FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: A Lost Lawsuit, but a Fight Worth Having

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October 18, 2026



Attorneys Shinichi Tokunaga and Tatsuki Nakayama at press conference in Tokyo on October 8, 2026

Sekai Nippo

Despite a lost lawsuit, plaintiff hopes for a freer society for all faiths as personal cost of publicly exposing religious beliefs is highlighted

Tokyo, 10th October 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper Sekai Nippo. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. Original article.

"There Is Value in Having Fought to the End"

Plaintiff and Lawyers Report on Lawsuit Against Eito Suzuki Over Disclosure of Religious Faith

by the editorial department of Sekai Nippo

The Tokyo District Court on 8th October dismissed the claims of a male member of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU, formerly the Unification Church), who had sued journalist Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト) for invasion of privacy and defamation.

Following the ruling, the plaintiff and his attorneys held a press briefing in Tokyo. The following is a summary of their remarks.

Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama: "A Disappointing Judgment That Fails to Recognize Damage to the Plaintiff's Social Standing"

In cases involving privacy such as this one, the court must make an overall assessment by weighing the plaintiff's right to privacy against the defendant's freedom of expression and the public interest served by the disclosure. In legal terminology, this is known as a "balancing of competing interests". There were several weaknesses in our case.

First, before the shooting incident involving former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), the plaintiff had listed his real name and his employment as a religious organization staff member on his LinkedIn profile, intending to connect with other religious professionals. (This information has since been deleted.)

He had also posted photographs of himself and his family on a blog, identifying himself anonymously as "an administrative staff member of the Unification Church". Furthermore, when he participated in a street speech organized by UNITE, an organization of second-generation believers, in June 2016, he introduced himself by name to Suzuki, who approached him. In December 2023, although he did not disclose his name, he appeared in public and delivered a street speech as a member of the International Federation for Victory over Communism.

Based on these circumstances, the court concluded that the plaintiff had been prepared, to some extent, for his religious affiliation to become public knowledge. It therefore ruled that Suzuki's actions did not

constitute a tort.



From a demonstration May 29, 2016 in Shibuya, Tokyo held by UNITE, a student organization primarily of Family Federation second-generation believers in Japan

Suzuki had described the plaintiff as someone involved in a disguised volunteer organization. In addition to alleging an invasion of privacy, we added a defamation claim partway through the proceedings. However, I was surprised that the judgment concluded that merely stating that the plaintiff was affiliated with a particular religious organization, and that he had not disclosed the nature of that relationship, did not diminish his social standing.

The circumstances in which these statements were made were crucial. At the time, the Family Federation was facing its most intense public criticism following the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe. It was in this climate that the plaintiff's connection to the Unification Church was exposed. We brought the case on the grounds that disclosing this information under such circumstances constituted an invasion of privacy and defamation. It is disappointing that the court nevertheless concluded that there was no evidence that his social standing had been diminished.


Militantly campaigning against the Family Federation: Activist journalist Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka

Suzuki uploaded several photographs of the plaintiff. The judgment stated that the plaintiff had not refused to be photographed. However, during the two years of litigation, whether the plaintiff had actually consented to being photographed was never a point of contention. Many of the photographs were taken at an angle. If they had been taken covertly, the plaintiff might not even have realized that he was being photographed, let alone consented to it.

Attorney Shinichi Tokunaga: "Human Rights Are Won by Those Who Fight for Them"

This case concerned how to draw the line between the right to privacy and freedom of expression when the two come into conflict.

It is true that the plaintiff had disclosed some private information on social media, but this was before the incident involving former Prime Minister Abe. At that time, the social climate surrounding the Unification Church had not yet created the circumstances in which people would feel compelled to be extremely cautious and conceal their religious affiliation. These earlier disclosures should not be regarded as an abandonment of his right to privacy.

Regarding the plaintiff's volunteer activities, Suzuki disseminated information in a manner that portrayed them as if they were somehow sinister. This arguably went beyond the scope of what should be protected as freedom of expression. Nevertheless, the court ultimately prioritized the public interest cited by Suzuki and ruled that his actions did not constitute a tort.

As for the defense's reliance on freedom of expression, there is no doubt that public interest in the Family Federation increased significantly after Abe's assassination. That interest was stimulated by rumors, including misinformation, and by mass-media coverage. The Japanese Communist Party and others were also conducting campaigns claiming that the Family Federation was responsible for corrupting Japanese

politics. Investigating such matters and disclosing relevant facts can, in principle, serve the public interest.

One reason it is difficult for plaintiffs to win lawsuits involving the Family Federation is that, in the prevailing social climate, disclosing someone's affiliation with the organization tends to be regarded almost automatically as serving the public interest.

