

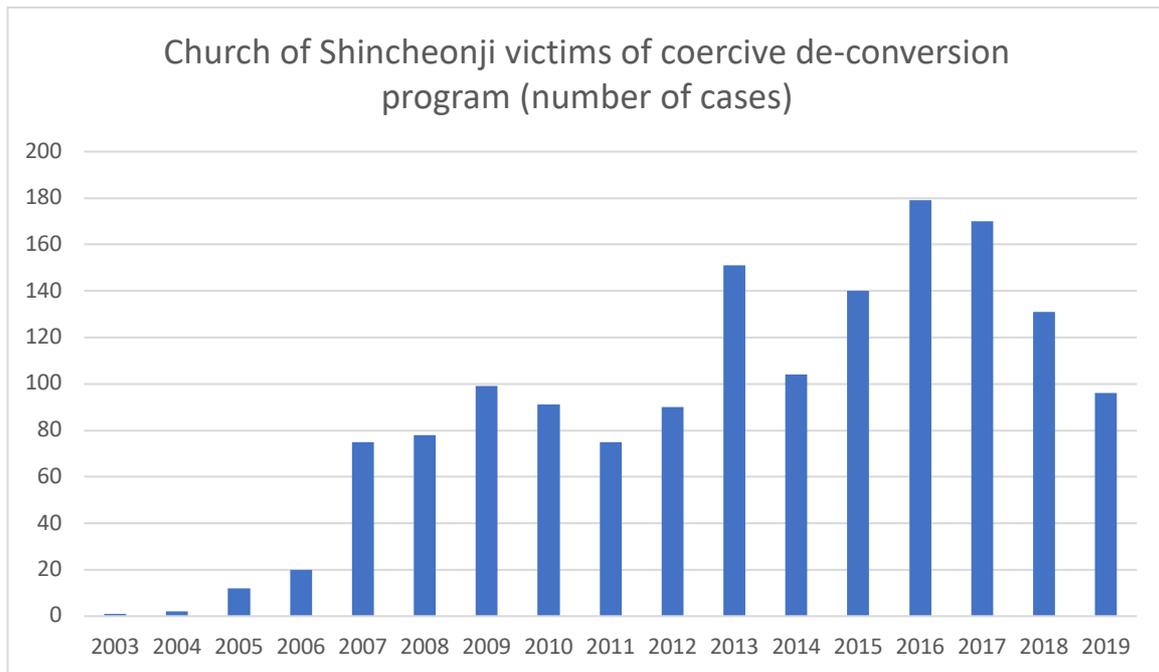
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Forced change of religion: Hyun-Kyung KIM detained for 44 days

This is her testimony at a hearing held in Seoul on 30 November 2019 by scholars in religious studies that were invited by the CESNUR and Human Rights Without Frontiers.

HRWF - From 29 -30 November 2019, the *Center for Studies on New Religions* (CESNUR) from Italy and *Human Rights Without Frontiers* (HRWF) from Belgium hosted a seminar in Seoul titled: "Intolerance and Discrimination Against New Religious Movements: An International Problem." It highlighted the practice of forced change of religion by non-state actors that occurred in the United States (US) and in Europe during the 1960-1980s, in Japan until recently and is currently occurring in South Korea.



Total number of cases from 2003 until 2019 (September): 1,514 ()
Credit: Massimo Introvigne, CESNUR*

On this occasion, victims of forced change of religion attempts were invited by prominent professors and scholars from the US and Europe to share their experiences (**).

The case of Kim Hyun Kyung, confined during 44 days for a coercive de-conversion program

At the time of the incident, Kim Hyun-Kyung was 23 and was living in Seoul.

It is by a former member of the Shincheonji Church that her parents were told she was attending the religious services of the Shincheonji Church. Her mother consulted a so-called *Cult Counseling Center* in Guri for advice. A Presbyterian pastor taught her to abduct her daughter and how to confine her 'safely' before beginning a de-conversion program.

It took Hyun-Kyung's mother five months to put all of the details of the operation into place. During the planning and implementation of this confinement, her husband took leave from his job and their younger son interrupted his theological studies for a few months.

A lot of expenses

Hyun-Kyung's family already had a lot of debt accumulated, and the financial burden of this operation brought them to the verge of bankruptcy. The costs included: a lack of income while the father was on leave, properly equipping a place for the forced de-conversion (which is worth hundreds of thousands of won***), counseling fees, travel expenses (taxi fares), and religious offerings. On many occasions, her mother wanted to give up this project. However, she was always dissuaded by **the assistant administrator Shin Hyun-ja** of the Guri *Cult Counselling Center* run by Presbyterian staff who said: "If you give up, your daughter will go to hell, and she will ruin her life...". This was a clear abuse of weakness when the family was in distress and in a vulnerable position.

The detention house Hyun-Kyung was confined in was situated in the mountains of Anseong. It was a very remote private property covering a large area owned by her grandfather. Steel bars were fixed to windows and toilet doors, and warehouses were built nearby to store supplies for several months. Nobody had access to this property and there was no cell phone coverage.

