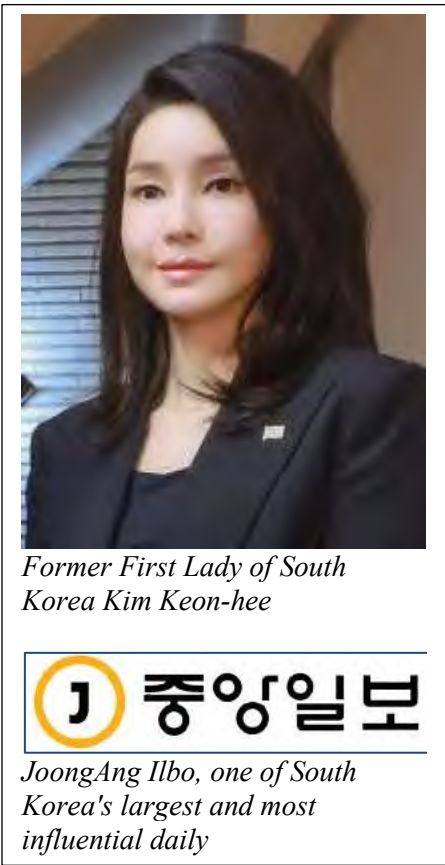


FFWPU Europe and Middle East: S Korea Continues Targeting Holy Mother Han - Mass Enrollment Case

Knut Holdhus
August 21, 2026



Disputed evidence in mass enrollment case. Illustration: ChatGPT



Former First Lady of South Korea Kim Keon-hee



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

In first trial 21st August in Seoul, defense challenges evidence in Family Federation mass political party enrollment case

The first trial in the politically sensitive case concerning the alleged organized enrollment of members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - FFWPU, in Korea often called [Unificationism](#) - in the conservative People Power Party (PPP) began in Seoul on 21st August 2026.

See also [New Case: Claims of Political Mobilization](#)

The case involves former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희), FFWPU leader [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), former [FFWPU](#) World Headquarters Director [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), former chief of staff Jeong Won-ju (정원주), and Jeon Seong-bae (전성배), known in South Korean media as the "Geonjin shaman". All five defendants denied the charges at the opening hearing.

The proceedings are part of the broader series of investigations conducted by South Korea's special prosecutor teams under the Lee Jae-myung (이재명) administration. [JoongAng Ilbo](#) (중앙일보), reporting on the first hearing, emphasized the defense's argument that the alleged offense had simply not been

proven.

The lawyers of Kim Keon-hee (김건희) told the Seoul Central District Court that there was no evidence showing that she had directly asked either Jeon Seong-bae (전성배) or [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호) to support a candidate in the PPP leadership election, nor any telephone call, text message, or document in which she promised proportional-representation nominations.

The basic allegation, as summarized by [JoongAng Ilbo](#) (중앙일보), concerns events beginning in November 2022. Prosecutors allege that Kim and Jeon conspired to ask [Yoon](#) to organize [FFWPU](#) members to join the PPP. The special prosecutor's theory is that Kim wanted a candidate supported by then-President Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열) to win the PPP leadership election in March 2023 and that, in exchange for mobilizing [Family Federation](#) members, the [organization](#) was promised government support and other political benefits, including assistance concerning proportional-representation nominations.



Yoon Yeong-ho, Dec. 6, 2020



KBS News, the primary news reporting division of the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS), South Korea's national public broadcaster



Hankook Ilbo, a major national daily in South Korea, ranking among the top ten dailies in terms of circulation



Kyunghyang Shinmun, a large and influential South Korean national daily, ranked among the top ten in terms of circulation

According to the defense, the principal evidence consists of [Yoon](#)'s testimony and text messages exchanged between [Yoon](#) and Jeon.

[KBS News](#) provides more detail about the alleged scale of the membership campaign. According to the special prosecutor's case, [Yoon Yeong-ho](#), with the approval of [Hak Ja Han](#) and other [FFWPU](#) leaders, instructed local branches to enroll members in the PPP. More than 2,400 [FFWPU](#) members allegedly joined between November 2022 and January 2023.

[KBS News](#) also reports that the special prosecutor's team initially sought support for former PPP lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동). After Kweon announced that he would not run, Jeon allegedly sent [Yoon](#) a message asking that members support Kim Gi-hyeon (김기현), who subsequently became the candidate supported by the Yoon Suk-yeol camp.

The prosecution maintains that this was part of a broader relationship between the [religious organization](#) and political power.

