

South Korea: BREAKING NEWS/ Chairman Lee has been arrested

In the night between July 31 and August 1, 2020, Chairman Lee Man Hee, the founder and leader of the South Korean religious movement Shincheonji, has been arrested.

He is accused of having contributed to his movement's alleged lack of cooperation with the authorities after a member was infected with COVID-19, of having embezzled funds belonging to Shincheonji for building the Palace of Peace, and of having maintained an event in 2019 that the authorities had asked to cancel because of a "typhoon alert."

The charges are ludicrous. We have demonstrated [in our second White Paper](#) that there is no criminal negligence in how Lee and Shincheonji handled the COVID-19 crisis. The Palace of Peace is where three of us met Chairman Lee and is clearly used for Shincheonji events. The "typhoon alert" was a false pretext used by some politicians to prevent a duly authorized event—there was no typhoon.

We protest the arrest of an 89-year-old respected leader on obviously trumped-up charges, and we will promote all the appropriate initiatives to react against a travesty of justice, an attempt to destroy a religious movement, and a serious breach of religious liberty.

Alessandro Amicarelli, FOB, European Federation for Freedom of Belief

Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

Massimo Introvigne, CESNUR, Center for Studies on New Religions

Rosita Šorytė, ORLIR, International Observatory for Religious Liberty of Refugees

Marco Respinti, journalist and co-author of the White Paper on Shincheonji and COVID-19

31 July 2020

COVID-19: Scapegoating Shincheonji in South Korea: White Paper II

– Massimo Introvigne, Center for Studies on New Religions,
Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers,
Rosita Šorytė, European Federation for Freedom of Belief,
Alessandro Amicarelli, European Federation for Freedom of
Belief (president),
Marco Respinti, journalist

A White Paper by CESNUR – Center for Studies on New Religions,
Torino, Italy – HRWF (Human Rights Without Frontiers,
Brussels, Belgium)

Full Report:
<https://www.cesnur.org/2020/shincheonji-second-white-paper.htm>

1. 1. It Is About COVID-19... or Is It?

Why This Report

The name of Shincheonji (a name meaning “New Heaven and New Earth”), Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony (in short, Shincheonji) was known in the West only

to a few scholars of new religious movements before February 2020, when the church was accused of being largely responsible for the spread of COVID-19 in South Korea.

In March 2020, the authors published a first White Paper (Introvigne, Fautré, Šorytè, Amicarelli and Respinti 2020) distinguishing facts from fiction in the accusations against Shincheonji. The repression of Shincheonji in South Korea has now escalated to what can be described, without exaggeration, as an attempt to suppress a religion, close its places of worship, arrest its leaders, and scare members so that they will leave the movement out of fear of losing their jobs. A second White Paper, dealing with the persecution, is thus necessary. We will, however, summarize in this introduction some essential points about Shincheonji discussed in the first White Paper, and add some further general comments.

What Is Shincheonji?

Why is Shincheonji Persecuted?

Is It Really About Covid-19?

2. Is Shincheonji “Responsible” for the Virus Outbreak in Daegu?

Patient 31

The Alleged Wuhan Connection

The Case of the Cheongdo Daenam Hospital

Did Shincheonji Create the Outbreak in Daegu?

3. Did Shincheonji Refuse to Cooperate with the Authorities?

Shincheonji Stopped Services Immediately

Why Are Leaders Prosecuted?

Legal Background

Which Lists?

4. A Disproportionate Reaction

Mistakes Punished As Crimes

Disproportionate Measures

Private Vigilantism

Conclusions

References

READ THE WHOLE WHITE
PAPER: <https://www.cesnur.org/2020/shincheonji-second-white-paper.htm>

COVID-19 and the destruction of a religious movement in South Korea

CESNUR (15.07.2020) – <https://bit.ly/30FtcBB> – On July 20, a webinar on a new religious movement in South Korea, its political, religious, and social dimensions, and its discrimination during the COVID-19 crisis was organized by CESNUR, the Center for Studies on New Religions, and Human Rights Without Frontiers. International scholars in the fields of religion, international law, and human rights discussed the theme, “COVID-19 and Religious Freedom: Scapegoating Shincheonji in South Korea.”