The abduction

When the house was ready for the forced de-conversion, the abduction began according to plan. On the night of 20 June 2016, Hyun-Kyung's mother gave her some fruit. After eating it, Hyun-Kyung partly lost consciousness as she could feel she was being moved to another place but was unable to wake up and resist. Most probably, some sleeping pills had been injected in the fruit. The next morning, she woke up and found herself in a remote house in the mountains. There was no phone, besides one in a locked room. Hyun-Kyung was not allowed to leave the small room she was imprisoned in and there was no sunshine.

To combat suspicion from her friends and future inquiries from police, her mother posted a picture of the family in front of the front door with a message saying they were on a family trip, an instruction from the *Cult Counselling Center*.

After some time, Hyun-Kyung planned an escape. One day, she seized her opportunity to run away while her family was taking a nap. She ran in the wilderness for about 15 minutes but was finally caught by her father. She screamed, but there was no one to hear her.

The de-conversion program

One day, a man named director Song, who had forcibly de-converted his daughter through the Guri *Cult Counselling Center*, brought three people who had also been de-converted to the house. They showed Hyun-Kyung video clips that slandered the Shincheonji Church, claiming it was a necessary step before the intervention of the de-conversion assistant.

On several occasions during this process, Hyun-Kyung's parents voiced wanting to leave the space of confinement, but the de-conversion assistant coerced them into staying by saying, 'you don't know what's going to happen, so never leave the confined room.'

After some time, **de-conversion assistant Shin Hyun-ja** considered that the confinement place was too far away for the implementation of the de-conversion program and convinced the parents to move to a location closer to Seoul. Before moving, Shin Hyun-ja requested Hyun-Kyung's agreement in the form of a voice recording in which she was to state that she was willingly asking to be de-converted. This is a means to avoid future court prosecution. Under the coercion of her family, Hyun-Kyung felt forced to sign.

However, her absence did not go unnoticed. At one point, Hyun-Kyung's mother filmed a video of Hyun-Kyung telling the police that she was safe. The *Cult Counseling Center* planned the script that she was forced to say for this video.

After 40 days, **the de-conversion assistant Shin Hyun-ja** arrived at the new confinement location and spent two days with Hyun-Kyung, pressuring her to leave the Shincheonji Church. Hyun-Kyung knew that the only way to escape was to convince Shin Hyun-ja that she was de-converted, and so she pretended to be. However, Shin Hyun-ja didn't believe her at first. He tested her by telling her to persuade acquaintances at the Shincheonji Church to contact the *Cult Counseling Center*.

Against her will, Hyun-Kyung did what she was told, but she suspected that the so-called 'cult exit counseling' was fueling a lucrative business. One week later, she was released, but on the condition that she attended follow-up training at the Guri *Cult Counseling Center*.

During her confinement, she was forced to have four counseling sessions, one training session and 10 video training sessions. When she was finally back home, she was forced to go to the Cult Counseling Center to participate in two more counseling sessions and three training sessions. There, she met with **pastor Shin Hyun-wook**, who seemed to know the whole process of her abduction and detention. She could not escape her family's surveillance until the end of the follow-up training, so she pretended to believe the content of the de-conversion program out of self-preservation.

On 2 August 2016, while she was going to Guri Cult Counseling Center with her mother for a follow-up training, she met a friend of the Shincheonji Church. With her friend's help, she called local law enforcement. The police separated her from her family.

Over the next few months, she did not feel safe and was in constant fear of another abduction. She experienced nightmares of being abducted and confined almost every night and she suffered from emotional distress for a long time. Her family struggled after the forced de-conversion as well. Her

mother was traumatized by the whole situation, and her father was unemployed for months because he had taken leave for the 44 days of her confinement.

Now, Hyun-Kyung and her parents have restored their relationship. Her mother's health has improved and her father is back at work. Hyun-Kyung is also doing well in her social and religious life.

However, she regrets that the actors responsible for so much damage to herself and her family cannot be prosecuted and have continued their deceptive and immensely profitable activity. Worse, in their propaganda aimed at other families, "they attribute the failure of their operation to my parents, saying that my parents failed to strictly follow their instructions," she said at the end of the hearing.



Willy Fautré speaking in November 2019 at the seminar "Intolerance and Discrimination Against New Religious Movements: An International Problem" in South Korea.

(*) 2003 (1), 2004 (2), 2005 (12), 2006 (20), 2007 (75), 2008 (78), 2009 (99), 2010 (91), 2011 (75), 2012 (90), 2013 (151), 2014 (104), 2015 (140), 2016 (179), 2017 (170), 2018 (131), 2019 September (96).

(**) **Eileen Barker**, Professor Emeritus of Sociology with Special Reference to the Study of Religion at the London School of Economics (LSE), UK.

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

Holly Folk, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Western Washington University, in the US.

Massimo Introvigne, founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR) in Turin, Italy.

Gordon Melton, Distinguished Professor of American Religious History at the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, US.

Rosita Sorytė, co-founder and head of the International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees (ORLIR), Lithuania.

(***) 10,000 won = 7.5 EUR

Conference on forced change of religion in Seoul

HRWF (03.12.2019) - Forced change of religion is a human rights violation that not only occurs in Muslim or Hindu majority countries, but also in other areas of the world including South Korea.