[Hankook Ilbo](#) (한국일보) quotes the special prosecutor's team as arguing that the [FFWPU](#) had strongly supported Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열) in the 2022 presidential election and subsequently intervened in the PPP leadership contest after allegedly receiving promises of proportional-representation seats and other benefits. Prosecutors characterize the alleged conduct as an attempt to distort democratic decision-making within a political party and to turn parliamentary positions into objects of political bargaining.

The special prosecutor's team went further, arguing that [FFWPU](#) leaders used their religious authority to mobilize believers as political instruments. [Hankook Ilbo](#) (한국일보) reports the prosecution's claim that members were placed in circumstances in which they had little choice but to join the party and support particular candidates, regardless of their own preferences. The prosecution therefore characterized the alleged conduct not merely as an individual violation of election-related legislation, but as something that potentially undermined the constitutional principles of separation of religion and politics and representative democracy.

The defense strongly disputes that interpretation. [Kyunghyang Shinmun](#) (경향신문) reports that Kim's lawyers argued there was no evidence that she had promised either financial benefits or public positions to the [FFWPU](#). They also stressed that there was no evidence demonstrating that the [religious organization](#) actually influenced the outcome of the 2023 leadership election. One particularly important defense argument, also reported by

[KBS News](#), was numerical: more than 2,400 new [FFWPU](#) members may have joined the PPP, but the difference between the first- and second-place candidates in the leadership election was approximately 140,000 votes. The defense therefore argued that it was difficult to regard the membership campaign as having had a meaningful impact on the election result.

The defendants also challenged the prosecution's evidence on an individual basis. According to [JoongAng Ilbo](#) and [Hankook Ilbo](#), Kim's lawyers argued that even if she had mentioned proportional representation,

she was not in a position to guarantee nominations and therefore could not have made a concrete or realistic promise of a benefit.

The lawyers of [Hak Ja Han](#) similarly rejected the allegation that she had approved or received a request to mobilize members. They attacked the testimony of [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) as lacking credibility, arguing that he was the principal source of the allegations against the [FFWPU](#) leadership.

See also [How Reliable Is the Prosecution's Key Witness?](#)



OhmyNews. In smaller writing, reflecting the citizen journalism policy, it says, "All citizens are reporters"

[OhmyNews](#) (오마이뉴스) reports that the defense teams also raised a more fundamental legal argument. They contend that the relevant provision of the Political Parties Act, which prohibits providing or promising financial benefits or public positions in connection with party leadership elections, does not apply to the defendants in the manner alleged by the prosecution. The defense argues that [Hak Ja Han](#) and other [FFWPU](#) figures do not fall within the categories of candidates, campaign officials,

voters, or observers specified by the provision.

The prosecution, however, says it has documentary and testimonial evidence beyond [Yoon](#)'s account. According to [JoongAng Ilbo](#) (중앙일보), prosecutors obtained PPP membership rolls showing that large numbers of [FFWPU](#) members joined before the leadership election. They also say that information concerning the membership drive was repeatedly reported to [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) and that they obtained testimony indicating that he instructed members to join and vote.



The building housing Seoul Central District Court, where the first hearing was held on 21st August 2026. Image: Grok xAI

The first hearing therefore established a sharp divide between the prosecution's broader characterization of the case as an instance of religious-political collusion and the defendants' insistence that the central allegations lack direct evidence. [Kyunghyang Shinmun](#) (경향신문) notes that the court has decided to separate the proceedings involving Kim and Jeon from those involving [Hak Ja Han](#), [Yoon Yeong-ho](#), and Jeong Won-ju. Further proceedings concerning the latter three are scheduled for 28th August.

The court plans to continue witness examinations through 18th September and begin questioning the defendants themselves in October. The 21st August hearing thus marks the beginning, rather than the resolution, of a courtroom battle over whether the alleged mass enrollment actually constituted an unlawful attempt to manipulate a political party - and, crucially, whether the prosecution can establish a direct evidentiary link between Kim Keon-hee and the alleged mobilization.

See also [New Case: Claims of Political Mobilization](#)

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FFWPU leadership faces new case of political influence claims with 2000 members allegedly having been mobilized

Nate News, the South Korean digital news aggregation service,



The logo of Nate News

reported on

21st August on a new chapter in South Korea's extensive investigations into alleged political influence-peddling involving religious organizations and figures from the country's former conservative administration. On 21st August, the *Seoul Central District Court* opens the first full trial of Family Federation leader **Hak Ja Han** (한학자), former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희), and several others over an alleged effort to recruit **Family Federation** members en masse into the conservative **People Power Party** (PPP).

