

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: S Korean Failure and Non-State Peace Plans

Knut Holdhus
January 1, 2026

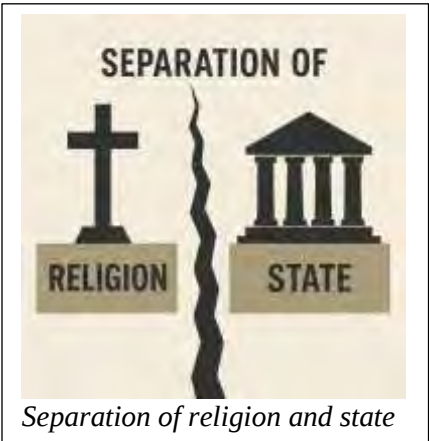


Illustration of undersea tunnel between South Korea and Japan



State failure to fulfil its political responsibility creates vacuum leaving long-term peacebuilding to others through backdoor politics

On 31st December 2025, the Korean daily [Segye Ilbo](#) issued an opinion piece which in English would be headlined "[The Unification Church's Peace Project – Wasn't This the State's Job?](#)" It was written by Moon Yong-dae (문용대), a Korean essayist, literary award recipient, and opinion columnist.



Separation of religion and state

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In many Western democracies, the separation of religion and state is treated as a foundational rule of political life. Religious groups are expected to stay out of policymaking, and governments are expected to remain neutral toward belief systems. This principle exists to protect individual freedom, prevent coercion, and maintain pluralism in diverse societies. From this perspective, any

large political or geopolitical project associated with a religious organization is often viewed with immediate suspicion.



illustration of undersea tunnel between South Korea and Japan

The Segye Ilbo [opinion piece](#) starts from this widely shared assumption but argues that it is not sufficient, on its own, to explain how ambitious international peace projects actually emerge – or why religious and civil society actors sometimes play outsized roles in proposing them. The article uses the long-debated [Korea-Japan undersea tunnel](#) as a case study to explore this tension.

The [proposed tunnel](#), which would physically connect Japan and the Korean Peninsula, has been controversial for decades. One reason is its enormous technical and financial cost. Another, more politically sensitive reason is its association with the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) – also often called by its former name, the [Unification Church](#). In South Korea and Japan alike, the movement is often portrayed by media as politically active, highly organized, and controversial. As a result, critics have

dismissed the [tunnel proposal](#) as an attempt by a [religious organization](#) to expand its influence under the guise of infrastructure or peacebuilding.

The [article](#) does not deny these concerns, but it asks readers to step back and examine the broader context. From the [Family Federation](#)'s own perspective, the [tunnel](#) is not merely a transportation project. It is imagined as a symbolic and practical link between island Japan and continental Asia, between maritime and land-based civilizations. More importantly, it is framed as one component of a much larger peace vision that includes international highway networks ("Peace Road"), cross-border peace parks between North and South Korea, and even the idea of hosting a future United Nations office on the Korean Peninsula.



Mother Han, Hak Ja Han, proposing a vision for the Korean peninsula

At this point, the author introduces a crucial distinction: proposing a vision is not the same as having the authority to implement it. In modern states, only governments control national budgets, diplomacy, and security policy. Religious groups and civil society organizations can advocate ideas, but they cannot turn them into law or infrastructure on their own. This creates an inherent structural tension. Big ideas about peace and reconciliation may originate outside government, but they can only be realized through political decision-making.

According to [Moon's article](#),

this is where things often go wrong. When political systems are unable – or unwilling – to engage seriously with long-term, cross-national challenges, those ideas have no clear institutional pathway. Formal channels such as parliamentary debate, official commissions, or public referenda may move too slowly, be blocked by partisan conflict, or prioritize short-term electoral concerns. As a result, advocates for large, long-range projects sometimes turn to informal influence, private persuasion, or indirect access to decision-makers.

From the outside, such behavior can easily look suspicious. In Western discourse, "backdoor politics" is often equated with corruption or illegitimate lobbying. The [article](#) acknowledges that lobbying for narrow private gain should be firmly rejected. However, it also poses an uncomfortable question: what happens when even broadly public-minded visions cannot enter the political system through legitimate, transparent means? In that case, the problem may not lie solely with the actors knocking on the door, but with the political structure that keeps the door closed.



Part of the peace vision: Korean reunification. Illustration

The author argues that debates over church-state separation in Korea have intensified precisely because governments have failed to take responsibility for long-term regional peace strategies. Reconciliation between Korea and Japan, stability in Northeast Asia, and durable peace on the Korean Peninsula are issues that require continuity beyond a single administration. Yet, in practice, few governments have pursued these goals consistently. When the state retreats from this role, non-state actors – religious groups included – step into the vacuum.

