FFWPU Europe and Middle East: S Korea - No Bail Ruling - Mother Han's Health at Stake

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October 13, 2026



Dr. Hak Ja Han, aka. Mother Han, arriving in court in wheelchair. Here, at Seoul Central District Court August 31, 2026

News1, South Korea's largest private news agency and wire service

Bail ruling hangs in the balance as prosecutors resist release on medical grounds despite deteriorating health for Mother Han (83)

South Korean media devoted extensive coverage to the first day of hearings in the appeal trial of Hak Ja Han (한학자), leader of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), at the Seoul High Court on 13th October 2026.

Bail request and health concerns

The major news agency News1 reported that a separate bail hearing was also held for the 83-year-old religious leader, widely known as Mother Han. According to the report, she told the court:

> "I need to take medication, but I cannot do so without assistance; I am unable to do anything on my own."

Mother Han has been held in detention since September 2025, spending her time in a small cell. However, serious health problems led to the suspension of her detention in March 2026 to allow her to receive urgent medical treatment.

At the bail hearing, she asked the court to allow her to continue receiving treatment while living at home.

According to News1, however, the special prosecutors appointed under the left-leaning administration of President Lee Jae-myung (이재명) opposed her release on bail. Their response appeared to give little weight to the humanitarian considerations raised by her age and frail condition. They reportedly argued:

> "While we acknowledge the poor state of her health, it is unclear whether her condition poses a critical threat to her life."

The prosecutors' position has raised questions about how much consideration is being given to the humanitarian needs of an 83-year-old woman with serious medical problems. Their opposition to bail leaves open the possibility that Mother Han could be returned to detention once her medical suspension ends, despite her stated inability to manage even basic daily tasks without assistance.

Newsis, the largest privately owned news agency in South Korea

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



Yoon Yeong-ho, former director general of the international headquarters of the Family Federation, here 11th February 11, 2022



Min Joong-gi, the head of an army of special prosecutors with extensive investigative powers

Newsis reported that she, during the bail hearing, also expressed distress over the circumstances, saying that she found it painful and regrettable to face what she described as an incomprehensible situation after spending her life working for world peace.

Her lawyers cited her deteriorating health and underlying medical conditions, arguing that continued detention would make it difficult for her to endure the proceedings and exercise her defense rights effectively. Yonhap reported that the defense referred to three falls since her detention and worsening pre-existing conditions.

The court had previously ordered the suspension of her detention, with that arrangement due to remain in effect until 20th October

At the appeal hearing, the prosecution sought to overturn parts of an earlier judgment, arguing that the sentences imposed were too lenient. In August, the 83-year-old religious leader was sentenced to two years in prison over allegations involving unlawful political funding, gifts to former first lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희), and related financial offenses.

Mother Han now again denied the charges through her defense team. Her lawyers maintained that the key actions attributed to her had been carried out independently by former Family Federation World Headquarters director Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호).

The opening hearing before the Seoul High Court's Criminal Division 13 brought sharply conflicting accounts of responsibility within the religious organization. According to South Korean news agencies and media outlets, the prosecution argued that the first-instance court had made factual and legal errors, while the defense challenged the reliability and admissibility of testimony central to the conviction. Yoon's own legal team, meanwhile, took the opposite position, arguing that financial support on the scale alleged could not have been carried out without Mother Han's instructions.

Prosecutors challenge acquittals and sentences

Many media outlets reported that the special prosecution team led by Min Joong-gi (민중기) challenged the August judgment on several grounds. The prosecutors argued that the first-instance court had wrongly acquitted Mother Han of certain embezzlement charges connected with political donations and had dismissed other allegations on the grounds that they fell outside the special prosecutor's authorized investigative scope.

One major point of contention concerns so-called "split donations" to the People Power Party (PPP), South Korea's conservative political party. The allegations concern contributions made through regional party organizations in March and April 2022. The prosecution argued that funds transferred from Family Federation-affiliated districts to facilitate the donations demonstrated an intention to misappropriate organizational money. News1 reported that prosecutors specifically challenged the acquittal concerning 210 million won transferred for donations to regional party organizations.

The prosecution also contested the dismissal of allegations involving attempted evidence destruction and other alleged financial misconduct. As Yonhap reported, prosecutors argued that the alleged evidence-

destruction offense was closely connected to the suspected political funding arrangement involving former PPP lawmaker Kwon Seong-dong (권성동). They maintained that if the special prosecutor had authority to investigate the alleged illegal political funding, related attempts to destroy evidence could also fall within its remit.

Prosecutors further argued that the alleged diversion of Family Federation funds for overseas political contributions emerged during their investigation into the sources of money used to purchase gifts for Kim Keon-hee (김건희). They rejected the characterization of this as an unrelated investigation.

JoongAng Ilbo, one of South Korea's largest and most influential dailies

The special prosecution team also argued that the conduct at issue had seriously undermined the constitutional principle of separation of religion and state and the fairness of democratic elections. It described the original sentences as disproportionately lenient in view of the seriousness of the alleged offenses. According to Newspim and JoongAng Ilbo, the prosecution maintained that Mother Han had used the religious organization's financial and human resources to pursue reciprocal interests with political power.

