

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: In S Korea Civic Education = Criminal Political Involvement

Knut Holdhus
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The [Family Federation](#) involved in civic education. Illustration: ChatGPT

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South Korean Family Federation trial involving Mother Han raises question: Where does civic education end and politics begin?

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On 8th May 2026, the South Korean online newspaper OhmyNews (오마이뉴스) published a [courtroom report](#) by journalist Lee Jin-min (이진민) detailing the latest developments in the trial involving [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), the leader of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - in South Korea often called [Unificationism](#) (통일교).



The building housing Seoul Central District Court. Image: Grok xAI

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The case has drawn significant public attention in the country. The [religious movement](#) has long claimed that its involvement in public affairs is educational or moral rather than directly political. Yet, the current left-leaning Lee Jae-myung administration has appointed "special prosecutors" in order to investigate allegations that senior figures within the [Family Federation](#) attempted to influence the country's 2022 presidential election, potentially violating laws governing political funding and improper lobbying.

The issue emerged during the 25th hearing in the trial of [Hak Ja Han](#) - also called [Mother Han](#) - and several senior officials from the [religious organization](#) at the Seoul Central District Court on 8th May. The special prosecutors are investigating whether organizations linked to the [Family Federation](#) improperly supported political actors or sought influence in ways prohibited by law.

At the center of this particular hearing was testimony from a former president of [Sun Moon University](#) (선문대학교), identified publicly only by his surname, Hwang (황). His testimony was significant

because it offered a rare insider's perspective on how [Federation](#) leaders viewed political involvement during the election period.

Hwang acknowledged that something unusual was happening inside the [religious organization](#) in the months before South Korea's 20th presidential election. He said he sensed "activities that had never happened before," suggesting that there was a distinct shift in atmosphere compared to previous election cycles. According to him, some within [Federation](#) circles were uncomfortable with what they were seeing and considered it inconsistent with the [movement](#)'s traditional posture.

However, Hwang was careful to limit responsibility for those actions. He testified that the unusual political activity was confined to specific branches of the [movement](#), particularly the [Family Federation](#) World Headquarters and the [Universal Peace Federation](#) (UPF), an affiliated international organization often presented as an independent peace-building body.



Crucially, Hwang insisted that [Mother Han](#) herself did not issue any orders related to election intervention. He stated that he had never heard any instruction from her to support a candidate or involve the [Federation](#) in electoral politics. Instead, he identified former World Headquarters director [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호) as the person exercising operational control during that period.

This distinction appears central to the defense strategy: to argue that any politically questionable behavior was carried out by specific individuals rather than by the [Federation](#) leadership as an institution.

One of the most striking moments of the hearing came when Hwang addressed the apparent contradiction between the [Family Federation](#)'s denial of political ambition and its past decision to create a political party.

Hwang referred to the [Unificationism](#)-founded Family Party for Universal Peace and Unity (천주평화통일가정당) - formally launched in March 2003 - which fielded candidates in South Korea's 2008 parliamentary election. The party promoted themes such as [family values](#), world peace, and Korean reunification.

To many outside observers, establishing a political party and running candidates would seem to be straightforward political participation. But Hwang argued otherwise. He claimed that the party was never intended to function like a conventional political organization seeking power or office. Instead, he described it as what he called an "educational political party" - an unprecedented effort designed to improve public morality and cultivate principled leaders through civic education.

According to his explanation, when [Mother Han](#) spoke about politics, she was not encouraging direct political participation. Rather, she was advocating the moral education of politicians so that the political system could function more ethically. Supporters will say that's definitely needed in today's South Korean political culture, often described as corrupt right to the top of the system.

For many outside South Korea, this distinction may seem unusual or even difficult to accept. In most democratic systems, creating a political party and nominating candidates would automatically be regarded as political action. Hwang acknowledged that ordinary people could understandably misunderstand the intentions of the [religious organization](#), but he insisted that the [Family Federation](#) has always viewed political engagement differently - as a form of social guidance rather than partisan competition.

According to the [OhmyNews article](#), Hwang emphasized that none of the nominated candidates in South Korea's 245 electoral districts in 2008 are "active politicians today, and among the candidates at the time, there were also people who were not members of [Unificationism](#)." The hearing also included testimony from another former senior official, identified only as Jo (조), who once served as vice president of the Japanese branch of the [Family Federation](#) and later headed its World Headquarters.

Jo described [Mother Han](#)'s management style as highly cautious and deliberate. According to him, she tends to observe individuals for months before entrusting them with major responsibilities. He suggested that this reflected a careful leadership approach rather than impulsive decision-making.

[Hak Ja Han](#) herself did not attend the hearing. Her detention had previously been [suspended](#) for health-related reasons, and that suspension was recently [extended](#) through the end of May. Her repeated absence from proceedings has reportedly reduced attendance by [Family Federation](#) followers who had previously come to court to show support.

For international readers, this case highlights broader questions about the relationship between religion and politics in South Korea. It also illustrates how religious organizations can frame engagement perceived by some as political in moral or educational terms, even when their activities resemble conventional political intervention.



