

The Washington Times

WashingtonTimes.com link:

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2026/aug/31/mother-moons-conviction-threatens-religious-liberty-worldwide/>

Mother Moon's conviction threatens religious liberty worldwide

The global war on faith



South Korea's assault on religious freedom and the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification illustration by Alexander Hunter/The Washington Times

OPINION:

By Newt Gingrich - The Washington Times – Monday, August 31, 2025

A quiet but dangerous assault on religious freedom, with deep roots in communism, is sweeping the world.

What was once confined to the margins of authoritarian regimes has now breached the gates of the democratic world.

In what has been described as a “global war on God,” the weaponization of the state against communities of faith is occurring in plain sight. The most urgent and tragic battleground of this struggle is unfolding right now in South Korea.

A Presbyterian pastor from Pusan, Rev. Son Hyun-bo of Segero Church, was imprisoned and then convicted for standing up for Christian values against a woke agenda in public schools. Rev. Lee Man Hee, the 95-year-old leader of the Shincheonji Church, has been arrested and charged.

Many other churches have been raided and are under investigation because they may appear to be threats to the current administration.

The South Korean government has just convicted 83-year-old religious leader Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon. She is co-founder of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, which grew into a worldwide organization that today maintains interests in multiple businesses, including The Washington Times.

She is known to millions worldwide as “Mother Moon.” She has faced a highly politicized trial that ended Monday with a guilty verdict.

To understand how awful this attack is, consider the legacy being targeted. After the 2012 passing of her husband, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon — who himself survived brutal communist imprisonment and fought a lifetime of persecution — Dr. Han stepped forward as the sole leader of the federation, a religious movement that spans more than 140 countries.

Under her leadership, the federation has championed international conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue and religious liberty around the globe, earning her a nomination for the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize.

However, this elderly woman, who is legally blind and suffers from a severe heart condition, has been held in pretrial detention for nearly a year. She has spent roughly 340 days in a South Korean detention cell without bail, even after undergoing major shoulder surgery in custody.

Special prosecutors in Seoul, operating under the highly partisan administration of President Lee Jae-myung, have demanded a staggering 13-year prison sentence on charges of bribery and political funds violations (again, remember, she is 83).

This is not a routine prosecution. It is a systematic, state-sponsored campaign to dismantle a religious movement. The criminal trial is merely the spearhead of a much larger, coordinated offensive. Mr. Lee's Cabinet has openly discussed using foreign dissolution orders as a model to disband the Unification Church outright.

In January, Mr. Lee took the extraordinary step of publicly labeling the church a “heretical” organization and calling for its dissolution. This is not the language of historic democracies. Even more alarming is the legislative machinery being built to back up this effort. A bill introduced in the National Assembly — Civil Code Amendment Bill No. 2215932, nicknamed the

“Church Dissolution Act” — would grant the government sweeping powers to audit, inspect and dissolve any religious organization it deems to have “interfered in politics.”

In other words, it will codify the South Korean government's assault on religion. The legislation calls for the transfer of offending church assets to the national treasury.

Under this effort, state officials could raid church properties and seize records without a warrant based on mere suspicion.

Mainstream Christian bodies, including the World Evangelical Alliance, have joined in opposing this bill, recognizing that its undefined standards could easily be turned against any church or religious organization in the country.

Again, none of this would be surprising in North Korea, but this attack on faith is happening in South Korea.

When a key democratic ally — one on which American forces have stood to defend liberty and democracy since 1950 — succumbs to such anti-religious, dictatorial maneuvers, the entire free world must take notice.

The battle in Seoul is not an isolated dispute over political campaign funds. It is a test case for how a modern democracy can abuse the legal system and its power to eliminate religious minorities.

If an international peace advocate and Nobel nominee can be locked away and convicted in her twilight years and have her church dissolved by executive decree, then no religious group is safe from state overreach.

This verdict is a critical point of reflection for South Korea (and all other democracies). Will South Korea remain a beacon of freedom or slide further into communist-inspired, anti-religious authoritarianism?

The global community must wake up, raise its voice, and stand in defense of Mother Moon and the fundamental right to faith.

President Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio should let South Korea know that these attacks on religious freedom could jeopardize our countries' unique relationship.



Newt Gingrich is a former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. For more commentary from Newt Gingrich, visit Gingrich360.com. Also, subscribe to the “Newt’s World” podcast.

Copyright © 2026 The Washington Times, LLC. [Click here for reprint permission](#)