Mother Han's defense blames former executive

Mother Han's defense team rejected the prosecution's account and reiterated that she had neither authorized nor been informed in advance of Yoon's alleged political contacts and gifts. The lawyers argued that the prosecution had failed to establish a conspiracy involving Mother Han and that the evidence directly linking her to the alleged arrangements depended overwhelmingly on Yoon's testimony.

Newspim, a prominent South Korean economic and financial news agency and multimedia company based in Seoul

According to Newsis and Newspim, the defense maintained that Yoon had independently pursued contact with former President Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열) and had not reported the meeting to Mother Han beforehand or immediately afterward. The lawyers argued that if the political contacts had been part of a shared plan, a prompt report to the organization's leader would have been expected.

The defense also challenged the admissibility of the testimony of Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호), arguing that Hak Ja Han's right to effective cross-examination had been compromised. The lawyers said Yoon had refused to answer important questions from Mother Han's side while responding to questions from the special prosecution team. They further argued that his statements had changed during the investigation and subsequent proceedings.



Former chief secretary Jeong Won-ju, on Jan. 19, 2025

Asia Today, a major South Korean comprehensive nationwide daily newspaper and multimedia outlet. Officially recognized as one of the country's 12 major general dailies

Newspim reported that the defense also questioned inconsistencies in Yoon's accounts of the alleged transfer of 100 million won to Kweon and the purchase and delivery of luxury gifts to Kim. These reportedly included a Chanel handbag and a Graff diamond necklace. Mother Han's lawyers argued that Yoon had made the relevant decisions independently and that the first-instance judgment should be overturned.

The defense of former chief secretary Jeong Won-ju (정원주) also attributed the alleged conduct to Yoon, arguing that he had built political connections to protect his position within the religious organization and pursue personal interests without informing Mother Han or Jeong.

Yoon's defense, however, directly contradicted this account. As reported by Yonhap and JoongAng Ilbo, his lawyers argued that Mother Han was the ultimate decision-maker within the Family Federation and that financial support exceeding 100 million won could not have been authorized without her instructions. They maintained that Yoon's testimony concerning Mother Han's involvement was credible and that the ultimate beneficiary of the arrangements was the religious organization rather than Yoon personally.

Asia Today also reported that the court considered whether prosecutors assigned to the special prosecution team retained their authority to conduct the appeal following the launch of the new

prosecution agency. The court accepted that their existing authority remained valid under the relevant transitional provisions and proceeded with the hearing.

The case moves into its next stage

The charges stem from alleged events in 2022. Mother Han is accused of conspiring with Yoon and Jeong to provide 100 million won in unlawful political funding to Kweon in January that year, arranging split donations to the PPP, and providing expensive gifts to South Korea's former First lady through religious figure Jeon Seong-bae (전성배), known as "Shaman Geonjin", in an alleged attempt to seek favorable treatment for Family Federation interests.

In August, the first-instance court sentenced Mother Han to two years' imprisonment: one year for violations of the Political Funds Act and one year for violations of the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act and occupational embezzlement. It dismissed some charges and acquitted her of a separate embezzlement allegation connected with the split donations. Yoon received a six-month prison sentence, while Jeong received suspended prison sentences.

The competing accounts presented on 13th October leave the appeal focused on questions of evidence, responsibility, investigative jurisdiction, and sentencing. The prosecution is seeking a more severe assessment of the conduct, while Mother Han's defense argues that the conviction rests on unreliable testimony and an unproven conspiracy. Yoon's position adds a further complication, with his lawyers insisting that Mother Han's authority made the alleged actions impossible without her approval.

The Seoul High Court scheduled the next hearing for 2nd November, when the proceedings are expected to continue examining the parties' appeals and the evidence underlying the original judgment.

Text: Knut Holdhus

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Path To Justice For Victims Of Faith-Breaking?

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Protection of Religious Freedom" was held in the conference center *Het Nutshuis* in The Hague, Netherlands on the *International Day of Peace*, 21st September 2026.

See also The Rome Statute: Safeguarding Religious Freedom?

See also Japan's Treatment of Faith Headed to The Hague?



***Willem Koetsier**, representing the Family Federation, speaking in The Hague on 21st September 2026. Screenshot from video by FFWPU, imroved resolution by Grok xAI, October 2026.*

Willem Koetsier, representing the host of the conference, mentioned that this day was established by the United Nations in 1981 to commemorate and strengthen the ideals of peace. He commented that, although much has been achieved since then, recently there has been some regression in the quest for world peace.

This was the second event this year organized by the Dutch *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* focusing on serious religious freedom violations in Japan, particularly against the Family Federation, formerly known as the Unification Church. The dissolution of the Family Federation, the first of its kind in Japan, is seen as a concerning precedent that could impact religious freedom globally. The conference called attention to the importance of upholding human rights and the rule of law in protecting religious freedom. The event was moderated by Hans Noot, Vice Chair of the Brussels-based *Human Rights Without Frontiers*.

