

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Family Fed Korea's Rice Donations to At Risk Groups

Knut Holdhus
June 20, 2026



Family Federation representatives deliver 400 kg of rice to the Heukseok Comprehensive Social Welfare Center in Dongjak-gu, Seoul

세계일보

[Segye Ilbo](#)



Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (2025)

Charitable gifts become food aid in South Korea as Family Federation marks anniversary with rice donation drive aimed at citizens in need

Segye Ilbo, a South Korean daily, [reported](#) on 19th June on a charitable initiative organized by the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), a religious movement also known in Korea as Unificationism. The article by reporter Jeong Seong-su focuses on a symbolic donation campaign held in connection with the organization's 72nd anniversary celebrations. Rather than emphasizing theology or religious activities, the [report](#) highlights the [Family Federation](#)'s efforts to develop as a contributor to local welfare and community support.

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According to the [article](#), the [Family Federation](#) collected rice donations from supporters, businesses, and affiliated organizations that participated in the anniversary celebrations. In total, 52 organizations and companies contributed rice in place of congratulatory flower wreaths. The rice was then redistributed to local welfare institutions serving vulnerable populations. Altogether, 1,020 kilograms of rice - just over one metric ton - were donated.

The rice was divided among four community organizations. Two food banks received 300 kilograms each: one in Cheorwon County, a rural area near the border with North Korea, and another in Seoul's Yongsan district. A larger share, 400 kilograms, went to the Heukseok Comprehensive Social Welfare Center in Seoul's Dongjak district, while a smaller donation of 20 kilograms was given to the Samtaegi Village Community in Seoul's Seongbuk district.



[Family Federation](#) Korean President Song Yong-cheon and his wife Lee Hae-sook delivering 300 kg of rice wreath donations received at the [organization's](#) 72nd anniversary ceremony to the Cheorwon County Basic Food Bank in Gangwon Province. Photo: [FFWPU](#) A key feature of the initiative is the use of "rice wreaths," a uniquely Korean custom that has become common at public events, ceremonies, concerts, and celebrations. Instead of sending traditional flower wreaths - which are often displayed briefly and then discarded - supporters donate sacks of rice that are arranged in decorative displays. After the event, the rice can be distributed to charities, welfare organizations, or people in need. This practice allows celebratory gifts to serve a practical social purpose.

The recipient organizations intend to use the rice in different ways depending on local needs. The food banks will distribute it to low-income households, elderly people living alone, and single-parent families. The welfare center plans to incorporate the rice into meal-support programs and lunchbox deliveries for economically disadvantaged senior citizens. Meanwhile, the Samtaegi Village Community will use the rice in its "New Village Restaurant", a project that provides inexpensive meals to people facing financial hardship.



Song Yong-cheon, President of the [Family Federation](#) in South Korea, delivering 300 kg of rice to the Yongsan-gu Food Bank Market Center in Seoul

The [article](#) presents the donation as part of a broader social-service effort undertaken by the [Family Federation](#). The [organization](#) recently established a [Social Contribution Corps](#), which coordinates charitable and volunteer activities. According to figures cited in the report, the group had already donated rice on two previous occasions earlier in 2026: 320 kilograms collected during a food-sharing event in April and 840 kilograms received through an [international marriage blessing ceremony](#) in May. When combined with the anniversary donation, the total amount of rice distributed through these initiatives has reached 2,180 kilograms.

The [report](#) also quotes a representative of the [Social Contribution Corps](#), who explains the philosophy behind the campaign. The representative argues that replacing temporary ceremonial displays with food assistance reflects the belief that "food is love" and represents a more meaningful way of celebrating important occasions. The statement emphasizes the idea of community solidarity and expresses the organization's intention to continue expanding rice-donation programs at future events across the country.

Overall, the [article](#) portrays the [Family Federation](#)'s anniversary not simply as an internal religious celebration but as an opportunity for public service. By highlighting the practical benefits of rice wreath donations and the assistance provided to food banks, welfare centers, and community meal programs, the [report](#) presents the organization as seeking to strengthen its image as a participant in local social welfare efforts. For readers unfamiliar with South Korea, the story also offers an example of how the country's distinctive rice-wreath tradition can transform ceremonial gifts into charitable resources that support vulnerable members of society.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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Korea's largest independent wire news agency, published on 19th June an [article](#) by reporter Hwang Jun-seon (황준선) about the latest development in the high-profile case at Seoul District Court against [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) – also known as [Mother Han](#) – and former leaders of her [religious organization](#). The trial is now entering its final stage. She is the spiritual head of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), commonly known in Korea as [Unificationism](#) (통일교). [Mother Han](#) has long been one of the most influential religious figures in South Korea.

