


FFWPU Europe and Middle East: S. Korean Prosecutors' Fake Narrative Against Holy Mother Han

Knut Holdhus
November 22, 2025



Artistic impression of South Korean court hearing. Illustration: ChatGPT

South Korean media: Signals from the court that unclear statutes on political giving by religious bodies weaken key pillars of special prosecutors' indictment of Mother Han

**YONHAP NEWS AGENCY**

The South Korean news agency Yonhap News issued on 21st November a report which, if translated into English, would carry the headline "[Unification Church Leader Hak Ja Han's Full Trial Begins 1st December ... Bail Hearing Also Scheduled](#)".



Artistic impression of [Mother Han](#) in wheelchair at preparatory hearing.
Illustration: Grok xAI

The upcoming trial of [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), the leader of the [Family Federation](#) (formerly and by some still called the [Unification Church](#)) represents one of the most politically sensitive legal confrontations in South Korea in recent years, intertwining issues of religion, political funding, prosecutorial authority, and constitutional interpretation.

[Hak Ja Han](#), also called [Mother Han](#), head of a large and influential religious movement, stands accused of orchestrating illicit political contributions, offering valuable gifts to high-profile political figures, and improperly using [Family Federation](#) funds in ways that allegedly violated the Political Funds Act and the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act.

Her indictment sits at the intersection of religious organizations and politics and more recent allegations that the Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열) administration maintained overly close ties with the [Family Federation](#).

On 1st December, [Mother Han](#)'s full criminal trial will begin at the Seoul Central District Court. The case has attracted extensive media attention not only because of [Hak Ja Han](#)'s prominence but also due to the involvement of various key figures, including former [Family Federation](#) World Headquarters Director Yoon

Yeong-ho (윤영호), a former governing-party lawmaker, and individuals connected to the former First Lady.

The special prosecutor leading the inquiry - often referred to as the "Kim Keon-hee (김건희) Special Prosecutor", named after the First Lady - has positioned the case as evidence of systemic political interference by powerful religious groups. The defense teams, meanwhile, argue that the prosecution is making aggressive or overbroad interpretations of political giving, lobbying, and religious organizational autonomy.



*People Power Party lawmaker
Kweon Seong-dong Dec. 23,
2024*

At the center of the legal dispute is a cluster of charges concerning the alleged transfer of 100 million won (around USD 75,000) in early 2022 to then-People Power Party lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동). Prosecutors contend that [Mother Han](#) and her associates made the payment to secure future government support for [Family Federation](#) initiatives. Additional allegations include the delivery of expensive luxury gifts - such as a necklace and a Chanel handbag - to individuals close to the First Lady, interpreted by prosecutors as attempts to influence policy outcomes relevant to the [Federation](#). Layered on top of this is the accusation that the [religious organization](#) engaged in what is known in Korea as "split donations."

In Korean political finance, "split donations" ("쪼개기 후원") refer to a tactic in which a large sum of money is divided into smaller increments and donated under the names of multiple individuals, sometimes without the donors' genuine involvement

or consent. This tactic is used to circumvent statutory limits on political contributions or to mask the actual source of the funds. For instance, if an organization wishes to contribute beyond the legal limit or hide its involvement, it might route contributions through members, employees, or proxies.

In [Mother Han](#)'s case, prosecutors allege that [Family Federation](#) funds totaling 144 million won were broken down and distributed to lawmakers through intermediaries, technically appearing as multiple unrelated donations but originating from a central pot of religious-organization money.

Another important procedural issue is [Mother Han](#)'s request for bail. In South Korea, bail is often granted under specific terms - known as "conditions such as a bond" - which typically include paying a specified sum as a security deposit to the court, promising to comply with court summons, and accepting additional restrictions such as travel limitations.

[Hak Ja Han](#), who recently underwent eye surgery and temporarily received a suspension of detention, is now seeking continued release while awaiting trial, arguing that remaining in custody restricts her ability to participate fully in her defense. The prosecution, however, has not supported her release, citing the seriousness of the allegations and the potential risks of evidence tampering.



Yoon Yeong-ho, Dec. 6, 2020

According to [Yonhap News](#), the attorney of Yoon Young-ho (윤영호), a key witness, stated during the preliminary hearing that Yoon intends to exercise his right to remain silent. His live testimony might have provided concrete evidence about how the alleged political funds or gifts were handled, who approved them, and what role [Hak Ja Han](#) played.

