FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Peace Prizes Becomes Political Flashpoint

Knut Holdhus
October 27, 2026



Mother Han at the Sunhak Peace Prize award ceremony April 11, 2025 in Seoul. The Sunhak Peace Prize is one of numerous peace projects she and her late husband Sun Myung Moon founded

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

Medals spark fresh debate over political pressure on religious minority

A report by domestic media outlet News1 on 27th October, highlights a new front in the ongoing political pressure against the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in South Korea.

During a parliamentary audit, Democratic Party lawmaker Kim Young-hwan (김영환) directed sharp criticism at the Korea Minting and Security Printing Corporation (KOMSCO). His grievance? The public institution had successfully fulfilled business-to-business (B2B) contracts to manufacture award medals for the Sunhak Peace Prize - an international award established at the initiative of Family Federation leader Hak Ja Han (한학자).



The main entrance of the Korea Minting and Security Printing Corporation (KOMSCO)

See also Mother Han: A Cycle of Prosecution Without End

See also Climate of Suspicion: Peace Reframed as Politics

Lawmaker Kim argued that the Korea Mint neglected its public responsibility by failing to vet the "public interest implications" or potential "social controversy" surrounding the purchasing organization. According to documents released by his office, the corporation produced 24 medals across four separate contracts between 2020 and 2025, netting approximately 207.3 million won (US$145,000) in standard business revenue.

Kim insisted that even profit-making arms of public entities must guard their reputation against alignment with controversial groups. However, a closer look at the political landscape reveals a profound irony: the very "social controversy" cited by Lawmaker Kim is a crisis meticulously manufactured and sustained by his own political party through an escalating judicial campaign.

The Anatomy of a Manufactured Scandal



Mother Han at the Sunhak Peace Prize award ceremony in Seoul 3rd February 2017 with prize winner Sakena Yacoobi, an Afghan professor famous for education of women. The image behind them resembles the medals mentioned by News1

The critique leveled against the Korea Mint relies heavily on circular logic. This dynamic becomes clear when evaluated alongside the broader legal strategy deployed against Hak Ja Han (한학자) - also called Mother Han. National media outlets have raised the alarm over this judicial overreach; notably, a 24th August editorial by Segye Ilbo explicitly cautioned that South Korea has entered an unprecedented era where state prosecutors function as permanent instruments of political attrition.

Lawmakers use state resources to generate negative publicity around a minority religious group, and then point to that exact negative publicity as a reason why state-linked entities should socially exclude them. The Korea Mint correctly noted in its defense that these medals were standard commercial orders produced under strict corporate guidelines. Yet, in the theater of parliamentary audits, standard business practices are easily reframed as institutional failure when a politically targeted group is involved.

In this light, the negative public sentiment surrounding the movement is not a spontaneous grassroots reaction, but the direct result of coordinated lawfare. A striking example occurred on 28th August, when domestic outlets 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.

Tactical Timing and Overlapping Indictments

The timing of these legal maneuvers betrays a clear political motive. This fresh embezzlement indictment was unsealed just three days before an earlier, entirely separate trial involving political-funding allegations was scheduled to reach its verdict on 31st August. In that initial case, the Min Joong-gi (민중기) Special Prosecutor's team had demanded an extraordinary 13-year prison sentence.

The tactical implementation of these rolling, overlapping indictments strongly indicates an institutional determination to sustain an unending cycle of prosecution against the religious minority.

By layering new accusations immediately before older ones reach a resolution, prosecutors ensure that even if one legal theory collapses under scrutiny, another is instantly ready to take its place. This strategy guarantees that the Family Federation remains perpetually under a cloud of suspicion.

Conclusion



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

When Lawmaker Kim Young-hwan (김영환) chastises the Korea Mint for producing medals for an organization in spite of its "social controversy", he is weaponizing a stigma that his own political faction has worked tirelessly to produce. The attack on the Sunhak Peace Prize medals is not an isolated oversight issue; it may well be a calculated public relations maneuver designed to enforce the social and economic isolation of a religious minority. By recognizing these overlapping legal indictments and parliamentary criticisms as part of a singular, sustained campaign, observers can see past the political theater and recognize the profound threat this lawfare poses to institutional neutrality and religious freedom in South Korea.