Nevertheless, regardless of the outcome of this case, it remains necessary for people to speak out and challenge what they believe to be unacceptable, guided by their own conscience.

At least for the time being, however, believers engaging in social activities may have little choice but to act with the determination to assert publicly that they have the same rights as anyone else.

To fight openly, believers are placed in the difficult position of having to take the risk that their religious affiliation will be exposed. But human rights are won by those who fight for them. We cannot expect society to show consideration simply because we do nothing.

In its ruling on the dissolution order against the Family Federation, the Tokyo High Court stated that there was no alternative to depriving the religious organization of its legal corporate status. At the same time, it indicated that human rights violations, including the deprivation of believers' freedom of religion, must not be tolerated.

Although these statements by the Tokyo High Court may appear contradictory at first glance, they can also be interpreted as acknowledging that the faith of Family Federation members is genuine, rather than some kind of sham or fraud. That is something we should remember.

The Plaintiff: "I Could Not Bear to See My Children Suffer"



Plaintiff A, a Family Federation member who sued Eito Suzuki for violating his privacy, in Tokyo, September 2024

When I was involved in volunteer activities, I once received an email from a parent after local children had participated in a neighborhood litter-picking activity. The parent wrote:

"My children have started picking up rubbish they see on the streets. Thank you so much."

That experience reinforced my belief that my activities were not in vain and that they served a meaningful purpose. I was never concealing my identity through what has been called "disguised volunteering". I participated because I wanted to contribute to and show love for my community, and because I wanted to provide a good example and a positive education for my own children.

Then everything changed. An impression was created that holding a particular religious faith was itself something evil. For a time, even my children found themselves unable to appear in public.

I could accept being blamed myself, but watching my children and the people I had worked with in volunteer activities suffer was unbearable and deeply painful. I even wondered whether it would have been better never to have participated in volunteer work at all.

But if things remain as they are, will future second- and third-generation members of the Family Federation come to believe that they should simply keep quiet and avoid speaking out? I do not want a

world in which people are made to feel miserable or ashamed of their religious faith.

That is why I believe there was value in fighting this case through to the end, regardless of the judgment.

I hope Japan will become a freer country for people of every faith. Even while the Family Federation is being treated as an "antisocial force", I want to continue fighting.

I hope this lawsuit will serve as a signal to those who feel constrained and marginalized because of their religious beliefs - a starting point for building a society in which they can openly express their faith and share their joy without fear.

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Mother Han Granted Bail Under Strict Conditions

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October 19, 2026 • The News Desk



Granted bail on health grounds, Hak Ja Han faces strict residence and contact restrictions during her current appeal case

On 19th October 2026, several South Korean news outlets reported that the *Seoul High Court* had **granted bail** to Hak Ja Han (한학자), head of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*

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(FFWPU), allowing her to continue her appeal against a two-year prison sentence without being held in detention. The ruling came just one day before the expiry of the suspension of her detention, which had allowed her to receive hospital treatment for health reasons.

The ruling does not determine the outcome of the appeal. The original conviction of the religious leader – also called Mother Han – remains subject to further judicial review, and she continues to deny that she directed or was aware of the alleged activities.

Court imposes strict conditions on release

According to News1, published in the late afternoon on 19th October, the *Seoul High Court*'s 13th Criminal Division approved Mother Han's bail application after considering her health, the progress of the proceedings, and the extent to which evidence had already been collected. The panel consists of Judges Kim Mu-shin (김무신), Lee Woo-hee (이우희), and Yoo Dong-gyun (유동균).

Logo of News1 (뉴스1), South Korea's largest private news agency and wire service.

The court nevertheless imposed conditions stricter than those attached to her previous suspension of detention. Mother Han must pay a cash bail deposit of 200 million won (approximately
The court nevertheless imposed conditions stricter than those attached to her previous suspension of detention. Mother Han must pay a cash bail deposit of 200 million won (approximately
US$140,000), remain at the hospital where she is currently receiving treatment, and have no contact with anyone involved in the case.

Logo of MBC News, the news division of the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), one of South Korea's four major nationwide television and radio networks.

Newsis and MBC News provide further details about the restrictions. According to Newsis, contact is permitted only with a very limited group of people, including medical personnel, lawyers, and individuals assisting Mother Han with mobility. Contact with all other people, including those connected to the case, is prohibited. MBC similarly emphasizes that she cannot return to her usual residence and must remain at the hospital.

*The logo of **Yonhap News**, South Korea's designated public news agency and the country's largest wire service.*

Yonhap News also reports that the court explicitly required the bail deposit to be paid in cash. It explains that bail differs from a suspension of detention: the latter permits temporary release for urgent reasons, such as serious illness, whereas bail allows a defendant to remain free while proceedings continue, subject to specified conditions.