The webinar addressed the history of what participants defined as an attack by politically powerful conservative and fundamentalist Protestant churches in South Korea, supported by some politicians, against a fast-growing Christian new religious movement known as “Shincheonji (New Heaven and New Earth) Church of Jesus,” founded in 1984 by Chairman Lee Man Hee.

Rosita Šorytė, a former Lithuanian diplomat and author of [a study of the international peace organization HWPL](#), also chaired by Chairman Lee, and J. Gordon Melton, distinguished professor of American Religious History at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, introduced the webinar by observing that, in times of crisis, minorities that have powerful enemies are easily scapegoated. “Cult,” Melton observed, is a dubious label often used by majorities to discriminate against minorities they do not like.

Massimo Introvigne is an Italian sociologist of religion who studied Shincheonji before and after the COVID-19 pandemic and [published the first accounts of the religious group in English](#). He summarized the history of Shincheonji, and said that it has become a target of “persecution by fundamentalist Protestants” because of its spectacular growth. “Conservative and fundamentalist protestants see Shincheonji as an unwelcome competitor and want to destroy it”.

Alessandro Amicarelli, a London-based attorney and chairman of the European Federation for Freedom of Belief, pointed out that some South Korean politicians scapegoated Shincheonji as “the” cause of the COVID-19 crisis in South Korea, yet their real aim is to shut down the church to please conservative Christian voters. He examined in detail the case of Patient 31, the female member of Shincheonji in Daegu who, before being diagnosed with COVID-19, set in motion a chain of events leading to thousands of Shincheonji members being infected, and the accusations that Shincheonji did not cooperate with the health authorities. He observed that, before Patient 31,

Chinese tourists had already spread the virus in Daegu, and that accusations of criminal misbehavior against Shincheonji leaders, some of them were arrested, are not sustained by the facts. In a difficult situation, they cooperated with the authorities as promptly and completely as reasonably possible.

Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF), said that the recent attack on Shincheonji can be viewed as an attempt by fundamentalist Protestant groups in South Korea to weaken and destroy a competitor in the religious market. He added that human rights violations against Shincheonji through [coercive conversion programs \(deprogramming\)](#), i.e. by kidnapping and confining its members to “de-convert” them, have been going on for more than a decade, and show that Shincheonji’s fundamentalist opponents have always been ready to resort to violence.

Ciarán Burke, professor of International Law at Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany, said that how Shincheonji was treated, in comparison with other churches that also had cases of COVID-19, is evidence of religious discrimination forbidden by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, that South Korea ratified in 1990. Because of its experience with MERS, Burke observed, South Korea has a law authorizing the government to take extraordinary measures during a pandemic. However, the case of Shincheonji shows that how its provisions are applied may create a contrast with human rights guaranteed by international law, as evidenced by the fact that the government asked the church to disclose the names of members who had no direct or indirect contacts with Patient 31 and even of members abroad.

WEBINAR: COVID-19 and Religious Freedom: Scapegoating Shincheonji in South Korea

– A webinar organized by the **Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR)** and **Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)**

Date/Time: Monday, July 20, 2020, 17:00 (UTC +2, Brussels time)

The fact that one member of Shincheonji, a Christian new religious movement in South Korea, was not timely diagnosed with COVID-19, attended church services, and set in motion a chain of events where thousands of her church's members were infected, led to the government's requests for lists of all members of the group and massive testing.

While it is possible that mistakes were made by Shincheonji, health and police authorities acknowledged that the movement submitted substantially accurate lists of its members, and tried to cooperate as it could. Shincheonji, however, is at the receiving end of an aggressive hostility by conservative Christians, who have tried for decades to have the movement, which has been very successful in converting Protestants, banned in South Korea.

Based on doubtful accusations that lists were not totally complete, or were handed to the authorities some days later than requested, leaders of Shincheonji have been arrested, most of its churches in South Korea have been closed, its cultural and charitable activities have been stopped, and thousands of members have been discriminated against in schools and workplaces.

What we are witnessing, well beyond any reasonable virus-related concern, is an attempt to destroy a new religious movement whose main sin is to have been successful as an unwelcome competitor for the politically powerful conservative and fundamentalist Protestant churches.