By remaining silent, he withholds first-hand narrative or admission, which could have been a cornerstone of the prosecution's factual case. Without his own testimony, the prosecution may have to rely more on documents, third-party testimony, internal church records, or forensic financial trails. These can be powerful, but they may not carry the same persuasive weight as a person under oath explaining or confessing.

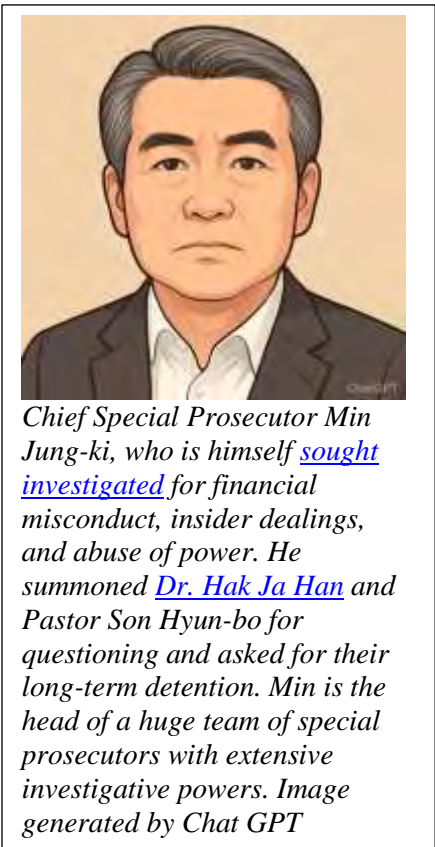
Tensions between the defense and the special prosecutor escalated during the second preparatory hearing on 21st November. A central point of contention involves evidence admissibility - that is, which documents, communications, and records may be entered into the formal evidentiary record of the trial. The special prosecutor has submitted a broad collection of materials, including text messages and internal [Family Federation](#) documents.

[Mother Han](#)'s defense team has refused to consent to the admission of many of these materials, which is their legal right; however, the prosecutor argued that the blanket refusal appeared to be a deliberate tactic to delay proceedings. In Korean criminal procedure, a defendant's consent to evidence can expedite the trial, whereas non-consent forces the court to examine each item more closely, which substantially slows the process. The defense, for its part, objected strongly to the suggestion of delay tactics, framing their refusal as necessary to challenge what they see as overreaching investigative methods.



The court also raised constitutional and statutory questions about whether Korean law explicitly criminalizes political donations made by religious organizations. While the Constitution mandates the separation of church and state, this principle does not automatically mean that every form of financial interaction between religious groups and political actors is prohibited. In fact, the Political Funds Act primarily regulates who may donate and how much, but its language regarding religious bodies as entities - rather than private individuals acting within religious communities - is somewhat ambiguous.

Some legal scholars argue that because religious organizations are not explicitly authorized as political donors, donations made with organizational funds could be treated as unlawful. Others maintain that, barring explicit prohibition, such donations may fall into a gray area unless linked to other crimes such as embezzlement, coercion, or illegal lobbying. The court asked the special prosecutor to clarify which statute specifically penalizes political contributions originating from religious-group funds and how such an offense should be distinguished from simple political engagement by private citizens who happen to belong to religious communities.



Additional complexities arise from embezzlement charges lodged against certain [Family Federation](#) officials involved in distributing funds. Under Korean law, to convict someone of embezzlement, prosecutors must prove "intent to illegally obtain benefits" ("불법영득의사"). The court questioned whether such intent can be established when the underlying act - namely, political giving by a religious organization - may not be clearly criminalized. If donating church funds to political recipients is not itself a crime, then using those funds for such donations may not satisfy the requirement for embezzlement either. This issue could significantly influence the trajectory of the trial.

As the trial approaches, the court has decided to proceed at a pace of approximately one and a half hearings per week - a compromise between the prosecutor's request for twice-weekly sessions and the defense's argument that such a schedule would hinder client consultations, especially with [Mother Han](#) detained. The court appears intent on balancing efficiency with due process, mindful that the case carries political sensitivity and intense public scrutiny.