From this angle, the [Family Federation](#)'s peace initiatives are less evidence of religious overreach than of governmental absence. Regardless of how one judges the movement itself, the [article](#) suggests that it was at least willing to sustain long-term visions that the state repeatedly postponed or abandoned. Once those visions

began to intersect with real political possibilities, engagement with politicians became unavoidable.

The danger, the author warns, is oversimplification. If all such engagement is dismissed as a violation of secular principles, the core issue – peace and long-term regional cooperation – gets lost. Religion becomes permanently suspect, while politicians avoid accountability by pointing to church-state boundaries rather than making difficult decisions. This leads to a cycle of mistrust and inaction.

The [article](#) concludes by returning the responsibility to politics. Projects like the [Korea-Japan undersea tunnel](#) should absolutely be debated, criticized, and scrutinized. But before rejecting them outright, society should ask why such ambitious peace proposals so often originate outside the state. Ultimately,

the author calls for political leadership capable of translating moral or religious visions into the secular language of public interest, national benefit, and long-term value. True peace, the [opinion piece](#) argues, begins when governments are willing to reclaim that role – so that big ideas no longer have to enter politics through the backdoor at all.

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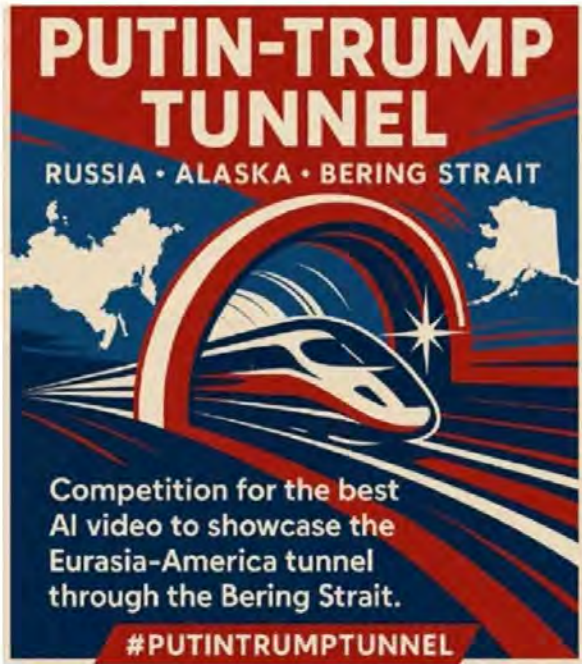
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Advisory Fees Misrepresented In S. Korean Media

- December 31, 2025
- Knut Holdhus



Foundation issues rebuttal saying report in Christian daily distorted facts about advisory fees for peace project

A statement in Korean issued by the Family Federation in South Korea to the Korean media on 30th December 2025. Translated from the text on the Korean language website of the Family Federation.

Rebuttal to the CBS NoCut News Report Dated 29th December 2025, "Did Lim Jong-seong Receive Money? A Unification Church-Affiliated Organization Paid 30 Million KRW Annually in Advisory Fees"

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On 29th December 2025, CBS NoCut News (노컷뉴스) [Editor's note: a daily newspaper run by South Korea's Christian Broadcasting System (CBS)] published an article titled, "Did Lim Jong-seong Receive Money? A Unification Church-Affiliated Organization Paid 30 Million KRW Annually in Advisory Fees." It reported as follows:



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기독교방송
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(CBS)

"It has been confirmed that the Unification Church-affiliated organization *World Peace Road Foundation* (hereinafter 'the *Foundation*'), for which former Democratic Party lawmaker Lim Jong-seong (임종성) reportedly served as an advisor, spent advisory fees amounting to hundreds of millions of won over several years. Former lawmaker Lim, who is said to have served as an advisor to the *Foundation*, maintains that he 'has never received any advisory fees.'

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According to *National Tax Service* filings reviewed by CBS NoCut News on 29th December, the *Foundation* spent close to 250 million won (ca. 170,000 US dollars) under the name of advisory fees over the seven-year period from 2017 to 2024.