On 29 November 2019, the *Center for Studies on New Religions* (CESNUR) from Italy and *Human Rights Without Frontiers* (HRWF) from Belgium hosted a seminar in Seoul which was titled: "Intolerance and Discrimination Against New Religious Movements: An International Problem." It highlighted the practice of forced change of religion by non-state actors in the United States and in Europe (in the past), in Japan and South Korea.

Prominent professors and scholars from the US and Europe covered this issue from various angles:

Gordon Melton is the Distinguished Professor of American Religious History at the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. He is the author of more than 50 books on religious studies, including *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, *Religions of the World*. A specialist in the study of new religions, he has authored multiple texts on the issues surrounding "cults" and anti-cultism.

Holly Folk, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Western Washington University in the US. In 2019, she has served as Program Chair for the Association for the Sociology of Religion annual meeting. She has lectured and published extensively on new religious movements, religion in Eastern Asia, new Christian groups and communal studies. She has published a number of academic papers on new religious movements (NRMs) in China.

Eileen Barker, Professor Emeritus of Sociology with Special Reference to the Study of Religion at the London School of Economics (LSE). Her main research interest is minority religions. She has around 350 publications (translated into 27 different languages). In 1988, she founded INFORM, an educational charity providing information about religions. She is a frequent advisor to governments, other official bodies and law-enforcement agencies around the world.

Rosita Šorytė, is the co-founder and head of the *International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees* (ORLIR). She is the author, inter alia, of "Religious Persecution, Refugees and Right of Asylum," *The Journal of CESNUR*, 2(1), 2018, 78-99. She graduated from the University of Vilnius in Lithuania and has served on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania at the Permanent Mission of Lithuania to UNESCO, the Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the Council of Europe, and the Permanent Mission of Lithuania at the United Nations. In 2011, she worked as the representative of the Lithuanian Chairmanship of the OSCE at the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. In 2012-2013, she was the chairperson of the European Union (EU) Working Group on Humanitarian Aid on behalf of the Lithuanian pro tempore presidency of the EU.

Massimo Introvigne is the founder and the managing director of the *Center for Studies on New Religions* (CESNUR) in Turin, Italy. He is also the editor-in-chief of the daily magazine *Bitter Winter* on religious liberty in China. He is the author of more than 70 books and several hundred peer-reviewed articles in the field of Sociology of Religions, mostly devoted to new religious movements. In 2011, he served as the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also Focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions.

Willy Fautré, is the director and founder of *Human Rights Without Frontiers* (HRWF), which is a Brussels-based NGO that was established in 1989. Before then, he was a *chargé*

d'affaires at the Cabinet of the Ministry of Education and the Belgian Parliament. He started defending religious freedom in Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe during the Cold War in the mid-1970s. He is a lecturer in the field of human rights and religious freedom. He has published a wide range of papers in academic journals about discrimination and intolerance targeting and stigmatizing NRMs and their members. Additionally, he has carried out fact-finding missions in more than 20 countries.

Forced de-conversion in South Korea, also known as "deprogramming" by scholars in religious studies in the U.S. and in Europe, is a social issue that involves kidnapping and forcing de-conversion in sequestration conditions. It is usually organized by pastors and evangelists in their crusades against so-called "heresies."

More than 80 participants including legal experts, journalists, and civil society representatives reviewed the current situation of forced de-conversion and discussed solutions to defend the individual right to religious freedom.

Massimo Introvigne, who co-organized the Seoul seminar, stressed that forced change of religion in South Korea is conducted by mainstream churches: "Korean 'deprogrammers' are specialized pastors from the mainline churches, most of them Presbyterian."

"The recent protests of the Shincheonji Church that commemorated the death of two victims of forced change of religion were mentioned in the 2019 U.S. State Department Report on Religious Freedom, including violations of religious freedom in the year 2018. However, there were new cases of 'deprogramming' by Presbyterian pastors and evangelists even after their death," he said. For the Shincheonji Church alone, there were 131 cases in 2018 and 96 in the first nine months of 2019.

Willy Fautré, who co-organized the Seoul seminar, shared his experience in Japan where several years ago he interviewed over 20 victims of this human rights violation. Through subsequent advocacy efforts, he aided in eradicating this practice together with Toru Goto who was detained for years by his family with the complicity of Evangelical and Pentecostal deprogrammers.

In the last few months, HRWF has interviewed victims of attempts of forced change of religion targeting members of the Shincheonji Church in South Korea and has published these cases. At this seminar, Willy Fautré compared the situation in South Korea and in Japan, and concluded that:

"As in Japan, this devastating practice could also be eradicated in South Korea if a multi-dimensional strategy is implemented. HRWF recommends:

- raising awareness within the international community of scholars in religious studies, national and international human rights organizations, as well as national and international media;
- highlighting the responsibility of the Presbyterian Church which tolerates, endorses and appears to encourage such practices;
- developing advocacy at the UN and in bodies defending freedom of religion or belief within the EU institutions, national institutions in Europe, the U.S. Department of State, USCIRF, etc.;
- prosecuting those who encourage people to perpetrate an act of abduction and confinement."