In sum, the forthcoming trial raises key questions not only about the conduct of a major religious leader but also about the boundaries of political influence, the responsibilities of religious organizations, and the interpretation of laws governing political finance in South Korea. The courtroom deliberations may help clarify unresolved areas of legal doctrine, particularly concerning the legality of political contributions by religious bodies and the standards for admitting various forms of digital and organizational evidence. As proceedings begin, the case promises to remain at the forefront of national conversation.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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Unlikely Alliances In Defense Of Mother Han (82)

- November 19, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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Leftwing advocacy group forms strategic alliances and points out treatment of Mother Han as warning against religious persecution and abuse of state power in South Korea and Japan

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On 15th

The Center for Political Innovation

From the header of the news page of CPI


November The Center for Political Innovation (CPI) published a well-written article on its news page titled “[Persecution of Peace Church Intensifies in Japan and South Korea](#)”. The piece by Philip High presents a forceful condemnation of what it characterizes as an escalating, **coordinated campaign of political repression** against the

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At the center of the narrative is [Hak Ja Han](#) – referred to by followers as the “[Mother of Peace](#)” or “[Mother Han](#)” – whose arrest, detention, and alleged mistreatment in South Korea are portrayed as emblematic of a **broader assault on religious freedom**. Drawing upon testimony from supporters, international political figures, and human rights advocates, the article argues that [Mother Han](#)’s treatment represents **not merely legal overreach but a model of “lawfare”**: the **weaponization of judicial and administrative systems to destroy minority religious communities and their leadership**.

The article places this crisis within a transnational frame. The dissolution order issued against the [Family Federation](#) in Japan is depicted **not as an isolated legal dispute** but as an **extension of the same ideological persecution** that, in the authors’ view, has targeted [Mother Han](#) in South Korea. These two developments together – South Korean prosecution and Japanese judicial dissolution – are described as an existential threat compelling [Family Federation](#) leaders to flee to the United States for safety.



Mike Pompeo, here on 13th February 2022. Screenshot from live transmission by PeaceTV.

Through testimonies from prominent American



Caleb Maupin. Photo (2015): Felestin1714 / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 4.0 Int.](#) Cropped

conservatives, such as former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, alongside commentary by CPI founder Caleb Maupin, the article places the struggle over [Mother Han](#)’s treatment within a global discourse on human rights, religious liberty, and the use of state power.

In its concluding call to action, the article presents this situation as a watershed moment for religious freedom worldwide. Echoing Rev. Demian Dunkley of the [Family Federation](#) in USA, it **urges broad international mobilization**, warning that the violation of fundamental rights in these cases carries implications for all minority faiths. The article thus functions not only as reporting but also as advocacy – seeking to galvanize public opinion, frame the conflict in moral terms, and position the [Family Federation](#) as a victim of systemic oppression.

According to the site of the publisher – *The Center for Political Innovation (CPI)* – the organization is “a sociopolitical education project and community of solidarity [...] deeply aligned with an optimistic, pro-growth, anti-imperialist vision.”

At first glance, CPI is an anti-imperialist, left-wing, pro-state, pro-growth socialist organization. So it certainly looks strange that they would publish an article quoting prominent Republicans like Mike Pompeo and Newt Gingrich as well as conservative religious-freedom advocates.

But when you zoom out and look at *CPI’s actual political method*, it turns out that CPI routinely aligns with non-left groups on single-issue anti-imperialist or civil-liberties causes.

Even though CPI is left-wing, they have a **long-standing pattern** of forming temporary or “united front” alliances with very ideologically different groups, including libertarians, Christian right figures, and anti-war Republicans.



Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives in US Congress 1995-1999, here Feb. 5, 2025. Screenshot.

So CPI using Pompeo or Gingrich to bolster a narrative is not ideological alignment – it seems more like a rhetorical alliance around a specific issue: “religious persecution” and “abuse of state power”.

It appears that CPI doesn’t fit neatly into standard left-right categories. Its “Innovationist” ideology combines left-wing economic ideas (public ownership, strong state) with a pro-growth, pro-technology outlook, and a somewhat unorthodox anti-imperialist posture. This

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makes it attractive to a certain segment disillusioned with both neoliberalism and traditional Marxism.

According to CPI, its innovationism is not only pro-growth, pro-state, and anti-imperialist, but also spiritually eclectic – deriving ideas from a broad and diverse range of sources. In fact, CPI often praises Christianity, Confucianism, and “pro-family” traditions.