Mother Han's appeal for release on health grounds

The reports also describe the arguments presented at the bail hearing on 13th October.

According to News1, Mother Han told the court that she needed assistance to take her medication and could not manage by herself. She said she was unable to do anything independently and asked to be allowed to receive treatment while living at her usual residence with assistance.

The logo of Newsis (뉴시스), the largest privately owned news agency in South Korea

Newsis reports additional remarks in which Mother Han described difficulties with her eyesight. She told the court that she could no longer see writing clearly at close range. She also expressed distress over her legal situation, saying that she had devoted her life to the cause of world peace and found it painful and

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of world peace and found it painful and distressing to face what she considered an unreasonable situation.

The special prosecution team opposed bail. As reported by News1, prosecutors acknowledged that Mother Han was experiencing health difficulties but questioned whether her condition posed a serious threat to her life. They therefore asked the court to reject her application.

The court ultimately accepted the application, citing her health, the progress of the case, and the degree of evidence collection. The stricter conditions, however, indicate that the release was not unconditional.

Background to detention and the appeal

Kookje Shinmun and Yonhap News provide additional background on the detention history of Hak Ja Han (한학자). Both report that she was arrested in September 2025 by the special prosecution team led by Min Joong-gi (민중기), which was investigating allegations of improper connections between the FFWPU and the administration of former President Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열).

The logo of Kookje Shinmun (국제신문), a major Korean-language regional daily newspaper based in Busan, South Korea.



Min Joong-gi (민중기), the head of an army of special prosecutors with extensive investigative powers. Image: Grok xAI, Jan. 2026.

According to these reports, Mother Han was temporarily released in November 2025 after a suspension of detention was granted, but was subsequently returned to custody when an extension was denied. Her detention was suspended again in March 2026 so that she could receive hospital treatment. By the time bail was granted, she had been receiving treatment under this arrangement for approximately seven months.

The suspension was scheduled to expire at 3 p.m. on 20th October. The 19th October bail decision therefore ensured that Mother Han could remain outside detention as her appeal continued, albeit under more restrictive conditions.

News1, Newsis, and Yonhap all report that she had been sentenced in August to a total of two years in prison at her first trial. The sentence comprised one year for violating the *Political Funds Act* and another year for violations of the *Improper Solicitation and Graft Act* and occupational embezzlement.

Allegations and defence position

The reports summarize allegations concerning political contributions and gifts in 2022. Mother Han was accused of conspiring with former Family Federation officials, including former World Headquarters director Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호) and former chief of staff Jeong Won-



Co-defendant: Jeong Won-ju, here 19th January 2025. Screenshot from FFWPU video.



Co-defendant: Yoon Yeong-ho, here 9th August 2020. Screenshot from video by FFWPU

Ju (정원주), to provide political funds to then-lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동) and make donations from FFWPU-affiliated organizational funds to politicians from the *People Power Party*.

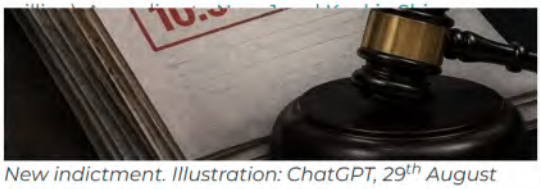
She was also accused of conspiring with Yoon to provide expensive gifts to Kim Keon-hee (김건희), the wife of former President Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열). News1 highlights an alleged diamond necklace from British jeweller Graff and gifts valued at more than 80 million won in total. Yonhap additionally mentions an alleged Chanel handbag and claims that the gifts were connected to requests concerning the religious organization's interests.

Kookje Shinmun explicitly presents the defence's position: Han maintains that Yoon and other officials acted independently, without reporting to her or receiving instructions from her. She denies the allegations against her.

Kookje Shinmun also reports that the first appeal hearing took place on 13th October and that the proceedings are underway.

New indictment. Illustration: ChatGPT, 29th August 2026, edited

Finally, News1, Kookje Shinmun, and Yonhap report a separate case in which Mother Han and former officials face additional charges involving the alleged embezzlement of approximately 10.5 billion won (about US$7.5 million). According to News1 and Kookje Shinmun, proceedings in that case are scheduled to begin on 12th November.



New indictment. Illustration: ChatGPT, 29th August 2026, edited

The 19th October ruling thus changes Mother Han's detention status but does not resolve either case. She will remain at the hospital under strict bail conditions while the appeal against her two-year sentence proceeds.

***Text**: Knut Holdhus, editor*

***Featured image** above: Dr. Hak Ja Han, aka. Mother Han, arriving in court in wheelchair. Here, at Seoul Central District Court 31st August 2026. Photo: Dr. Michael Balcomb, resolution improved by ChatGPT, 6th September 2026*

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