An open letter was initiated by CESNUR and signed by 15 international NGOs including the UN accredited NGO *Freedom of Conscience* (CAP) and HRWF. It was addressed to the South Korean President Moon Jae In on July 24th, and stated that "South Korea may well be the last democratic country in the world where deprogramming is still tolerated." It asked the

President to “investigate in-depth accusations of forcible deprogramming, put a stop to this abhorrent practice, and hold those responsible fully accountable.”

Recommended reading:

HRWF report on Japan: <https://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2012-Report-Japan.pdf>

HRWF investigated cases in South Korea: <https://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SouthKorea2019.pdf>

Cheonji Daily (Korea): <http://www.newscj.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=687421>

Sisa Magazine (Korea) :
<http://www.sisamagazine.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=304958>

Modern Ghana : <https://www.modernghana.com/news/970974/forced-conversion-that-violates-human-rights-becom.html>

Ghana News Online : <https://ghananewsonline.com.gh/forced-conversion-that-violates-human-rights-becomes-an-international-problem/>

The Anglo-Celt:
<https://www.anglocelt.ie/sponsorededitorial/roundup/articles/2019/12/02/4183056-forced-conversion-that-violates-human-rights-becomes-an-international-problem/>

Newsmaker: <https://www.newsmaker.com.au/news/376038/forced-conversion-that-violates-human-rights-becomes-an-international-problem#.XeZh6C2ZPyU>

Case of Tae Kyun KIM: A failed attempt of de-conversion

By Willy Fautré, director of *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (26.11.2019) - Earlier this year, HRWF interviewed a young man and his mother in Seoul about a kidnapping attempt for the purpose of forceful de-conversion. After this attempt, **Tae Kyun KIM** ran away from home and did not contact his family for two months. His mother shared with HRWF the technical and financial details of her involvement with the Presbyterian Church masterminds of the whole operation.

A painful confrontation between a son and his loving mother

Tae Kyun was very close to his parents before he was kidnapped in 2013. He is tall and athletic, and he was a boxer at that time boxing.



Tae Kyun Kim and his mother at the DMZ

Tae Kyun was 19 when he started to attend the Shincheonji Church. He followed the required Bible classes from December 2012 until June 2013 and passed an examination that qualified him as a registered member. At that time, he was a student at the police academy and was supported by his mother but she did not know what type of church her son was in.

After some time, she became suspicious and even aggressive with her son. Tae Kyun was very disturbed by his mother's behavior because she had never acted this way before.

His mother then sued the evangelist of the Shincheonji Church in charge of the Bible studies on the grounds that he was still under age. Eventually she dropped the charges and sought an alternative strategy. She contacted a **deacon of the Presbyterian Church, Mr. Yong Su PARK (of Bethel Church, Gwangju)**.

During this conversation, the deacon recommended that she have her son kidnapped and confined until he recants his new faith, which is an illegal and prosecutable offense.

Deacon Yong Su PARK promised to recommend a number of strong men for the abduction since Tae Kyun was a boxer. He advised her to rent an apartment far from home and to confine her son during the de-conversion session. However, before starting his program he needed Tae Kyun to sign a statement that he was willingly asking for so-called 'exit counselling'.

Deacon Yong-Su PARK informed her that it would take about 70 days to plan and carry out the kidnapping and the confinement of her son.

After much preparation, the attempt took place in July 2013. While traveling to a family dinner by car, Tae Kyun became suspicious that he was being abducted. He escaped once the vehicle stopped. After this incident, he decided to live with some friends and cut off ties with his family. He only revived communication with his mother 1 or 2 months later.

By that time, Tae Kyun's mother greatly regretted the decision to attempt a kidnapping and forced de-conversion. She asked for forgiveness and they were able to restore their good relationship. Tae Kyun is now a blue-collar worker, while also busking and performing in musicals.

I am a mother who tried to force her beloved son into a coercive conversion program

"My name is **Mi-Jeong PARK**. I am a mother who tried to force her beloved son into a coercive de-conversion program.

When my son began attending the Shingcheonji Church, I respected his decision and our family lived happily without any problem. However, one day, I heard rumors from my acquaintances regarding this Church. I was shocked and alarmed by those rumors. I was introduced to a pastor under the Christian Council of Korea and he referred me to a so-called 'cult counseling center,' which I visited.

March 2013: Instructions about the kidnapping, confinement and de-conversion procedure

At the 'cult counseling center' in Buk-gu Samgak-dong, I had a meeting with three people: **Pastor Gang**, who claimed to be a 'cult counselor', **evangelist Im** and another female evangelist.

The 'cult counselors' maliciously slandered Shincheonji Church and uttered shocking personal attacks. They planted anxiety and fear in my heart and made it impossible for me to make a rational decision. After hearing all of that, any parent would have been desperate to do anything 'to get back' their beloved child. I too trusted the 'cult counselors' and decided to have my son de-converted.

The de-conversion fee was between 1-3 million KRW (770 – 2310 EUR) minimum, but they proudly stated that they had received 5 million, 10 million and even 20 million KRW from other parents.