In addition, CPI is supportive of “peace diplomats” who push US-North Korea or US-Russia reconciliation CPI has a documented admiration for figures who engage in diplomacy with North Korea, religious or otherwise.

Hak Ja Han fits several CPI themes, e.g. its advocacy of Korean reunification. CPI has always been sympathetic to North Korea’s stance on reunification, and they praise figures who help facilitate US-North Korea diplomacy.



Demonstration near Seoul City Hall 16th Nov. 2025 in support of Holy Mother Han. Screenshot from video by Masataka Asaoka.

CPI appears to frequently elevate religious leaders whom they view as resisting US liberal secularism or Western geopolitical agendas. And Mother Han is such a leader.

Innovationism talks a lot about the danger of “neoliberal states crushing nonconforming groups”.

Thus, CPI placing Hak Ja Han within an anti-imperialist or anti-state-abuse narrative is ideologically consistent for them, even if the Family Federation is, culturally, viewed as a conservative movement.

The CPI article employs a layered rhetorical strategy that merges political critique, moral appeal, and human-rights framing. At its core, the piece positions Mother Han as both a symbolic and literal victim of political abuse, grounding its argument in vivid descriptions of her alleged treatment during detention. By emphasizing her age, physical frailty, and lifetime record of law-abiding citizenship, the article constructs a moral contrast between Mother Han’s personal character and what it presents as the state’s disproportionate, degrading response. This narrative tactic reinforces the claim that her prosecution is not grounded in legitimate legal concerns but in ideological hostility toward the Family Federation and its influence.

The emotional intensity of the article is heightened through detailed accounts of Mother Han’s conditions in custody. The emphasis on lack of heating, inadequate ventilation, the absence of a wheelchair or cane, and the requirement to wash a single set of clothes underscores the argument that her treatment amounts to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. These descriptions serve two functions. First, they support the claim that South Korea’s actions constitute human-rights violations. Second, they dramatize the stakes of the conflict to mobilize sympathy and solidarity from an international audience.



Demonstration near Seoul City Hall 16th Nov. 2025 in support of Holy Mother Han. Photo: Masataka Asaoka.

A second major theme in the CPI article is the portrayal of transnational persecution. By linking South Korea’s prosecution of Mother Han with Japan’s dissolution order against the Family Federation, the article suggests a broader regional trend: the use of legal tools to suppress religious minorities and silence ideological

dissent. The authors highlight the Japanese government's reinterpretation of the *Religious Corporations Act* and the invocation of "mind control" theories in court as evidence of judicial bias. Whether or not one accepts these claims, the rhetorical strategy positions Japan and South Korea's legal systems as aligned in a broader, coordinated hostility toward the Family Federation.

This transnational framing also serves a strategic purpose: it elevates the conflict from a domestic legal matter to a global human-rights crisis, thereby inviting international scrutiny. The invocation of statements by Pompeo, Gingrich, and Maupin reinforces this global dimension. Their comments frame the issue as a betrayal of democratic principles and religious liberty, thus situating the [Family Federation's](#) plight within a larger ideological struggle over state power and freedom of belief.

The article's reliance on political figures from the United States – especially those associated with conservative causes – also reflects a particular political alignment. CPI founder Caleb Maupin, while a left-wing populist, joins voices from the political right in a rare cross-ideological convergence. This indicates the article's aim to appeal broadly to critics of government overreach, regardless of party affiliation, and underscores how the story of [Mother Han's](#) detention is positioned as a rallying point for diverse movements concerned about civil liberties.

A significant element of the article's strategy is its use of moral exemplars and martyrdom narrative. The reported suicide of a Korean church leader following harsh interrogation is presented as tragic evidence of the destructive effects of the prosecution. This rhetorical choice reinforces the claim that the state's actions are not merely legalistic but fundamentally destructive to human dignity and life.

Finally, the article concludes with a call to action, warning that the persecution of [Mother Han](#) foreshadows potential oppression of other minority faiths. This closing argument transforms the narrative from a specific case study into a universalist warning: that unchecked state power threatens both religious liberty and democratic values.

See also [Mother Han: Prosecutors' Narrative Hard to Prove](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: *Demonstration in support of Mother Han in front of the South Korean embassy in San Francisco, USA November 2025. Photo: Georges Tegha*

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