The Webinar will examine the current situation, raise international awareness, and call for appropriate action.

Introducing and Chairing:

Rosita Šorytė, president of the International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees (ORLIR), Vilnius, Lithuania.

Panelists:

J. Gordon Melton, Distinguished Professor of American Religious History, Baylor University, Waco, Texas

Massimo Introvigne, sociologist, managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions, Torino, Italy

Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)

Alessandro Amicarelli, attorney and president of the European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB)

Ciarán Burke, Professor of International Law, Friedrich-Schiller University, Jena, Germany

Respondent: Jae Heung So, lawyer and Head of Legal Department of Shincheonji Church of Jesus Temple of Tabernacle of Testimony

The webinar is held on Zoom and is open to all interested. To join this webinar, please click the link below at the designated time:

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89163553658>

Webinar – COVID 19 and Religious Freedom: Scapegoating Shincheonji in South Korea (20.07.2020)

A webinar organized by the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR) and Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)

Date/Time: Monday, July 20, 2020, 17:00 (UTC +2, Brussels time)

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Thank you.

Coronavirus, a chronology: the CCP is responding. Evidence.

– If you need a smoking gun, here it is. A timeline of delays, cover-ups, and fake news proving that the world should indeed blame the CCP for the deadly epidemic.

by Massimo Introvigne

**This chronology is partially based on one [compiled by the Daily Wire](#), to which we have added additional events and links.*

November 17 (2019): [The first case](#) of what was later identified as COVID-19 was detected in Wuhan.

December 10: [57-year-old Wei Guixian](#), a merchant in the

seafood section of the Wuhan Animal Market, reported sick with what were later identified as COVID-19 symptoms.

December 26: Wuhan patients data were [sent to several Chinese genomics companies](#), which were supposed to detect new viruses. Reportedly, [at least one of these companies](#) was ordered to stop the tests and destroy the material.

December 27: Zhang Jixian, a doctor from Hubei Provincial Hospital of Integrated Chinese and Western Medicine, [told China's health authorities](#) that he believed the disease was caused by a new coronavirus.

December 31: Chinese officials [told the Country Office in China of the World Health Organization](#) (WHO) that cases of a "new form of pneumonia" had been reported in Wuhan. At the same time, CCP Internet censorship [started preventing searches](#) for "Wuhan Unknown Pneumonia," "SARS Variation," "Wuhan Animal Market," and similar.

January 1 (2020): Eight doctors who had alerted about an epidemics caused by a new coronavirus in Wuhan, including Dr. Li Wenliang (1986-2020), who will later die of the disease, [were detained and questioned by the CCP police](#) for "spreading false statements." Li was forced to [sign a letter of apology](#).

January 1: The Hubei Health Commission [ordered all genomics companies](#) that had been contacted on December 26 to stop their tests and destroy the materials they received (which would have proved that data about the virus were already available from late December).

January 1: Authorities [closed the Wuhan Animal Market](#), without swabbing individual animals and their cages and without drawing blood from everyone working there or otherwise checking who might have been infected.

January 3: China's National Health Commission [issued a](#)

[national gag order](#), preventing all medical institutions in the country to disclose information about the disease.

January 5: [Professor Zhang Yongzhen](#) of the Shanghai Public Health Clinical Center provided the genomic sequence of the virus to Chinese authorities.

January 5: Wuhan Municipal Health Commission [stopped releasing daily updates](#) on new cases of the disease.

January 9: WHO released a [statement](#) about the situation in Wuhan, suggesting a new coronavirus was at work.

January 10: China Central Television broadcasted [a statement by Wang Guangfa](#), a prominent government medical expert, stating that the “Wuhan pneumonia” was “under control” and mostly a “mild condition” (11 days later, Wang reportedly tested positive himself)

January 11: The Shanghai laboratory of Professor Zhang Yongzhen, who had provided the genomic sequence of the virus, [was shut down for “rectification”](#) by the Shanghai Health Commission, after Zhang had posted his data online to put them at the disposal of the international scientific community. Only after he did it (and was consequently punished), China’s National Health Commission announced it would share the sequence (which was by then already online) with the WHO.

January 12: The National Health Commission [shared the virus genomic information with the WHO](#) for the first time. It had been [available](#) from January 5.