Their de-conversion business was planned meticulously. They said that the program was comprised of a total of 45 subjects and would take 1 to 3 months to complete successfully. They said that the location of the de-conversion process must be a studio or a pension in a desolate area no more than 2-3 hours roundtrip from the city of Gwangju, such as Suncheon, Hwasun, Gokseong or Gochang.

I conveyed that I would like to de-convert my son at home. However, they told me about a recent case where a young woman who was in the process of de-conversion jumped off the 4th floor of a building. Her father also jumped in an attempt to catch her. Since the my apartment was on the 16th floor, the 'cult counselor' said the program cannot happen there. They told me to find a studio or a guest house that has no more than three floors.

They also informed me of the case of the kidnapping of a female college student from Chonnam National University.

The cult center reassured me that they provide phone assistance 24h a day, and that I would receive assistance to overpower my son if necessary. They also recommended that

I open a new landline with a different number when calling instead of using my current cellphone.

They explained to me how to physically kidnap my son. They recommended forcing him into a car, taking away his cellphone and searching him thoroughly, from his outwear to his undergarments, in case he is hiding a location tracker. They explained that when we reached the confinement place, we should tie my son's arms and legs together with my and my husband's arms and legs during the sequestration period. They emphasized that I must harden my heart as if he is not my child even if he cries and begs to leave.

Finally, for their legal safety as "cult exit counselors", they needed a contract form signed by the parents. I understood it was a guarantee for the payment of their services. Then, they also needed the person who was to be de-converted to sign a declaration stating that he or she willfully was asking for the assistance of the de-conversion task force (self-proclaimed 'exit counselors').

They shared that parents have occasionally sued them in the past, but they triumphantly boasted that they are always released if they are summoned because they have good friends in the police force.

May 2013: Executing the instructions of the 'cult exit counselors'

I loaded one month's quantity of food in the trunk of my car, chose a day for the kidnapping and did everything I had been instructed to. My family and the 'cult exit counselors' decided to execute the 70-day kidnapping and confinement plan.

I enticed my son into the car with a meeting with the evangelist he was studying the Bible with. Then, we headed to a pension in Boseong. After my son got in the car, his uncle forcefully took his phone, as had been suggested. My son tried to open the locked door several times, screaming to let him out.

When we arrived at the pension, he started to run as fast as he could. At one point he turned around and said, "Mum, don't follow me". I was frozen there. My heart broke as I watched him run further and further away.

As a result of this first phase of the de-conversion program, my son rejected me. I called the 'exit counselors' to update them and their callous response was: "oh, he is done now".

The next day I received a call from my son. He was crying and said, "why are you listening to others instead of listening to a single word your son has to say? You are not like that, Mum." After his phone call, I was filled with immense regret about what I had done.

I went back to the Shincheonji Church that my son attended. After seeing the teachings of the Church, I realized that the 'cult exit counselors' had lied to me the whole time. They use religion and their positions as religious leaders for the sole purpose of deceiving people and filling their pockets. They exploit the love parents have for their children, instill fear and anxiety in their minds, and push them to perpetrate illegal acts that destroy their families.

I almost lost my son and gave a significant amount of money to these 'cult exit counselors'.

At this very moment there are parents who are preparing to send their adult children to a forceful de-conversion program. As someone who has attempted this and deeply regrets it, I would like to tell them this: "Look at your children straight. Listen to them sincerely. They are your children. You raised them properly. They did not change all of a sudden. Engage in a conversation with them and treat them as the adults they are."



Tae Kyun Kim and his mother reunited after the failed de-conversion attempt

HRWF does not defend any religion or belief system, but defends the right of a person to have the beliefs of her/his choice as is guaranteed by Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration.

ANNEX: What is the Church of Shincheonji?

Shincheonji Church of Jesus Temple of the Tabernacle of Testimony (Shincheonji in short) is one of the largest Korean Christian new religious movements. The Church was founded in 1984 in South Korea by Chairman Man Hee Lee and currently has more than 200,000 members in 29 countries.

Shincheonji teaches that it is the promised church in the Bible, destined to appear during the fulfillment of the Revelation prophecies. It also teaches that, when the prophecies are fulfilled, the messenger of Jesus, i.e. Chairman Man Hee Lee, will start a new religious world to spread the gospel of the fulfillment of Revelation and to heal all nations. Because of its original theology and rapid growth, the Church encountered hostility from traditional Christian denominations.

On 25 May 2013, Chairman Man Hee Lee established the Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light (HWPL) and proclaimed The Declaration of World Peace.

On 18 September 2014, HWPL organized the World Alliance of Religions' Peace Summit in Seoul.

In 2017, HWPL was granted special consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

HRWF Comment

Willy Fautré: "I interviewed Tae Kyun Kim together with his mother in Seoul. Several years ago, I interviewed about 30 victims of parental kidnapping, confinement and forceful de-conversion attempts during long sequestration periods in Japan. I interrogated

a lady belonging to the Unification Church in Japan together with her father who had kidnapped her for the purpose of de-conversion. I asked the father if he regretted what he done. He answered that he did not. I asked his daughter if she could forgive her father for what he had done and she answered 'I am trying to.'