See also [2026 Mass Enrollment Case: Evidence Under Fire](#)



He has already been given life sentence in another case, she 4 years in what some perceive as revenge on political opponents: Former South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and First Lady Kim Keon-hee, here in Tokyo 16th March 2023. Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

The case is part of a much wider series of investigations and prosecutions that have followed the political upheaval surrounding former President Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열), his wife Kim Keon-hee (김건희), and the collapse of the previous conservative administration. Several special prosecutor teams have been appointed by the current left-leaning Lee Jae-myung (이재명) administration to investigate allegations involving the former president, his wife, political figures and alleged links between politicians and religious organizations.



The investigations have resulted in numerous indictments and court proceedings. Yonhap News, for example, in a [report 26th June](#), records that the special prosecutor investigating Kim Keon-hee (김건희) eventually indicted 66 people before its investigation ended in December 2025.



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The particular case beginning on 21st August concerns alleged violations of South Korea's *Political Parties Act*. The prosecution's central allegation is that members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU), in Korea also known as [Unificationism](#) (통일교), were mobilized to join the *People Power Party* in large numbers in connection with the party's 2023 national convention.

The [article](#) published by Nate News on 21st August focused on the allegations and interpretation of the prosecution. The claims described are therefore allegations, not established facts, and the defendants have the opportunity to contest them during the trial.

What is the prosecution alleging?

According to the prosecution's case as [reported by Nate News](#), former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희) allegedly worked with a figure known as Jeon Seong-bae (전성배), sometimes referred to in Korean media as the "Geonjin shaman". They allegedly approached [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), then director-general of the [Family Federation's World Headquarters](#), and sought the organized recruitment of members of the [religious organization](#) into the PPP.



Yoon Yeong-ho, former director general of the international headquarters of the [Family Federation](#), here 11th February 2022. Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#)

The alleged purpose, according to the special prosecutor, was to influence the outcome of the party's 2023 national convention. The prosecution believes that approximately 2,000 [Family Federation](#) members were encouraged to join the PPP so that they could participate in the selection of party leadership and support a candidate favorable to former President Yoon.

The prosecution further alleges that this political support was connected to promises of benefits for the [Family Federation](#). These allegedly included political and policy assistance on issues important to the [organization](#) and the provision of proportional-representation seats in the National Assembly.



Former People Power Party

One of the political figures mentioned in connection with these allegations is Kweon Seong-dong (권성동), then a prominent *People Power Party* lawmaker, whose candidacy for party leader Kim Keon-hee (김건희) allegedly sought to support.

Hak Ja Han's alleged role

former People Power Party lawmaker **Kweon Seong-dong** (권성동), here 23rd Dec. 2024. Photo: 국민의힘TV / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

The charges against **Hak Ja Han** (한학자) – also called **Mother Han** – concern a somewhat earlier stage of the alleged scheme.

According to the prosecution, in November 2022 she allegedly conspired with senior **Family Federation** officials, including former chief of staff Jeong Won-ju (정원주) and former World Headquarters director-general **Yoon Yeong-ho** (윤영호), to arrange for **Family Federation** members to join the *People Power Party*.

The prosecution therefore views the alleged mass membership campaign as part of a broader effort by the **Family Federation** leadership to develop political influence and secure favorable treatment from politicians.

Mother Han and the other defendants, however, should not be treated as having been found guilty merely because they have been indicted. The 21st August hearing is the beginning of the substantive trial, in which the prosecution's allegations will be tested against the evidence and the defense's arguments.

Why the case matters

The case is particularly significant because it brings together two highly controversial issues in contemporary South Korean politics: the alleged use of religious networks for political purposes and the government's increasingly forceful investigation of such activities.



Aggressively promoting special prosecutor investigations: **Lee Jae-myung**, President of South Korea since 4th June 2025. Photo: Jeonnam Provincial Government / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

As reported by [The Japan Times](#) on 10th December 2025, President Lee Jae-myung (이재명) has called for investigations into suspected links between religious organizations and politicians and has urged consideration of measures against religious groups that improperly intervene in politics. The **Family Federation** has consequently found itself at the center of an unusually intense political and legal controversy.

The 21st August proceedings should therefore not be viewed in isolation. They form part of a larger confrontation involving the former conservative political establishment, the

current administration's special-prosecutor investigations, and allegations concerning the political activities of religious organizations.

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For the **Family Federation**, the central issue is not simply whether individual members participated in political activities. The crucial legal question is whether the prosecution can prove that **Mother Han** personally

participated in an unlawful scheme to manipulate party membership and, if so, what responsibility can legitimately be attributed to her.

The court will ultimately have to distinguish between political allegations, organizational activities and individually provable criminal responsibility.

That distinction will be particularly important as the case moves forward.

See also [2026 Mass Enrollment Case: Evidence Under Fire](#)

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Featured image above: *Alleged political mobilization.*

Illustration: ChatGPT, August 2026.

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