FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Survey - Widespread Distress Among Japan's FFWPU Believers

Knut Holdhus
October 22, 2026



Members of the Family Federation demonstrating for religious freedom and human rights in Shinjuku, Tokyo on June 30, 2024

Sekai Nippo

Survey finds 84.7% of Family Federation members report distress following Japan's 2026 dissolution order as social exclusion deepens

Tokyo, 22nd October 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper Sekai Nippo. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. Original article.

Unable to Find a Place Where They Belong, Believers Continue to Suffer

Family Federation President Reports on Victims at CESNUR 2026 International Symposium

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of Sekai Nippo



Masaichi Hori, here in Gapyeong, South Korea Aug. 24, 2025

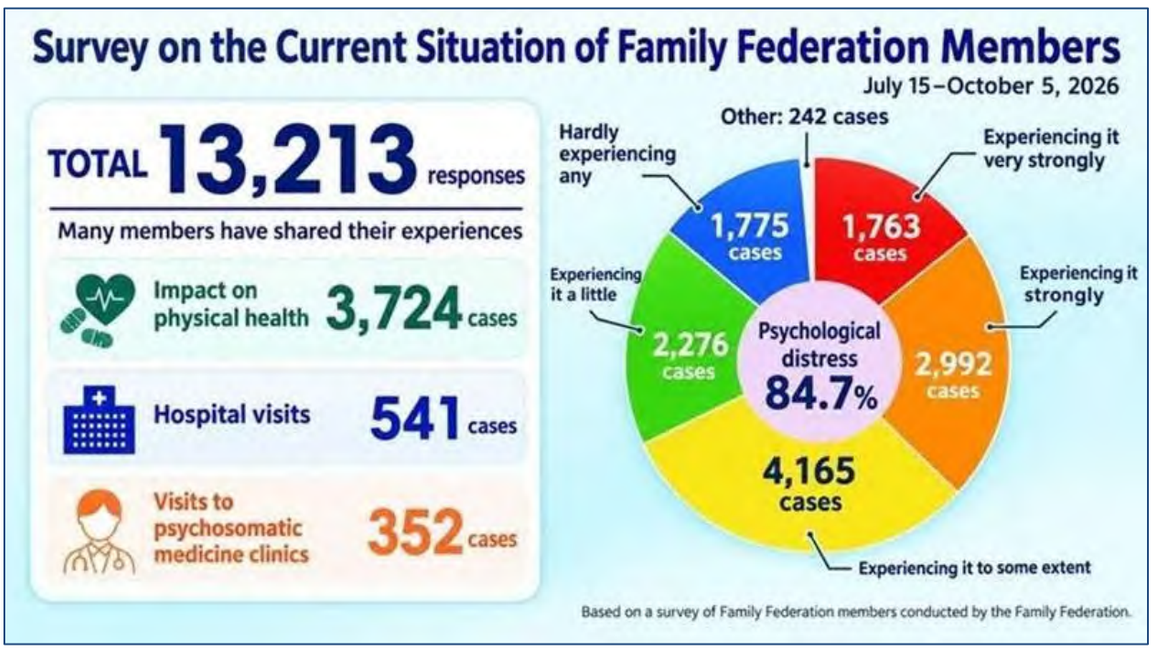
At CESNUR 2026, an international symposium on minority religion studies held in Taichung, central Taiwan. Masaichi Hori (堀正一), the president of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU, formerly the Unification Church), reported on 12th October on the serious situation facing members following the order to dissolve the religious corporation.

See also The Fallout from Japan's 2026 Dissolution Order

Suffering from a Profound Sense of Loss

On 4th March, the Family Federation entered liquidation proceedings following the Tokyo High Court's decision upholding the order to dissolve the religious corporation. While ordering the corporation's dissolution, the court also stated that "there is no justification for believers to be subjected to social discrimination, social exclusion, or persecution."

Numerous Cases of Family Violence and Discrimination



Graph showing the results of a new survey on the impact of the dissolution order against the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in Japan on its members (as of 5th October 5, 2026). Illustration: English version by ChatGPT

According to the Family Federation, however, many members are experiencing psychological distress in practice. Drawing on the results of a survey conducted among members, Hori reported cases involving medical treatment for physical and mental health problems, violence by family members, discriminatory treatment at schools and workplaces, and even cases of suicide.