Case of Ha-Seong WEE: Kidnapped twice by his family to give up his faith



Ha-Seong WEE

HRWF (04.11.2019) – Ha-Seong Wee, a 26 year-old student, was kidnapped twice by his family to force him to come back to his parents' faith (*). He shared his experience with *Human Rights Without Frontiers*. The first time, he was confined for five days and earlier this year for 23 days. During his sequestration, he was subjected to coercion and physical abuse.

24-28 September 2018

The first kidnapping

During Korean Thanksgiving day, I was kidnapped by my parents, my sister, and two uncles. They kept me for five days and four nights at the Adama Inn in South Jeolla Province in an attempt to force me to stop believing in the teachings of the Shincheonji Church.

After I successfully escaped, I continued with my religious life despite continued conflicts with my parents.

19-22 February 2019

One of my uncles who had participated in the first round of kidnapping informed me that my parents had recently asked him to help them a second time. He had refused.

23 February 2019

The second kidnapping

When I came home from church, my grandmother was at home. She was visiting from Mokpo. After greeting her, I took a car to a nearby public bathhouse to meet my dad as promised. However, very quickly my dad said he had a stomachache and we returned home. I fell asleep on the couch and awoke to being lifted by someone who was moving me from the couch. When I realized what was going on, I struggled, saying "Please save me!" I resisted as two of my uncles forced me to leave the house and go into the back seat of my uncle's car. My dad got into the passenger seat and we all left.

After about 45 minutes, they stopped the car. I was thrown into a mud house. Its structure was similar to where I was detained during the first abduction. I said to my parents, "Are you kidnapping me again? This is the second time already!" However, my family claimed it was not a kidnapping, and that they had come to spend time with family.

I didn't say much else because I was so angry that I was at a loss for words. We all went to bed without saying anything.

24-27 February 2019

My aunt and uncles left on the first day of my confinement, leaving just my grandmother, parents and me. I was still very upset. My mother tried to comfort me by explaining that they had abducted me because they wanted us to all be one family. She said that we won't leave until I become one with them.

I was distraught the first couple of days and so did not speak much. I asked for the bible that my parents had brought and read it. They held a family service every morning and asked me to join, but I refused.

On Wednesday (27 February 2019), I felt guilty for not taking part in family services. I asked my parents and grandmother how we will find a way to live together. They claimed that if we were going to be one, we had to determine who is "right," but it would be best to talk to a pastor to figure that out. They wanted me to meet pastor Choi Jae-myung of their church. I had already met him in August 2018, so I said I would think about it.

28 February - 5 March 2019

I was feeling so frustrated after the first six days of my confinement that I told my parents I would meet their Presbyterian pastor. My parents contacted him but he said that he would not be able to visit anytime soon because it was Lent. He suggested meeting with Choi Myung-cheol instead. I preferred to meet pastor Choi Jae-myung, but, after a few back-and-forth conversations, I finally agreed to meet the other pastor.

My parents and grandmother were not able to attend Sunday church service, so they asked me to worship at home with them. I participated on this occasion and my grandmother was very happy. On 5 March 2019, my grandmother left because of a toothache that she needed treatment for. This was also the first anniversary of my grandfather's passing. My parents blamed me for not being able to properly commemorate it.

6-16 March 2019

After ten days had passed since **Pastor Choi Jae-myung** said he would send someone else, my dad called him again. Finally, on 13 March 2019, a man who looked like he was in his 50s arrived. Later, I found out that he is **Choi Myung-cheol**, who is one of those Presbyterian pastors and brokers involved in forcible de-conversion/re-conversion activities.

He needed my signature for the 'Agreement for Conversion Counseling' to begin his work and he was going to film the process of me filling out the document. He claimed that this was to protect himself legally in case any of us later claim that I was forced to attend this program.

I read everything in the agreement and realized it was an 'Agreement for Conversion Counseling' which I had been warned of in the past. I decided that I would not sign it and I told him. Choi Myung-cheol tried to persuade me for about an hour before leaving.

17 March 2019

Escaping captivity

After Choi Myung-cheol's visit, my parents exerted more pressure for me to sign the agreement. On the morning of 17 March 2019, my father physically assaulted me. After punching my face several times, he threatened: "do you want another Hwasun pension incident here today?" He was referring to the case of Gu Ji In in 2017. Her parents used a family trip to abduct her for the second time and, when she threatened to escape, her parents bound and gagged her which caused her to suffocate to death.

My father went outside to get something to beat me with since his hands hurt from punching me. When he returned, the door was open and so I tried to escape. I had to struggle with both of my parents, but finally I was able to run away. I was barefoot and wearing only pyjamas.

I ran to a health care center in Muan town and managed to contact an acquaintance who came to collect me after an hour.

(*) When the incident occurred, Ha-Seong Wee was living with his parents. After the incident, he lived with his friend (his junior from university). Since he graduated from university, he has been volunteering with the church full-time. His parents used to run a math academy prior to the incident.

Case of So-yeon JUNG: An attempted forcible change of religion by a Presbyterian anti-cult association resulted in divorce

HRWF (16.10.2019) - So-yeon Jung disclosed to Human Rights Without Frontiers her experience of domestic violence, kidnapping and confinement in an attempt to change her religious affiliation.



