (Inter-Parliamentary Speaker's Conference). The "UN Secretariat" mentioned in the report is an incorrect designation and does not reflect reality. It appears that the report

failed to verify the basic name of the organization in question.

We request that accurate fact-checking be conducted when reporting on a private organization that has made large-scale investments for public-interest purposes.

2. Facts Regarding Allegations of "Special Treatment and Waste of Taxpayer Money"

[Reported Content]



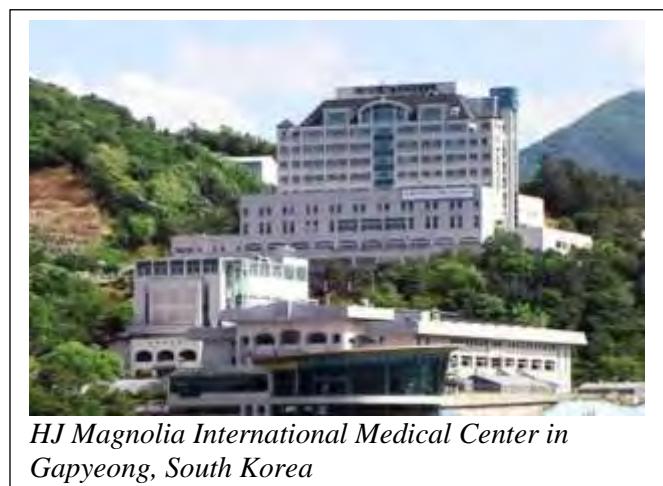
"There are indications that Gapyeong County, a local government, sought to support a [Unification Church](#) project aimed at turning Gapyeong, Gyeonggi Province, into a holy site. It has been revealed that the county is even pursuing designation as a special zone to provide various preferential measures such as financial support and regulatory relaxation. In short, it appears that Gapyeong County is preparing to pour public resources into a project being promoted under the direction of [Unification Church](#) leader [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자)."

"This is an unprecedented allegation of church-state collusion, in which the public system of local autonomy has operated for the convenience of a specific [religious organization](#)."

[Facts]

As of the end of June 2025, Gapyeong County has a population of only 63,494. A review of annual population trends clearly shows that Gapyeong is classified as a "population-declining region." Under these circumstances, it is an essential administrative decision for the local government's survival to cooperate with private entities that have the capacity to invest in order to revitalize the regional economy.

The tourism cluster and planned development special zone being promoted by Gapyeong County are lawful regional development projects carried out in accordance with relevant legislation. The participation of HJ Group and ITC Korea, which are pursuing projects in the Gapyeong area, should be understood as a public-private partnership (PPP) model chosen by the local government in a situation where alternative investment options are limited. Labeling this as "special treatment" amounts to a wholesale denial of administrative efforts aimed at regional development.



HJ Magnolia International Medical Center in Gapyeong, South Korea

In particular, HJ Magnolia International Medical Center, established in 2003, operates the only emergency room and obstetrics department in Gapyeong, a medically underserved area. Over the past 22 years, it has invested a total of KRW 199.6 billion (ca. 138 million US dollars) – an annual average of KRW 9.1 billion (ca. 6.3 million US dollars) – in private funds. Despite operating at a loss, the hospital has maintained a 365-day emergency room, treated 6,634 emergency patients in 2024 alone, and handled 2,277 childbirths. It has faithfully fulfilled its role in public healthcare, including receiving commendations from the Governor of Gyeonggi Province for

disaster recovery support.

While the report claims that public funds are being poured into the project, the reality is that private entities are bearing financial losses to invest in a medically vulnerable region, thereby protecting the lives and health of Gapyeong residents. We request balanced reporting that reflects this reality.

3. Facts Regarding the "Sanctification" Allegations

[Reported Content]

"The area where Gapyeong County plans to develop a tourism cluster exactly coincides with the [Unification Church](#)'s Garden of Eden – from the vicinity of the HJ Cheonju Cheonbo Training Center, where [Unification Church](#) members pray, to the area near the HJ Global Art Center, which the [church](#) uses for large-scale events."

"At the very front, there are instructions from [True Mother Hak Ja Han](#). It states that the Cheonwon complex must be made into a religious and cultural holy site like the Vatican in Rome."



HJ Global Art Center, previously Cheongshim Peace World Center (2018)

[Facts]

Gapyeong County, with a population of 63,494, faces the risk of regional extinction. In this context, it is a natural responsibility of the local government to pursue regional growth by cooperating with private entities capable of investing capital. Utilizing existing infrastructure is a managerial decision intended to enhance investment efficiency.

Gapyeong's tourism strategy has focused on developing stay-type tourism by connecting fragmented tourist destinations (such as Nami Island, Jarasum Island, and Petite France) via water routes. For more than a decade, the

project failed to move forward due to uncertain business viability. It is now being implemented through cooperation among multiple private operators – including HJ Group, Gapyeong Cruise, Cheongpyeong Leisure, and Nami Island – while minimizing the county's financial burden through investments such as the construction of eco-friendly electric cruise ships totaling KRW 40 billion (ca. 27.5 million US dollars).

Furthermore, it falls under the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion for a [religious organization](#) to hold a vision of developing its facilities into globally recognized religious and cultural landmarks. Linking a private vision of building cultural assets – such as the Vatican in Rome or Mecca in Saudi Arabia – to separate allegations is inconsistent with the facts, and we ask that this point be reconsidered.

4. Facts Regarding the Interview Content

[Reported Content]

"The county governor admitted that he did what the [Unification Church](#) told him to do."

[Facts]



On-the-ground [Family Federation](#) volunteers in Gapyeong, South Korea after the floods July 20, 2025

The "scenario" referenced by Governor Seo Tae-won (서태원) referred to the event operation "protocol". During the questioning process, the reporter reframed this as "doing as instructed", which led the response in that direction. We request reporting that considers context so that the true intent of the interviewee's remarks is accurately conveyed.

5. Opportunity for Rebuttal

In the course of producing this report, Newstapa did not

provide the [Family Federation](#), as the party concerned, with any formal inquiry or opportunity to present a rebuttal. Under the Press Arbitration Act and broadcast deliberation regulations, guaranteeing the right of reply is a fundamental duty of the media. We request that, in future reporting, the positions of the parties involved be duly heard.

Closing Statement

This project represents a cooperative effort between the public and private sectors for the future of Gapyeong. We respectfully ask for the media's attention and cooperation so that legitimate public-private partnerships aimed at regional development and improving the quality of life for Gapyeong residents are

reported based on accurate facts.

Should further verification be required, please feel free to contact us at any time.

29th December 2025,
External Relations Headquarters
Korea Branch of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)

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Response To “Pilgrimage By Ferry” Media Claims

- December 28, 2025
- Knut Holdhus



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.

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 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. Photo (2002): Erich Iseli / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp

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. Photo: FFWPU

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 "OO 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 formal business licenses, such as Gapyeong Cruise, Cheongpyeong Ferry, and

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.



Map of the **Han River watershed** in North Korea and South Korea. Created with the free Global Watersheds web app. Photo: Mheberger / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int

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, Jararu 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

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Korean Branch of **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification**

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Featured image above: The Gapyeong ferry on an early May evening in 2024. Photo: FFWPU

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