The survey was conducted from 15th July to 5th October and received a total of 13,213 responses. Regarding psychological distress, 1,763 respondents said they were experiencing it "very severely," 2,992 said "severely," 4,165 said "to some extent," and 2,276 said "a little." The combined total was 11,196 responses, meaning that 84.7% of respondents reported experiencing some degree of psychological distress.

In addition, 3,724 respondents reported adverse effects on their physical health. Of these, 541 had sought treatment at a hospital, while 352 had visited a psychosomatic medicine clinic.

Hori further explained that the survey had documented more than 2,000 instances of critical remarks or violence by family members and relatives; 462 cases in which members felt uncomfortable after the Family Federation was brought up at school or work; 19 cases in which teachers or counselors questioned individuals about their religious beliefs; and 44 cases of business-related disadvantages. These findings illustrate how members are being affected in various areas of their daily lives.

Commenting on the results, clinical psychologist Kenichi Endo (遠藤健市) observed:

> "Quite a few people are suffering from a profound sense of loss, feeling as though they have lost something that served as the foundation of their lives. The impact is likely to be particularly severe for believers who found a place where they belonged in the church and had been actively involved."

The findings suggest that the dissolution decision and the accompanying liquidation measures are having a significant impact on the personal foundations of individual believers, including their values and outlook on life.

Endo added that "when people feel that the faith and activities to which they have devoted themselves seriously for many years have been rejected by the state and society, it can become extremely difficult for them to come to terms with the situation psychologically."

The process surrounding the Family Federation's dissolution extended over a prolonged period. It began with critical media coverage following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), followed by statements in the Diet by then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄) that involved a change in the interpretation of the Religious Corporations Act, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's exercise of its right to question [See editor's note below] the religious organization, and ultimately the court's decision.

Did the Judicial Decision Underestimate Human Rights Violations?

Criticized by a Doctor



Changed the interpretation overnight of the Religious Corporations Act: Former Japanese prime minister Fumio Kishida, July 14, 2022

The survey results suggest, however, that the psychological distress experienced by believers during this process has not received sufficient consideration.

Some of the cases Hori presented raise serious human rights concerns. In one reported case, a member who sought treatment at a psychosomatic medicine clinic was confronted by a doctor who criticized the religious organization and pressed the patient with the question,

"Do you still believe in it?"

In another case, a university student receiving counseling was treated as though the student's religious faith itself were the cause of their psychological difficulties.

Hori also described a case in which a believer sustained injuries after being subjected to violence by family members. Another case involved an employee of the Family Federation, identified as N., who was dismissed as a result of the liquidation proceedings and forced to leave staff accommodation. The resulting difficulties with utility contracts and payments, including water and gas, contributed to a deterioration in the employee's living conditions.



Constitutionally highly problematic proceedings against Family Federation were held behind closed doors in the joint building of the Tokyo High Court, Tokyo District Court, and Tokyo Summary Court in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, Japan

The High Court's decision stated,

"Even if a religious corporation loses its legal personality, it may continue its activities as a religious organization without legal personality, provided that the organization itself continues to exist." The court also noted that "employment relationships with staff may continue."

However, with all facilities and assets subject to liquidation, turning that stated possibility into reality is far from straightforward.

The decision also explicitly stated,

"It goes without saying that social discrimination, social exclusion, and persecution against believers are impermissible, whatever the reason may be."

In reality, however, numerous cases have arisen in which individual believers have found themselves at the receiving end of criticism and prejudice following the dissolution of their religious corporation. This is an issue that cannot be overlooked.

Hori also referred to a female believer in her 60s who took her own life in May,

> "According to the reports we received, this woman had been experiencing psychological difficulties since the beginning of the year, and her symptoms worsened after the 4th March decision."

He concluded by emphasizing the significance of losing a source of daily support:

> "What I want to convey here is the need to ask just how profound an impact losing a place and relationships that have provided daily support can have on someone who is struggling psychologically."

Hori called for greater understanding of the effects that the dissolution of the religious corporation can have on the lives and mental well-being of individual believers.