See also Mother Han: A Cycle of Prosecution Without End

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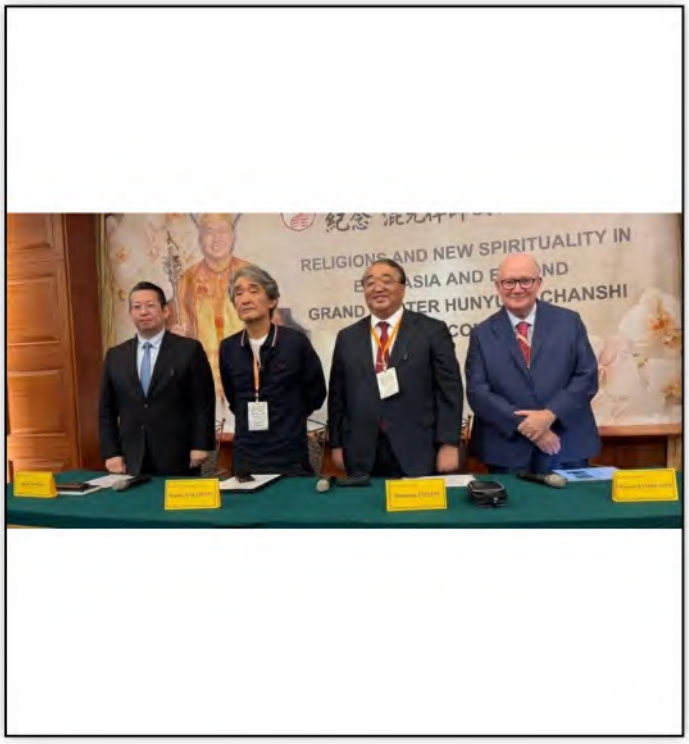
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Shunsuke Uotani, secretary general of UPF in Japan, during Session 16 at CESNUR 2026, an international symposium on studies of minority religions held in Taichung, central Taiwan from 10th to 14th October 2026. Slightly edited.

Continued from part 1: 3 Forces Behind Decades of Opposition

Feeling a sense of crisis about this development, leftwing forces formed *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales [See editor's note 1 below]*.



***Stanislav Alexandrovich Levchenko** (1941-), former Russian KGB major, who defected to the USA in 1979. Received American citizenship in 1989. In 1975, Moscow sent him undercover abroad, as a journalist. He worked for the Russian magazine New Times (Novoye Vremya) in Tokyo, Japan. From October 1979 he gave detailed information about KGB's Japanese spy network to the American authorities, including in a Congressinal testimony at the beginning of the 1980s. He revealed the names of around 200 Japanese agents, including former labour minister Hirohide Ishida of the Liberal Democratic Party, and the Socialist Party's leader Seiichi Katsumata. Takuji Yamane from the newspaper Sankei Shimbun was also mentioned. (Wikipedia) Photo: Bitter Winter*

It was formed to stop the enactment of the anti-espionage law, especially after the Levchenko affair. It refers to Stanislav Levchenko, a former KGB major who conducted espionage activities in Japan.

In 1979, he defected to the United States and testified about his espionage activities before the *House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence*.

In his testimony, he revealed the real names and codenames of 26 Japanese people who had acted as spies for the Soviet Union, including a leading member of the Japan Socialist Party.

The VOC made extensive use of Levchenko's shocking testimony and called for the enactment of an anti-espionage law.

And in May 1983, the Socialist Party's journal Shakai Shimpo published an article stating that the Levchenko affair was a plot orchestrated by the VOC and the CIA.

As this was completely unfounded, the VOC filed a defamation lawsuit against the Socialist Party and the editor in chief of the party's journal.



***Hiroshi Yamaguchi** (山口広), activist leftwing lawyer and founder and leading member of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS). Photo: Screenshot / Bitter Winter*

The lawyer who represented the Socialist Party at that time was Hiroshi Yamaguchi (山口博), who later became a central figure in establishing *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* [See editor's note 1 below]. The lawyers who made up this network were mainly lawyers affiliated with the Communist Party and the Socialist Party.

The defamation trial found that the Socialist Party had lied about VOC and ended in a victorious settlement for VOC.

But as retaliation and extension of this struggle, the leftwing lawyers stepped up the campaign against so-called "spiritual sales" [See editor's note 3 below] by the Unification Church [See editor's note 2 below].

The three groups had the following collaborations.

Parents of Unification Church members would pay a fee to anti-Unification Church pastors in order to receive their guidance

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Unification Church pastors in order to receive their guidance.

The anti-UC pastor would instruct the parents on the specific method of abduction and confinement.

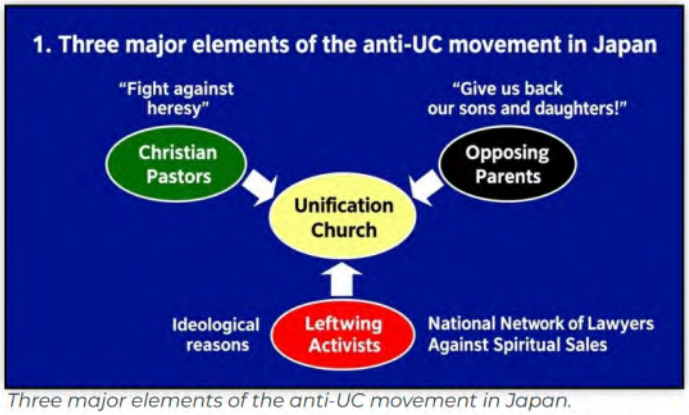
And once the parents confined their adult son or daughter, the pastor would visit the sites of confinement and urge the members to renounce their faith.