Special prosecutors appointed by the current left-leaning Lee Jae-myung (이재명) administration allege that she and several senior [Unificationism](#) officials became involved in efforts to cultivate political influence through unlawful donations, lobbying, and gifts directed toward prominent conservative politicians and their associates.

[Newsis](#) reports that the trial is expected to conclude on 10th July, when special prosecutors will present their final arguments and recommend sentences for the defendants. [Mother Han](#) and her co-defendants will then make their closing statements before the court begins deliberations in order to reach its final decision.



Sentenced to lifetime imprisonment in case seen by many as political revenge: Former South Korean President **Yoon Suk-yeol**, here in a meeting at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., 27th April 2023. DoD photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Alexander Kubitza / US Secretary of Defense. License: [CC Attr 2.0 Gen](#). Cropped

The allegations arise from events surrounding South Korea's 2022 presidential election, which was won by Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열). According to special prosecutors, [Family Federation](#) officials sought to build close ties with Yoon's political circle and to increase the influence of the [religious organization](#) within the new administration. The prosecution claims that these efforts crossed legal boundaries and involved violations of South Korea's political funding and anti-corruption laws.

The case has become one of the most prominent examples of what Korean media often describe as “religion-politics collusion” – the improper intertwining of religious organizations and political

power. There are however a large number of critics of the current Lee Jae-myung administration and the special prosecutors given wide powers to investigate political and religious leaders perceived to have supported the former conservative Yoon Suk-yeol administration. Such critical voices regard the investigation called for by Lee, to be a campaign against political or ideological opponents.

One of the most serious accusations concerns an alleged payment of 100 million Korean won – equivalent to roughly US\$70,000 to US\$75,000 at current exchange rates – to Kwon Seong-dong (권성동), a senior member of the conservative *People Power Party* and a close political ally of Yoon. Prosecutors contend that the money was delivered shortly before the presidential election as part of a broader



People Power Party lawmaker **Kwon Seong-dong** (권성동), here 23rd Dec. 2024. Photo: [국미이회](#)



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effort to support Yoon’s campaign and strengthen the [Family Federation](#)’s political connections.

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The defendants also face accusations that [Unificationism](#) funds were distributed to multiple politicians through a practice often described as “split donations”. In this scheme, a large sum is divided into many smaller contributions and donated through different individuals, making it appear that the money comes from separate donors rather than a single source. South Korean authorities frequently investigate such arrangements because they can be used to evade campaign-finance restrictions.

Another allegation involves luxury gifts reportedly provided to Kim Keon-hee (김건희), the wife of former South Korean President Yoon. Prosecutors claim that expensive items, including Chanel handbags, were passed through Jeon Seong-bae (전성배), a controversial religious figure known in Korea as “Geonjin Beopsa” (건진법사). This aspect of the case has attracted considerable public attention because it combines questions of political influence, religious networks, and unofficial intermediaries operating around the highest levels of government.

According to the [Newsis report](#), a notable feature of the latest court hearing was the apparent opposite views of [Mother Han](#) and one of her former senior aides, [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호). During questioning, [Hak Ja Han](#) largely declined to answer questions from prosecutors and often stated that she could not remember relevant details. However, she made an exception when her own lawyer asked about [Yoon](#)’s conduct. [Mother Han](#) stated that she felt “betrayed” by her former subordinate, suggesting that he had acted independently and was now attempting to shift responsibility onto her.

Throughout the proceedings, [Mother Han](#) has sought to distance herself from key decisions at the center of the case. She testified that she was not informed in advance about [Yoon Yeong-ho](#)’s meetings with Yoon Suk Yeol and denied receiving reports concerning donations to the *People Power Party*. Her position is that any improper activities were carried out without her knowledge or authorization.

[Yoon Yeong-ho](#), however, offered a more complicated account. While he rejected suggestions that he possessed broad independent authority within the [Family Federation](#), he acknowledged that major decisions typically required approval from [Mother Han](#) and other senior leadership figures. He emphasized that important matters, including special events and financial decisions, were routinely reported to the president of the [religious organization](#) before action was taken.

Perhaps most significantly, [Yoon](#) claimed that discussions had taken place among himself, [Mother Han](#), and her former chief secretary [Jeong Won-ju](#) (정원주) regarding organized support for Yoon Suk Yeol’s presidential bid. Although [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) characterized this allegation as true only “in broad terms”, the statement could prove important because it potentially links the [Federation](#)’s highest leadership to political activities that prosecutors argue were coordinated and systematic.

When the trial concludes in July, the court’s eventual ruling will not only determine the legal responsibility of [Mother Han](#) and her associates but may also have broader implications for political fundraising, lobbying regulations, and the relationship between religion and government in South Korea.

Text: *Knut Holdhus, editor*

Featured image above: A South Korean court scene with special prosecutors on one side and defense attorneys on the other, [Mother Han](#) in the middle, with [Jeong](#) on the left

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