See also The Fallout from Japan's 2026 Dissolution Order

> **[Editor's note:** The right to question: In Japan's dissolution case against the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly the Unification Church), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) used what is known as the "right to question" under Article 78-2 of Japan's Religious Corporations Act. It was an administrative investigative procedure intended to establish whether there were sufficient grounds to seek a court-ordered dissolution.
>
> The "right to question" was the investigative stage preceding the government's application for dissolution, not the dissolution decision itself. Its stated purpose was to establish whether the Family Federation's activities met the statutory criteria for dissolution. Its broader significance lies in how the state exercises investigative powers over religious organizations while balancing enforcement of the law against freedom of religion and the safeguards required by the Religious Corporations Act.
>
> The right to question gives the competent government authority the power to require a religious corporation to submit reports and documents and to put questions to it concerning its activities when there are legally specified grounds for investigation.
>
> The government argued that it needed to establish the facts systematically before deciding whether to ask a court to dissolve the organization. The investigation was intended to gather evidence about the nature, extent and continuity of alleged unlawful activities, rather than rely solely on media reports, public complaints or allegations by individual parties.
>
> MEXT subsequently exercised the right to question the Family Federation seven times, seeking reports and documents. The government also interviewed more than 170 alleged victims, according to MEXT's March 2026 account of the process.
>
> The case raised questions about the boundary between legitimate government oversight and interference with religious organizations. Although the law expressly protects freedom of religion, critics of the investigation argued that the scope and repeated use of the questioning procedure placed excessive pressure on the organization.]

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Mother Han: A Cycle Of Prosecution Without End

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Cycle of overlapping investigations raises questions about political retaliation as Mother Han faces three simultaneous legal battles

A disturbing pattern of weaponized legal maneuvers has begun to

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emerge from South Korea's judiciary, raising profound systemic questions about the weaponization of criminal investigations under President Lee Jae-myung (이재명).

Observers are increasingly echoing the concerns raised by former Commissioner General of the *National Police Agency*, Yoon Hee-keun (윤희근). According to several large Korean media outlets, including Yonhap News and News 1, on 26th August, he openly questioned how long the current administration intends to exploit what he calls "political-retaliation special prosecutors" to settle political scores.

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

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

Yoon's perspective – informed by his own experience under the crosshairs of administration-appointed prosecutors – points to a structural strategy: when a lengthy investigation fails to produce the desired indictments, authorities simply refuse to close the case, keeping the targets indefinitely pinned under state scrutiny.

This critical perspective is highly relevant to the escalating judicial campaign against Hak Ja Han (한학자) – known as Mother Han – and the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* – commonly referred to in Korea as Unificationism (통일교).

The logo of the Segye Ilbo, one of the top 10 comprehensive daily newspapers in South Korea.

National publications, such as *Segye Ilbo* in an editorial on 24th August, have voiced explicit concerns that South Korea is entering an unprecedented era where state-appointed prosecutors act as permanent fixtures of political attrition, operating continuously through the entirety of President Lee's term, which runs until June 2030.

Rather than concluding exhaustive inquiries when initial evidence falls short, the state has continuously widened its net. This dynamic became undeniable when domestic outlets on 28th August reported a new indictment accusing Mother Han and senior officials of embezzling 10.5 billion won (approximately US$7.5 million) over an eight-year period.

Crucially, this came just as an earlier, separate trial involving political-funding allegations was drawing to its verdict date on 31st August, where the Min Joong-gi (민중기) Special Prosecutor's team had demanded a staggering 13-year prison sentence. The tactical timing of these rolling, overlapping indictments strongly indicates an institutional determination to sustain an unending cycle of prosecution against the religious minority, ensuring that even if one legal theory collapses, another is immediately ready to take its place.

Judicial developments reported on 19th October 2026 by several South Korean media outlets – the same day Mother Han was granted bail – outline the upcoming logistical phases of her trials.

Scheduling of the 10.5 Billion Won Embezzlement Trial

The logo of Beobchi News (법치뉴스), a specialized South Korean online news publication that focuses primarily on legal, judicial, and law enforcement affairs. The name means literally "rule of law

The logo of BBS News,

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news".

According to a consensus report by *Beobchi News*, *BBS News*, *Newsis*, *Yonhap News*, *SBS News*, and others, the first-instance trial addressing the new embezzlement charges will officially begin next month.