Soyeon Jung

I am a 40-year old woman. My husband was working as an engineer before our marriage was destroyed by a few Presbyterian pastors. In August 2018, he found out that I was attending Shincheonji Church. In an effort to be transparent about my change of religious affiliation, I took him to a religious service. He did not say anything negative about it. However, in November, I saw my husband's social media account by chance on the computer. His sister and his brother had sent him groundless slander about Shincheonji that they had found on the internet. My husband came into contact with an anti-cult 'counseling' association linked to the Presbyterian Church. They recommended that he abduct me and they shared their expertise about how to confine me safely. They also said that they would not intervene with a de-conversion program until I had signed an agreement asking for their 'counseling'. I found out later that my husband gave them 500 dollars (500,000 Korean Won) as a donation for their assistance, but I suspect that he also paid other fees. In early November, he decided that for various reasons we should move to Uijeongbu city.

Friday 23 Feb 2018

The kidnapping

After moving to Uijeongbu, my husband organized a housewarming party at a restaurant with his family without my knowledge. When we were almost done with dinner, his older sister Lee Sun-nae told my daughter Su-min that she had bought a nice toy for her and took Su-min to her car. I rode in a car with the rest of the family, separated from my daughter and nephews.

As soon as my husband sat next to me, he took my cell phone and turned it off. He also took my purse. I was so scared and shocked that I cried and struggled. When I said, "why are you doing this to me?" they replied, "we have no choice but to do this." Then, they closed the curtains and ignored me. After driving for about an hour, we arrived at an apartment in Ansan that they had prepared in advance.

The confinement

The front door to this apartment had five different locks! Various kinds of locks had also been placed on the kitchen windows and the doors of each room. The bathroom doorknob was missing and the bathroom window was closed with twelve nails.

A sensor was attached to the right wall next to the front door so that a bell rang when I was close to it. I wasn't allowed to do anything and each of my movements was watched. Even when I was using the restroom, I had to leave the door open. My husband searched my body again, checking if I was hiding extra money, and even asked my mother-in-law to check my underwear. It was very humiliating. These frustrating circumstances continued.

Signing an agreement under force for 'counseling' assistance

I tried to reason with them, but they did not respond. I asked them to call the pastor who was supposed to conduct the coercive de-conversion, which was the reason for holding me in the apartment. My husband replied that his job was to bring me here and then he had to wait for a call to proceed further. After a long scuffle, he handed me a coercive conversion program agreement titled: "Religious Consultation Guide". When I refused to sign it, they said that I will never leave that apartment. Due to their threats, I was forced to sign it.

Saturday-Sunday, 24-25 Feb 2018: Attempting contacts with the 'counselors'

My husband decided to contact the de-conversion pastor by sms and told me to wait. I was so angry that I yelled and tried to leave. My husband then grabbed both of my legs and dragged me into a room where the TV was on at a loud volume. He then taped my mouth shut as a second measure to prevent anyone from hearing my calls for help.

I couldn't eat or drink anything. I cried out that they bring in the coercive de-conversion pastor. I tried screaming and persuading my husband, but nothing worked. Then, after texting someone, he abruptly said that we were moving somewhere else where we might have to stay longer. Nothing happened until midnight when, after texting again, he said that he decided we should not go.

I protested again, but every time he would cover my mouth and raise the TV volume to drown out my voice.

Monday 26 Feb 2018: 'De-conversion program' starts

Around 10 am, a woman came in with two heavy bags in her hands. She presented herself as a counselor. I protested about my kidnapping and confinement, but she interrupted and told me to talk about it with my husband instead. The coercive de-conversion program finally started.

She browbeat me with various slanderous materials and books about Shincheonji, forcing me to acknowledge them no matter what. It was frustrating because she was not listening to me and she could not answer my questions. It was clearly a forceful indoctrination. After she left, I lost all of my energy and fell unconscious.

Tuesday ~ Wednesday, 27-28 Feb 2018: Visit from the 'counselor'

When I woke up, it was dawn. I spent hours crying. In the afternoon, the same 'counselor' came back. I was lying down because I was completely exhausted, and so she just prayed for me and left. I was scared because I did not know how much longer I would spend in captivity.

I ate some rice to give myself energy but soon after I got stomach cramps. I then became so sick that I couldn't breathe. I screamed and asked to be taken to the hospital, but instead they brought me a handful of painkillers and forced them into my mouth. I had to spend the night alone and in pain. I thought I might die.

Thursday, 1-5 March 2018: Domestic violence and calls for help

Another day passed. It was the 7th day of my captivity. They allowed me to sit in front of the main door because I couldn't breathe well and felt pressure in my chest. Suddenly, I heard someone outside and I yelled "please help!". My husband grabbed my feet and dragged me into the other room. He then got on top of me, tied me up, and pressed down on my mouth and nose. I resisted fiercely, and so he poured water on my face and stuffed several wet tissues into my mouth. It was truly mortifying and I fell unconscious again.

Over the next few days, I continued crying for help. A couple of times my husband became violent with me again to silence me.

I thought that I would never be free again and that I would die in that apartment. When I struggled, my mother-in-law would grab my legs to stop me from moving and my husband would shout that I would leave there in a coffin if I did not change my mind. The entire time, my husband was insulting and threatening me. He was so volatile that he even hit his own head against the bathroom wall and started bleeding.

