

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: S Korea's 1970s Czech Communist Persecution of Religion

Knut Holdhus  
November 30, 2025



Left: Some of the members who were imprisoned in Czechoslovakia during crackdown by Communist authorities in 1973-1974. In the middle, are the prison photos of Marie Živná, who died while in prison. Photo: Screenshot from "[The Struggle for Truth and Justice](#)" Right: Artistic impression of [Mother Han](#) in detention cell. Illustration: Grok xAI



South Korea's treatment of Mother Han in long-term detention today shows echoes of communist-era repression in East Europe

Dr. Juraj Lajda, an early member of the [Unification Church](#) in the former Czechoslovakia, writes for [News and Insights](#) from Prague November 2025,

"In 1973 the persecution of the [Unification Church](#) members started. The communist secret police started to observe us and in September 1973 the first members were arrested. Within several weeks almost 30 members were put into prison. Now, about 50 years later, something I never thought possible is taking place. In a democratic and free country, [Mother Han](#), the Co-Founder of the [Family Federation](#), has been detained for more than 60 days and goes through similar trials and difficulties that I myself and many others suffered under the anti-religious communists in what was then Czechoslovakia.

At that time 18 members were sentenced to terms ranging from one year to four years and four months. I myself was in prison for three years and two months.

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We experienced a similar humiliation and persecution as [True Mother](#) does now. At first, they put us in custody. Every day, they interrogated us for 6-7 hours. This lasted for three months until the case was closed, and the file was submitted to the judge. We were held in a 2×3 m cell, with two or three other prisoners.

Our national leader at the time, Betka Danišková, was taken into custody even though she had previously been in a very serious car accident. Her health condition was very serious, she had problems with her spine, could not move properly and her condition required medical care. Despite all this, she was taken into custody and interrogated. For a whole month, she refused to testify due to health problems, which the investigator had to accept, even though he constantly urged her to participate in the interrogation.

After a year of investigation, the final appeal court was held. The judge promised her a suspension of her sentence and time to recover. However, nothing of the sort happened. Finally, she spent 4 years and 4 months in prison.



*In communist prison 4 years and 4 months, despite serious health condition: Alžbeta (Betka) Danišková, here in February 2024*



*Detained long-term in South Korea: Pastor Son Hyun-bo, here Aug. 2025*

As members, we were aware of her health condition and knew that she needed medical care. During the trial, some members asked the judge, to her dismay, if they could serve the sentence imposed on Betka themselves so that she could be released.

But these are the ways of communist and totalitarian regimes. No respect for human life.

In 1948, the communists came to power in the former Czechoslovakia. The first thing they did was to persecute and liquidate believers and religious people, political opponents, and any opponents whatsoever.

Our lawyers were surprised why we were being held in custody. During the investigation, they realized that we would not escape punishment. It was only a matter of the severity of the punishment.

The entire trial was staged with the clear intention of destroying our group. That was the assignment, and the prosecutors and judges proceeded accordingly.

After the fall of communism, all charges were dropped, and we were recognized innocent."

Reading Dr. Juraj Lajda's account of the 1970s - long interrogations, custody despite serious illness, predetermined verdicts, and a judicial process used to "destroy" a religious group - one is struck by how specific techniques of repression recur across time and regimes. Comparing that account to the recent, widely discussed situation involving prolonged interrogation of [Hak Ja Han](#) and other religious figures in South Korea highlights several worrying similarities, even as important differences between a communist police state and a modern constitutional democracy should be kept in view.

First, the tactic of long, exhausting interrogation as a means of pressure appears in both narratives. Lajda reports daily sessions of six to seven hours for months - an approach aimed at breaking down resistance, gathering statements that can be shaped into charges, and signaling the state's dominance. Recent reports describe unreasonable [long hours of questioning](#) by special prosecutors in South Korea. Regardless of legal framework or labels attached to the investigating body, prolonged interrogation wears on the human body and mind and can create the conditions for coerced or unreliable statements. The method's psychological effect - humiliation, exhaustion, isolation - is itself a tool that, in

both accounts, serves to intimidate not only individuals but an entire community.

Second, both accounts feature the targeting of vulnerable or medically fragile individuals. Lajda emphasizes Betka Danišková's fragile health - a prior car accident, spinal problems, inability to move easily - and how those vulnerabilities were ignored or overridden by the authorities, resulting in a lengthy prison term despite promises to the contrary.

The parallel with [Mother Han](#)'s repeated movement in a wheelchair after surgeries brings the same ethical question into relief: how does a justice system respond when those it prosecutes are in poor health? In the Czechoslovak account, medical need was subordinated to the objective of punishment. If similar disregard is present in South Korea - through prolonged detention or repeated, strenuous procedures imposed on someone with known health limitations - the similarity is not in legal form but in human cost.

Third, the specter of preordained verdicts and instrumentalized trials forming part of a broader political assignment binds the two stories. Lajda recalls that their lawyers realized early on that the outcome was foreordained: "it was only a matter of the severity of the punishment." The trial was "staged with the clear

intention of destroying our group." In contemporary contexts, citizens often interpret aggressive investigation and sustained public prosecutors' activity against prominent figures as politically animated if there is a perception that prosecutorial zeal is selective. Even in democracies, when prosecutorial processes appear directed toward a preconceived outcome - particularly when cases involve public figures or religious leaders - perceptions of instrumentalized justice can arise and erode public trust.



*Alžbeta (Betka) Danišková.  
Photo (2023)*



*[Died in communist prison](#) under  
mysterious circumstances: Marie  
Živná. Photo (1973)*

Fourth, both situations involve the use of legal institutions to regulate or punish religion and religious actors. Under communism, repression of religious groups was explicit state policy; in Lajda's telling, the first acts of the new regime were to "persecute and liquidate believers."