BBS News, the news division of the Buddhist Broadcasting System (BBS), a major religious, non-profit public media network in South Korea, dedicated to Buddhism, operating alongside other major religious outlets like the Christian Broadcasting System (CBS).

What the charges essentially boil down to is not putting organizational funds in one's own pocket. It's rather that the prosecutors claim money belonging to the religious organization has been used in a way that the country's laws don't regard as "regular religious activities". Even if the money was spent entirely on the organization's broader global vision, doing so in violation of statutory financial controls is legally classified as embezzlement.

Believers revere Mother Han as a messianic figure ("True Mother"). From the perspective of the faith and many of its donors, giving money to the religious organization is synonymous with giving it to her to use as she sees fit for global and providential causes.

The prosecutors appointed by the left-leaning Lee Jae-myung (이재명) administration claim that legally, the money belongs to the registered religious corporation, not an individual. Using institutional assets for projects outside the narrow scope of what the charter and South Korean law define as "regular religious activities", constitutes a criminal diversion of corporate funds.

All the five above-mentioned outlets confirm that *Criminal Agreement Division 22* of the *Seoul Central District Court*, presided over by Judge Jo Hyeong-woo (조형우), has scheduled the first public preparatory hearing for 12th November 2026, at 11:00 AM.

The South Korean media outlets provided a lopsided view of the case, focusing **predominantly on the prosecution's theory and investigative details**, while mentioning the defense's perspective only to a **minimal extent**.

A direct comparison of how the two sides were represented across the different reports reveals a clear imbalance:

The Defense's View (Minimal Mention)

The logo of SBS News (SBS 뉴스), the primary news division of the Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS), one of South Korea's three major nationwide television networks alongside KBS and MBC.

The defense's perspective is almost entirely absent from the mainstream broadcast and wire reports (*SBS*, *BBS*, *Newsis*, and *Yonhap*), which strictly stick to the facts of the indictment and court scheduling.

The only notable exception is *Beobchi News*, which is the only outlet to explicitly provide the defense's counter-argument. At the very end of its report, it briefly notes that Mother Han's legal team **flatly denies the charges**, asserting that former Director-General Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호) acted entirely on his own authority without her prior knowledge, reporting, or instruction.

Additionally, the outlets do maintain standard legal neutrality by clarifying that these are "prosecutorial allegations" rather than judicially established facts, noting that the defendants were "indicted without detention". However, in terms of actual narrative real estate, the state's allegations received overwhelming dominance across the board.

Beobchi News, *Newsis*, and *Yonhap News* explicitly identify the four co-defendants as Hak

Ja Han (한학자), former Chief of Staff Jeong Won-ju (정원주), and former World Headquarters Director-General Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호). *Newsis* provides the additional detail that a fourth individual, a former head of the *Central Administration Office* identified only as "A", is also being tried. All five outlets state that the charges have been brought under the *Act on the Aggravated Punishment of Specific Economic Crimes* (Embezzlement).

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

The Prosecution's View (Predominant Focus)

The bulk of the text in all the articles is dedicated to detailing the state's narrative. The outlets exhaustively report:

- The precise **alleged criminal mechanisms** (conspiracy, false accounting, and using the guise of ceremonial "offering fees" to bypass normal accounting).
- The sensational structural details of the investigation, specifically highlighting the **discovery of 26 billion won (about US$19 million) in cash bundles** inside Mother Han's private safe.
- The institutional background of the *Joint Investigation Headquarters* (*Hapsubon*), framing the trial as a crackdown on systemic "religion-politics collusion".

The Investigative Authority and Mechanism of the Alleged Crime

Beobchi News, *BBS News*, *Newsis*, and *Yonhap News* report that the prosecution was initiated by the specialized "Joint Investigation Headquarters for Religion-Politics Collusion" (*Hapsubon*). *Newsis* contributes the specific context that the headquarters is led by Chief Prosecutor Kim Tae-hoon (김태훈) of the *Daejeon High Prosecutors' Office*.



Joint Investigation Headquarters. Illustration: ChatGPT, 29th August 2026.