If the members accepted the exhortation and renounced their faith, the parents' goal was achieved.

However, this wasn't the end. The persons who had thus become "former members" were introduced to the leftwing lawyers who persuaded them to file a lawsuit against the Unification Church for damages.

By representing such former members in court, the leftwing lawyers could earn a fee while at the same time damage the Unification Church's social standing.

In addition, information about these lawsuits was publicized to society through the mass media and used to stir up anxiety among parents of believers.



Three major elements of the anti-UC movement in Japan. Illustration: Shunsuke Uotani, edited version by ChatGPT, October 22026

In this way, the opposition movement became a network of professional groups including pastors, parents and lawyers and the mass media, each of whom is using their own position and professional ability to push the Unification Church into a corner.

And finally, I'd like to consider why the decision to dissolve the Unification Church [See editor's note 2 below] was issued now.

The opposition movement against the Unification Church has been persistent over the decades and has succeeded in tarnishing the church's social reputation.

However, no matter how much the lawyers network [See editor's note 1 below] asked the Japanese government to dissolve the Unification church, the Japanese government has never seriously attempted to dissolve the church.

This is because neither the church [See editor's note 2 below] nor its leaders were ever accused of a crime.

What completely changed this situation was the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) on 8th July 2022. The assassin is not a Unification Church member, however, his mother is a member.

The panic caused by this incident unfortunately led the then Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄) to make a mistaken judgment and decide to request a dissolution order. This is a direct cause of the current situation.

However, there was a historical background to this. The most important factor was the end of the Cold War.

Hiromi Shimada (島田裕巳), one of Japan's leading scholars of religion,

analyzed the Unification Church [See editor's note 2 below] as a religion of the Cold War era.

The theology of the Unification Church, which sees world events as a confrontation between God's side and Satan's side and interpret Communism as being on Satan's side, was persuasive to during the Cold War.

However, he said, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the Cold War structure, the significance of the existence of the VOC declined relatively for the conservative forces, including the Liberal Democratic Party.

The LDP is basically a conservative party, but within it there are more conservative factions and more liberal faction.

The Seiwakai, which Abe led, was the most conservative faction and had historical ties to VOC



Sun Myung Moon *and* ***Nobusuke Kishi****, Prime Minister of Japan 1957-1960, shaking hands in Tokyo in 1973. Photo: FFWPU*

Abe's grandfather, Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi (岸信介元), was one of the initiator of the VOC and had even met face to face with Reverend Sun Myung Moon (문선명) in 1973.

On the other hand, Kishida's faction, the Kochikai, was a liberal faction within the LDP.

Following the end of the Cold War, vigilance against communism within the LDP waned and few politicians retained a clear anti-communist ideology.

Mr. Abe was a leading figure among those who held conservative convictions. His assassination led to a devastating blow to the conservative faction within the LDP.

Heavily influenced by the left-leaning media and public opinion, then Prime Minister Kishida came to believe that his administration would not survive unless the ties between the LDP and the Unification Church were severed.

He subsequently concluded that public opinion would not tolerate anything less than the dissolution of the organization.

In conclusion, the historical anti-UC movement has involved a complex mix of factors including religious and ideological motives and parent-child relationships.

However, it was not this anti-UC movement itself that led to the dissolution.

According to pure legal theory, there is no basis for dissolving the Unification Church [See editor's note 2 below].

The main factor behind the move to order the dissolution after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) was political and the background to the LDP government's decision to dissolve the Unification Church is that the LDP itself has changed and become more left-leaning as a result of Abe's death and the significant decline of his faction.

The current administration under Sanae Takaichi (高市早苗) has returned to conservatism, carrying on the ideology of Mr. Abe.

However, prior to the administration's inception, the dissolution of the Unification Church had already become the established course of action for the LDP, and the judicial proceedings were already underway.

Consequently, the current administration has been unable to halt the process.

Thank you very much.