[Mother Han](#) being released on March 27, 2026 for urgent medical treatment after being held detained in a tiny cell for more than six months

[Lee Jin-min's reporting](#) captures a critical moment in this ongoing legal drama: a courtroom effort by the defense to draw a line between spiritual mission and political action, while prosecutors attempt to show that the boundary may have been crossed.

The next court hearing is scheduled for 15th May.

In its [report](#), OhmyNews pointed out that Nam Do-hyeon (남도현), Park Ye-ju (박예주), and Oh Se-jin (오세진) from the team of special prosecutors investigating the former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희) attended the 8th May hearing. The legal team defending [Mother Han](#) consisted of ten attorneys from the law firms Bae, Kim and Lee LLC and LKB and Partners.

OhmyNews is a South Korean online newspaper widely known for pioneering a citizen journalism model.

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[News Close-Up]

“Shock” at Japan’s Dissolution Verdict

U.S. Pastors and Family Federation Believers Visit Japan



American and Japanese members of the *Family Federation* at Shibuya, Tokyo on 29th April 2026.
Photo: *FFWPU*

by Takahide Ishii (石井 孝秀)

See also *Solidarity Action by 150 U.S. Members in Tokyo*

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Two months have passed since the *Tokyo High Court* upheld the dissolution order against the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (formerly the *Unification Church*). During this period, the religious organization filed a special appeal with the Supreme Court. Amid growing protests from believers, Christian pastors and *Family Federation* members from overseas have traveled to Japan one after another, voicing objections to the Japanese government’s response while also encouraging members in Japan.

“In these difficult circumstances, I’m deeply moved by the courage and determination shown by second-generation believers in Japan. From an American perspective, it’s unimaginable that something like this could happen.”

Those were the candid remarks of Naokimi Ushiroda (後田 直君), a second-generation believer who has lived in the United States for approximately 40 years.

Following news of the dissolution of the religious corporation in Japan, around 100 second-generation believers from the American branch of the *Family Federation* visited Japan together with Christian pastors in late April. According to Ushiroda, the initiative was devised by the American side only about two weeks earlier and was made possible through support from American believers.

Many of the visiting second-generation believers were Japanese Americans, and although Ushiroda himself is an American citizen, his parents are Japanese. He explained:

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“There are many Japanese believers in the United States as well, and there is a strong desire to support Japan.”



Members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) from the United States during panel discussions with members from Japan in Tokyo on 29th April 2026. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

On 29th April, the American second-generation believers held a gathering in Shibuya, Tokyo together with members of the “Association of Second-Generation Believers Protecting the Human Rights of Believers,” a group formed by second-generation believers in Japan. They exchanged opinions and participated in panel discussions.

Many participants wore white shirts bearing the words “FAITH FREEDOM PEACE,” renewing their resolve to seek religious freedom.

During the panel discussion, an American participant, Jinil Fleischman, asked:

“How are believers in Japan continuing to maintain their faith under these circumstances?”

In response, association member Sayaka Kurahashi (倉橋 紗弥香) said:

“Our faith has not changed, nor have the communities and relationships we have built among believers. Every day we continue striving with the determination to preserve them.”

The group's representative, Nozomi Kojima (小嶋希晶), commented:

“Through this experience, second-generation believers in Japan have had an opportunity to seriously reflect on why they have faith and why they believe in [God](#).”

Five Christian pastors from the United States also attended the gathering and shared their perspectives.

Bishop Ron Thomas, who traveled from Nevada, stated that he felt “a strong sense of shock” regarding the Japanese government’s decision.

He then encouraged the second-generation believers present by saying:

“Looking back at biblical history, persecution has always become an opportunity for the expansion and growth of the church. Whenever the church has faced trials, God's providence has continued to advance.”





Bishop Edward Barnett from Greater Grace Family Ministry, Washington D.C. at symposium in Tokyo on 29th April 2026. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Bishop Edward Barnett, who came from Washington DC to attend the gathering, pointed out that only the corporate entity as a “business organization” could be dissolved. He emphasized:

“The church itself is not an organization created on paper. It is something born through the spirit of God, and it can never truly be dissolved.”

He further stated:

“Religious freedom is the right to unrestricted access to God. It is an inalienable supernatural right — the freedom to worship, praise, pray, teach, and learn without interference from anyone.”

Afterward, the American second-generation believers joined “NABI”, a campaign group centered on Japanese second-generation believers, to begin street preaching in front of Shibuya Station.

Participants carried red heart-shaped balloons while making their appeals in front of the famous scramble crossing crowded with holiday pedestrians.

One American second-generation believer declared:

“We understand there are forces trying to silence us. But we will not remain silent. We will continue raising our voices and continue praying.”

Another member offered a prayer in English:

“We want to melt the coldness remaining in the hearts of people in Japanese society and through every effort possible, help them understand the true nature of the [Family Federation](#).”

Genryu Kageyama (影山権龍) referred to the various negative reactions believers have experienced in Japanese society following the judicial decision to dissolve the organization. However, he stressed:

“In return, we gained something very important: pride in our faith.”

Regarding the arrival of many believers from the United States, he added:

“We realized that we are never alone. No matter how much persecution or religious oppression comes from the state, our faith will not change.”

Reported by Takahide Ishii (石井 孝秀)

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Featured image above: Hebangja Kisile from Chicago street preaching in Shibuya, Tokyo on 29th April 2026.
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