Regarding the mechanics of the alleged crime, *Beobchi News*, *Newsis*, and *Yonhap News* state that the defendants are accused of illicitly diverting roughly 10.5 billion won in Federation funds between 2017 and 2025. *Beobchi News* and *Yonhap News* specify that these funds were diverted under the guise of "offering/gift expenses" (*예물비*), while *Newsis* emphasizes that the core of the state's case relies on proof that senior officials conspired to execute false accounting procedures.

Beobchi News, *Newsis*, and *Yonhap News* all report that these cash bundles were subsequently hidden in a private vault inside Mother Han's living quarters at the *Cheon Jeong Temple* complex in Gapyeong, Gyeonggi Province. *Newsis* reminds readers that this follows a severe compulsory raid and seizure carried out at the Gapyeong complex and the Seoul headquarters on 6th May.

Genesis of the Vault's Discovery and Asset Seizure

Beobchi News, *BBS News*, and *Yonhap News* trace the origin of this new indictment back to an aggressive raid originally executed by the team of Special Prosecutor Min Joong-gi (민중기) while they were investigating unrelated allegations involving the former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희).

Beobchi News, *BBS News*, and *Yonhap News* all write that the special prosecutors originally discovered 26 billion won **(about US$19**

million) in cash bundles within Mother Han's private vault.

In the highly competitive digital landscape of South Korean internet media, visual and concrete details – such as "hoards of cash hidden in private residential vaults" – drive massive click-through rates. The press naturally prioritizes these dramatic investigative leaks over the dry, highly technical legal denials issued by defense attorneys.



***Granted bail due to her critical health condition**: Dr. Hak Ja Han, aka. Mother Han, here being wheeled into the courtroom by her grandson Moon Shin-chul at Seoul Central District Court 31st August 2026. Photo: Dr. Michael Balcomb, resolution improved by ChatGPT, 6th September 2026*

These three outlets report that while the initial special prosecutor team interrogated financial officers, they were unable to confirm the definitive source or legal nature of the money before their mandate expired. *Beobchi News*, *BBS News*, and *Yonhap News* explain that the case was subsequently handed over to the *Joint Investigation Headquarters*, which traced the financial flow, concluded that 10.5 billion won (about US$7.5 million) was embezzled, and subsequently seized the entire 26 billion won **(about US$19 million)** under asset-collection and preservation laws. *Beobchi News* adds a critical clarification: the media underscores that the pending trial is strictly restricted to the 10.5 billion won, meaning the remaining cash must be legally handled as a separate matter.

The Lower Court Verdict and Appellate Court Status

Beobchi News, *Newsis*, and *Yonhap News* provide comprehensive tracking of the separate, primary criminal trial concerning political-lobbying allegations. All three outlets note that on 31st August, the *Seoul Central District Court* found Mother Han guilty, sentencing her to a combined 2 years in prison.

Beobchi News adds that the Special Prosecutor's team has appealed the verdict, arguing the sentences are too lenient and contesting the lower court's decision to acquit on certain embezzlement counts and dismiss charges of instigating evidence destruction.

Exclusive Details on Mother Han's Bail and Defense Strategy

Beobchi News also carried the news that on 19th October, Criminal Division 13 of the *Seoul High Court* – led by High Court Judges Kim Moo-shin (김무신), Lee Woo-hee (이우희), and Yoo Dong-gyun (유동균) – formally approved a bail request for Mother Han in the lobbying appeal. *Beobchi News* reports that the court cited her critical health condition and the fact that evidence collection had concluded. The

publication details the highly restrictive terms of her release: a 200-million-won cash bond, strict confinement to the hospital where she has been receiving treatment since March, and an absolute ban on contacting any external individuals except for legal counsel, medical professionals, and essential mobility assistants.

Finally, *Beobchi News* maps out the immense logistical pressure on the leadership, reporting that Mother Han is now facing three distinct, simultaneous legal battles: the lobbying appeal, the upcoming 10.5-billion-won (about US$7.5 million) embezzlement trial, and a separate trial for allegedly violating the *Political Parties Act* through organized mass party registrations. In terms of defense positioning, *Beobchi News* reports that Mother Han's legal team is flatly denying the embezzlement charges, asserting that former Director-General Yoon Yeong-ho (윤영호) acted entirely on his own authority without her prior knowledge or instruction.

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

***Featured image** above: Dr. Hak Ja Han (한학자) – also known as Mother Han. Photo: FFWPU*

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