January 14: WHO (rather than the Chinese authorities) [advanced the hypothesis](#) that the virus was spreading through human-to-human transmission.

January 14: Journalists trying to cover the outbreak at Wuhan’s Jinyintan Hospital [were stopped by the CCP police](#), and

their cameras and phones were confiscated.

January 15: China [answered the WHO](#) through a statement by Dr. Li Qun, head of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Emergency Center, who claimed that only a "low" risk of human-to-human transmission of the virus had been detected.

January 17: The Wuhan Municipal Health Commission [resumed its daily updates](#) on new cases of the coronavirus, which had been stopped on January 5.

January 18: Despite the virus outbreak, the city of Wuhan [hosted a potluck banquet](#) attended by more than 40,000 families, so the city could apply for a Guinness world record for most dishes served at an event. Wuhan authorities also announced they were distributing 200,000 free tickets to residents for festival activities during the Lunar New Year holiday.

January 20: Dr. Zhong Nanshan, an authority on SARS [said in a TV interview](#) that person-to-person transmission was a fact, and that authorities had been negligent in disclosing information about the virus.

January 20: Wuhan Mayor Zhou Xianwang [admitted](#) that he had not released all the information the city had on the virus, but said he was just following "Beijing rules."

January 23: The lockdown of Wuhan was finally ordered, but only after [about 5 million people](#) had already left the city without being tested.

February 6: President Xi Jinping [personally ordered](#) increased censorship of the Internet on all news about the virus, and to close the WeChat accounts of those criticizing the authorities.

February 6: Attorney and "citizen journalist" Chen Qiushi,

who had posted on the Internet footage showing overcrowded hospitals and panicking families in Wuhan, [“disappeared.”](#)

February 7: Dr. Li Wenliang, the doctor who had sounded the alarm on the new coronavirus (and had been detained for this), died of coronavirus. A debate followed whether Li, who had joined a Christian chat room, [had in fact converted to Christianity.](#)

February 9: Another “citizen journalist” who had posted unauthorized videos on the epidemics, Fang Bin, [“disappeared” in Wuhan.](#)

February 15: President Xi Jinping made censorship on the Internet on anything concerning the virus [even stricter.](#)

February 15: Human rights activist Xu Zhiyong, who had publicly asked President Xi Jinping to apologize for his cover-ups about the virus and resign, [was arrested.](#)

February 16: Academic Xu Zhangrun was [put under house arrest](#) and banned from using the Internet after publishing an essay claiming that, “The coronavirus epidemic has revealed the rotten core of Chinese governance.”

February 16: A paper posted by two Chinese scientists, Dr. Botao Xiao from South China University of Technology, Guangzhou, and Dr. Lei Xiao, from Wuhan University of Science and Technology, on the international scholarly database Research Gate, suggesting that the virus may have originated from bats from two Wuhan laboratories (rather than from wild bats), [“disappeared” from Research Gate.](#)

February 19: China [expelled three Wall Street Journal reporters](#) who were covering the epidemics.

February 26: The State press agency *Xinhua* [announced the publication of a book](#) by the CCP’s Central Propaganda Department, which will be translated in six languages and

explain how President Xi Jinping's "outstanding leadership as a great power leader" defeated the virus.

March 8: Reportedly, Chinese embassies throughout the world were instructed to [promote the theory](#) that the virus did not originate in China.

March 12: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian [publicly stated](#) that the virus did not originate in Wuhan, nor in China, but came from the United States through American soldiers who participated in the Wuhan Military Games in October.

March 14: Chinese tycoon Ren Zhiqiang ["disappeared" in Beijing](#) after posting critical remarks on how President Xi Jinping handled the coronavirus crisis.

March 18: China announced that another 13 journalists from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* [will be expelled](#).

March 19: Wuhan Public Security [apologized to the family of Dr Li Wenliang](#), admitting his detention was "inappropriate" and stating that two officers who "mishandled" the case had been disciplined.

March 22: The CCP-controlled *Global Times*, [misquoting a statement](#) by Italian pharmacologist Giuseppe Remuzzi, claimed that the virus did not originate in China (nor in the United States) [but in Italy](#).