The keynote speaker from Japan, Toru Goto, described the persecution of religious groups in Japan and South Korea, highlighting the cases of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, co-founder of the Family Federation, and Chairman Lee Man-hee, founder of *Shincheonji Church of Jesus* [See editor's note 1 below]. Goto emphasized the importance of protecting religious freedom and avoiding the use of theological labels or political disagreements as substitutes for evidence.



***Toru Goto** speaking in The Hague on 21st September 2026. Photo: FFWPU*

See also Apartment Turned Prison: 12 Years to Break Faith

Mr. Goto recounted his experience of being confined and subjected to faith-breaking [See editor's note 2 below] efforts by his family and professional deprogrammers. He was completely isolated, denied basic rights, and subjected to psychological and physical abuse for over a decade. He eventually resorted to a hunger strike in an attempt to persuade his captors to free him, but was unsuccessful, leading to prolonged suffering and near starvation.

After being confined for over 12 years, Mr. Goto was freed in 2008. He subsequently filed a civil lawsuit against his family members and the deprogrammers and won a judgement in 2015. This victory led to a near cessation of kidnapping and deprogramming [See editor's note 2 below] in Japan. Up until that time, over 4,300 Family Federation members in Japan had been forcibly detained and subjected to deprogramming [See editor's note 2 below] with 70% having been compelled to renounce their faith.

The case of Mr. Goto is part of a larger pattern of religious persecution. This persecution, involving abduction and coercion to renounce faith, has been ignored by the Japanese government,

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despite evidence and complaints. The Rome Statute, which Japan ratified in 2007, could provide redress for victims of these crimes, which may constitute crimes against humanity.



The International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague, Netherlands. Photo: Tony Webster / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 2.0 Gen

A panel consisting of Mr. Noot and three lawyers specializing in international criminal law, Javier Ruiz, Haydee Dijkstal and Cristian Gonzalez, then discussed the importance of integrating human rights into litigation strategies, particularly in cases involving crimes against humanity. The need for a comprehensive approach that considers the impact on victims, the role of strategic communication, and the potential for policy change was emphasized. The discussion also highlighted the importance of using various legal forums, including international and domestic courts, to address these issues.

The right to a remedy under international human rights law encompasses various forms, including judicial remedies, restitution, compensation and rehabilitation. Participation is crucial, allowing victims to have agency and a meaningful voice in the process, as recognised by institutions like the *European Court of Human Rights* and the *International Criminal Court* (ICC) in The Hague.

The ICC and various national courts claiming universal jurisdiction are investigating the case of the Family Federation in Japan, focusing on the practice of confinement and deprogramming [See editor's note 2 below] and its impact on victims. These cases aim to challenge the narrative surrounding the religious organization and highlight the importance of freedom of religion. While the ICC respects state sovereignty, it also promotes accountability and justice for the victims.

International courts are being considered for these cases in Japan due to a lack of action by Japanese authorities. Their involvement is key to encourage Japan to take responsibility for the abuses.

However, the goal is for the cases to be handled within Japan if possible. The process involves a preliminary examination, a formal investigation, and potential arrest warrants, with victim involvement throughout.

The panel emphasized the importance of human rights, particularly freedom of belief, for all individuals, regardless of their religious affiliation. They highlighted the challenges faced by minority religions, often labeled as "cults", and the resulting discrimination and societal pressure.

The panel called for greater understanding, respect, and protection of religious freedom for all.

See also The Rome Statute: Safeguarding Religious Freedom?

See also Japan's Treatment of Faith Headed to The Hague?

***Text**: Randy Orr, observer*

***Featured image** above: From the panel of speakers at the conference in Het Nutshuis in The Hague, Netherlands on 21st*

conference in Het Nutshuis in The Hague, Netherlands on 21 September 2026, from left: Cristian Gonzalez, Hans Noot, Javier Ruiz, Haydee Dijkstal. Photo: FFWPU

[***Editor's note 1***: **Shincheonji**, officially known as *Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony*, is a new religious movement founded in South Korea in 1984 by Lee Man-hee, who claims to be the promised pastor mentioned in the Bible's Book of Revelation.

Shincheonji teaches that the Book of Revelation is being fulfilled through its church and that Lee Man-hee has received divine revelation to interpret it. He teaches that South Korea is the location where the prophecies of the *Book of Revelation* are actively playing out in real-time, making it the epicenter of the final harvest. Shincheonji focuses on filling the literal 144,000 slots of the 12 Tribes mentioned in Revelation. Once this number of truly sealed, flawless believers is completed, they believe they will rule as kings and priests over the rest of humanity.]

[***Editor's note 2***: **Coercive faith-breaking** ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the Family Federation or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: *Members of* ***Soka Gakkai****. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp. Cropped*

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

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