In a democratic setting the legal basis for action against religious actors is more likely to be framed as rule-of-law enforcement - tax, fraud, or other statutory violations. But the function can appear similar when enforcement disproportionately targets a religious movement or its leadership and when the legal process is experienced by adherents as persecution. The distinction between legitimate law enforcement and persecution can blur when procedures are opaque, when outcomes seem prearranged, and when the rhetoric surrounding investigations is charged.

In sum, Dr. Lajda's testimony and the contemporary allegations share troubling motifs: prolonged interrogation as a pressure tactic, apparent disregard for the health and vulnerability of detainees, and the experience that courts and prosecutions can function as instruments of group suppression.

Those parallels are meaningful because they highlight how procedural details - hours of questioning, detention decisions, medical accommodations, and the transparency of legal process - shape whether justice feels impartial or punitive. At the same time, important structural differences remain between a one-party authoritarian state and a democratic society; preserving those democratic safeguards requires a vigilant civil society, independent courts, and institutions willing to investigate alleged abuses of prosecutorial power.

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Testimony by Dr. Juraj Lajda, additional text by Knut Holdhus, editor

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Typical cell at Seoul Detention Center



The

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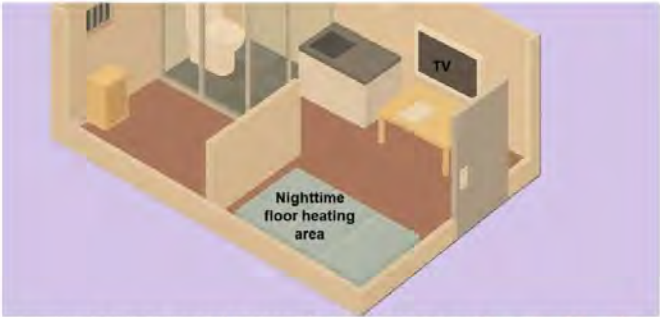


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A typical **cell at Seoul Detention Center** where **Mother Han** is being held, possibly for many months. Image: Chat GPT, 10th October 2025.

piece emphasizes that the relationship between state power and religious authority has always been delicate, and in democratic societies it is especially important to prevent even the appearance of repression. When law-enforcement actions involve religious figures, the consequences often extend far beyond the individuals at the center of the investigation.

The **article published in Asia Today** highlights this tension, arguing that the Korean justice system must handle cases involving religious leaders with heightened caution. The core principle emphasized is that investigations and legal proceedings should, as far as possible, be conducted without pre-trial detention. Detaining a cleric – someone who symbolizes and represents a faith community – can easily be perceived as a broader attack on the religious group itself, regardless of the formal justification offered by prosecutors.

The **editorial** underscores how sensitive these issues are not only within Korea but also internationally. Foreign governments and religious freedom observers tend to monitor closely any actions that could be interpreted as limiting religious activity.



President Donald Trump hosts a bilateral meeting with President Lee Jae-myung of the Republic of Korea, Monday, August 25, 2025, in the Oval Office. Official White House Photo by Daniel Torok. **Public domain** image. Cropped

This point was illustrated earlier when U.S. President Donald Trump, ahead of his Korea-U.S. summit with President Lee Jae-myung (이재명), **stated** that he had heard about “**vicious raids** on churches” in South Korea.

Following his remarks, several American political figures echoed similar concerns, warning that religious liberty in Korea might be under threat. Because of the global attention that religious freedom issues attract, the article argues, Korean authorities must avoid actions that could spark unnecessary controversy or misinterpretation on the world stage.



Pastor Son Hyun-bo, here August 2025. Photo: **Bitter Winter**

circumstances constitutes disproportionate punishment and borders on religious oppression.

Despite this, the **article** notes that real-life practice has sometimes failed to reflect this needed restraint. One example cited is the ongoing investigation into Pastor Son Hyun-bo (손현보) of the Busan Segyero mega-church, who has been accused of violating the *Public Official Election Act*. The *Busan Metropolitan Police* sought to detain him, claiming a risk of flight and possible destruction of evidence. Critics, however, reacted strongly, arguing that a pastor delivering sermons – which are already recorded – poses no realistic threat of disappearing or tampering with evidence. For them, detaining a clergy member under such

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Posters in support of [Mother Han](#) outside Seoul Detention Center 29th November 2025. Photo: FFWPU

This broader debate forms the backdrop to an upcoming legal milestone involving another prominent religious figure. On 1<sup>st</sup> December, the *Seoul Central District Court* is set to open the formal trial of [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), President of the [Family Federation](#), also called [Mother Han](#). A hearing on her request for bail will be held the same day. While acknowledging that the trial must proceed impartially and according to law, the [Asia Today article](#) stresses that the decision about whether she remains detained during proceedings is a separate question. Because she is the head of a major religious movement, detaining her could inflame public perceptions of religious discrimination or political targeting.

The humanitarian dimension is also highlighted. [Mother Han](#) is elderly and reportedly suffers from heart disease and other ailments. The editorial warns that if bail is denied and she is forced to endure prolonged detention, the government would assume full responsibility for any deterioration in her health or potential medical emergencies.

Finally, the [article](#) appeals directly to President Lee Jae-myung's leadership and character. It notes that he has overcome many hardships throughout his life and therefore understands suffering on a personal level. Because of this, the [article](#) suggests, he is uniquely positioned to make a compassionate decision that promotes national harmony. Allowing [Mother Han](#) to await trial under bail rather than detention would help dispel concerns about religious persecution, reinforce South Korea's commitment to civil liberty, and contribute meaningfully to social unity.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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