세계피스로드재단
World Peace Road Foundation

Logo of the World Peace Road Foundation

The *organization* spent approximately 36 million won (ca. 24,300 US dollars) annually on advisory fees from 2017 through 2022, reduced the amount to 22 million won (ca. 15,000 US dollars) in 2023, and further reduced it to 8 million won (ca. 5,400 US dollars) in 2024, for a total of 246.4 million won (ca. 167,000 US dollars) over seven years. Former lawmaker Lim was appointed as an advisor in December 2017, while he was still an incumbent lawmaker. Before and after that time, Lim jointly hosted several events with the *organization* related to the *Korea-Japan undersea tunnel* and attended the *organization's* events to deliver congratulatory remarks."

However,

1.



Misrepresented in media: Former Democratic Party lawmaker Lim Jong-seong. Photo (2019): 경기도정방송국GTV / Wikimedia Commons. Source: YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0W02pIAUoGQ>. License: CC Attr 3.0 Unp

The CBS NoCut News report distorted the facts by failing to accurately verify the actual nature of the advisory fee expenditures reported to the *National Tax Service* by the *World Peace Road Foundation*, and by making unfounded inferences solely on the basis that former lawmaker Lim Jong-seong held an advisory position.

In reality, the only individual who received advisory fees from the *Foundation* was former Ambassador A, a non-politician, who was appointed in September 2014 as Chair of the *Foundation*-affiliated *Peace Road Forum* and served as an advisor to the *Foundation*.

Beginning in September 2014, former Ambassador A served as an advisor to the *Foundation*, performing duties such as recommending and recruiting speakers for the Forum (held four times annually) and

overseeing forum operations. From 2014 onward, the *Foundation* paid him a monthly advisory fee of 3 million won (ca. 2,040 US dollars). These payments were duly reported to the *National Tax Service*, resulting in an annual advisory fee of 36 million won (ca. 24,300 US dollars) reported through 2022.

In consideration of the *Foundation's* financial circumstances, the monthly advisory fee was reduced to 2 million won (ca. 1,350 US dollars) starting in 2023, which is why the advisory fee reported to the *National Tax Service* for that year totaled 22 million won (ca. 14,800 US dollars). Due to health-related reasons that made it difficult for Advisor A to continue fulfilling his duties, he was relieved of his advisory position as of April 2024. Accordingly, advisory fees totaling 8 million won (ca. 5,400 US dollars) were paid through April 2024, after which all advisory fee payments were discontinued. These facts are fully reflected in the filings submitted to the *National Tax Service*.

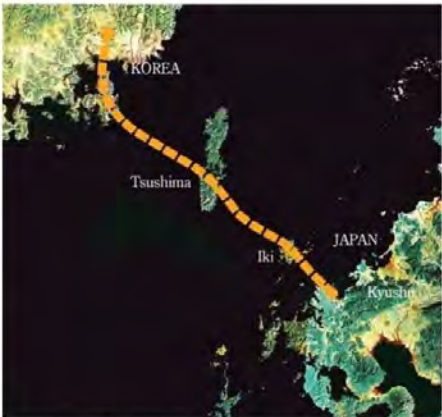
2.

Although former lawmaker Lim Jong-seong was appointed as an advisor to the *Foundation* at the end of 2017, reporting as though unlawful monetary payments were made to him based solely on the suspicion that advisory fees were paid during a similar period has resulted in damage to the reputation of both the *Foundation* and the named public official.

To reiterate clearly, the *Foundation* has never paid advisory fees to any politician.

By reporting as though unlawful monetary payments were made merely because advisory fee expenditures appeared in *National Tax Service* filings during a similar timeframe, CBS NoCut News has recklessly infringed upon the honor and reputation of both the *Foundation* and the public official referenced in the article.

For reference, the vision of the *Korea-Japan undersea tunnel* and the Peace Road initiatives promoted by the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* and the *World Peace Road Foundation* are peace-building initiatives conceived under the overarching principle of "One Family Under God". The *World Peace Highway*, or *International Highway*, is a peace movement launched with the goal of creating the "arteries of the global village" to realize "One Family Under God", connecting the world through a web-like



A proposed tunnel project between the Japanese

network of highways that allows people and goods to move freely, lowers national barriers, and eliminates the justification for war.

island of Kyushu and South Korea. Illustration:
[The International Highway Foundation \(IHF\)](#)

Going forward, the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) and the [World Peace Road Foundation](#) pledge to continue devoting themselves fully to peace activities aligned with the Foundation's mission, striving toward the day when the entire world is united through an [International Highway](#), a [World Peace Highway](#), under the vision of "One Family Under God".

30th December 2025

World Peace Road Foundation
External Relations Headquarters,
Korea Branch of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)

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Featured image above: Ad for a competition run by the [World Peace Road Foundation](#) on its website.

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