See also part 1: 3 Forces Behind Decades of Opposition

***Featured image** above: The plenary session on the Unification Church in Japan on 12th October 2026 at CESNUR 2026. From left: Masaichi Hori, Masaki Nakamasa, Shunsuke Uotani, Massimo Introvigne. Photo: Bitter Winter*

[***Editor's note 1***: The ***National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales*** (*Zenkoku Benren*) presents itself to the Japanese public as a benevolent coalition of legal professionals fighting for consumer rights. Established in 1987, the network claims its sole mission is to protect vulnerable citizens from fraudulent business practices and what it terms "spiritual sales". However, an objective examination of their history, methods, and underlying political motivations reveals a far more sinister agenda. Scholars of religious liberty and investigative journalists have increasingly exposed the network as an ideological weapon designed not to protect consumers, but to systematically dismantle minority religious organizations – most notably the Family Federation.

Prominent critics, including Italian sociologist Massimo Introvigne and the human rights organization CESNUR, have documented how *Zenkoku Benren* acts as a **primary instigator of religious intolerance in Japan**. Rather than operating as an objective legal resource, the network has long been accused of actively facilitating, or turning a blind eye to, the brutal practice of "deprogramming" or coercive faith-breaking. For decades, thousands of faith believers were abducted, confined, and subjected to severe psychological duress by professional faith-breakers working hand-in-hand with hostile relatives and network-aligned activists.



***Dr. Massimo Introvigne**, Italian sociologist of religion, founder of CESNUR, specializing in new religious movements and religious liberty. A prolific author, he has advised governments and international bodies, and served as OSCE Representative on combating racism, xenophobia, and intolerance against Christians worldwide and comments on contemporary religious controversies. Here speaking at the UN Office at Geneva on 16th June 2025. Screenshot from video by UPF.*



Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ), Japanese investigative journalist and prize-winning author, here speaking at a press conference in Brussels, Belgium on 29th June 2026. Screenshot from live transmission by HRWF

Furthermore, acclaimed Japanese investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda has meticulously exposed the inner workings of the network, highlighting how it **manufactures legal grievances**. Fukuda's reporting reveals that many of the lawsuits championed by *Zenkoku Benren* involve former members who originally made voluntary, faith-driven donations but were later coerced by anti-cult lawyers **into retroactively claiming they were defrauded**. This **predatory litigation strategy** serves a dual purpose: it generates **immense financial payouts for the lawyers** involved

while **feeding a sensationalist media narrative** designed to stoke public prejudice.

The network's ultimate objective has culminated in their aggressive push to strip the Family Federation of its religious corporation status. Critics argue this is a politically motivated campaign driven by an alliance of left-wing and communist activists seeking to purge religious voices from the public square. By weaponizing the concept of "spiritual sales", *Zenkoku Benren* has succeeded in manipulating public opinion and pressuring government authorities to violate fundamental constitutional rights to religious freedom.

To understand the ongoing religious liberty crisis in Japan, it is vital to look past the network's consumer-protection facade. *Zenkoku Benren* represents a dangerous precedent where activist legal networks can selectively target and destroy minority faiths under the guise of public interest.]

[***Editor's note 2***: Although Shunsuke Uotani uses the name "Unification Church" and also the word "church", please be aware that the Unification Church in Japan in 2015 changed its name to *Family Federation for World peace and Unification*.]

[***Editor's note 3***: The concept of **"spiritual sales" (*reigan hanbai*)** has emerged as a central legal and political battleground in Japan's discourse on new religious movements. Originally coined by the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales in 1987, the term was strategically rooted in consumer law rather than traditional religious debate. It initially targeted the practice of selling religious items – such as seals, statues, and miniature pagodas – at prices far exceeding their material value.



Patricia Duval – *Member of the Paris Bar Association, specializing in international human rights law. Has defended the rights of religious and faith minorities both in France and internationally. Screenshot from live transmission by UPF June 2025.*

However, as the research of French human rights attorney Patricia Duval highlights, the application of this concept underwent a significant and controversial expansion. Leftwing legal networks systematically extended the definition of "spiritual sales" to encompass standard religious donations. By framing faith-based giving as a commercial transaction, critics argued that the Family Federation (formerly the Unification Church) "sold" eternal salvation by exploiting the spiritual anxieties of its followers. This legal framework effectively stripped away the theological context of concepts like sin and salvation – which are common to many global faiths – and reclassified them as fraudulent business practices under consumer protection laws.

The consequences of this shifting definition have been profound. Sociological and investigative reports, notably by investigative journalist and author Masumi Fukuda, suggest that the "spiritual sales" narrative was frequently leveraged alongside highly coercive "faith-breaking" and deprogramming practices. Former members were reportedly pressured into filing civil lawsuits for damages as a mandatory, symbolic proof of their renunciation of faith.

For international observers, the Japanese controversy offers a critical case study in how consumer law can be utilized by political and legal activists to regulate minority religions. It raises vital, ongoing questions about the boundary between consumer protection and religious freedom, and how the state defines the legitimacy of spiritual devotion.]

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