Tuesday, 6 Mar 2018: Rescue by the police

My husband was preparing breakfast when the police showed up. I begged them repeatedly to save my life. They filmed everything that was in the house. An ambulance arrived and I was moved to the Danwon hospital.

That is how my 12-day imprisonment ended. My husband and my mother-in-law were placed under arrest but were indicted without detention since they're first-time offenders.

After my checkup at the hospital, my parents and I were escorted by the police to the station to make a statement. I told the police about the events of the kidnapping and how I had been assaulted. I also explained that a pastor had orchestrated the whole operation behind the scenes. The police said that they were aware of who and how many people were behind this incident. Since then, I have never been contacted by nor met with the police again. I am not aware of any further investigation or prosecution.

My husband has been charged with kidnapping and assault. We also filed for divorce and are in the midst of reaching an agreement.

My husband is currently living in the studio apartment in Ansan city where I was held and I live in Uijeongbu city. My mother is staying with me temporarily to help me stabilize myself mentally and financially.

Case of Yoon-Jin LEE: How Presbyterian de-conversion teachings about kidnapping and sequestration destroyed a family



Yoon-jin LEE

HRWF (04.09.2019) - Yoon-jin LEE, a 22-year old hospital staff, and her sister were both followers of the beliefs taught by the Shincheonji Church. They were living in Yeongdeung po-gu, Seoul. Yoon-jin wanted her mother to share her beliefs. She took her to the bible classes of the Church but after some time, she stopped attending them. When she learned from her sister that her parents were planning to kidnap her and confine her until she would recant her new faith, she decided to go and live with her sister outside the family house.

Again, the teachings of Presbyterian pastors to perpetrate the crime of abduction and forced change of religious beliefs in confinement conditions were going to make victims.

Yoon-jin shared her experience with *Human Rights Without Frontiers*:

"5 February 2019, Tuesday

On Korea's New Year's Day, which was also my birthday, my family and I went on a trip. After 9 pm, on our way back home, my dad stopped the car in an empty lot. There were two other cars on each side. At that moment, three unknown men grabbed my arms and legs and pulled me out of the car by force. I tried to escape but it was impossible. Eight male adults carried me and my sister to another car and took us to the Neulsolgil pension in the Yangyang district.

They prepared a lot of canned instant food and packed suitcases as if we were going to stay in the pension for a long time. The windows were taped and nailed shut. A lock was installed on both sides of the front door and the codes were changed frequently. I was so shocked and traumatized that I threw up everything I ate. I could not sleep properly that first night.

6 February 2019 Wednesday

When I opened my eyes, I realized I was still in the pension. My mother and a corpulent woman were staying next to me. I asked my mom if we could leave this dark place where

there was no light because I am claustrophobic, but she never answered. I went to the window, I drew up the blinds and I began to yell and cry out for help. Outside, there was a woman and an elementary school student. She was the owner of the pension and she had seen me when I was taken inside by force. I thought she would help me but she swore loudly and reproved me.

7 February 2019 Thursday

While everyone was sleeping, I went to the restroom. I took off all the tapes and tried to escape but as I passed through the window, my mom and the other woman caught me. Afterwards, some men brought nails and wooden boards in order to block all the windows and openings. They swore loudly and my mom tied her leg to mine with a scarf.

8 February 2019 Friday

I couldn't eat anything for three days. I had blood, bruises, and wounds all over my body because of the scuffles. I had difficulty in breathing because of the extreme stress, but nobody would let me go to the hospital and nobody gave me food any more. I was alone every single day to bear my grief and my pain.

9 February 2019 Saturday

After another day had passed, my state of health further deteriorated and I was almost losing consciousness. My mother then told me we would go to hospital but it happened that it was not true. She had to help me to reach the car because I was very weak. I thought we were going to go to hospital but the car went to the harbor and there, she took me to another car that was parked next to us. We did not go to hospital but I was taken to my aunt's house. There was a lock inside and outside, and all the windows were also nailed shut. There were no words to express my disappointment. This change of location had suddenly become necessary because my sister had managed to escape from the pension and she would certainly go to the police.

10 (Sunday) ~ 18 (Monday) February 2019

Every time I used the bathroom or simply went to get some water, I was followed by three people. Every day, the lady that was with us, my mother and my aunt forced me to follow a de-conversion program for 3-4 hours. When I refused their indoctrination, they would get mad at me and even pushed me around. When it seemed they would not manage it with me, my mother would call the Presbyterian pastors and would try to force me even harder to sign the agreement for voluntary de-conversion.

19 February 2019 Tuesday

For 2 weeks, I was left to suffer with claustrophobia and under increasing stress. Eventually I fainted on the way to drink some water. Even at that time, my mother told me to stop putting on a show and swore at me. She never took me to hospital. That left me with indelible scars. Her behavior with me had changed so much that I could hardly recognize her. She had been fanaticized by her Presbyterian coaches.

20 February 2019 Wednesday

While we were having lunch, my mother felt unwell. The other lady said it was all my fault and my mom might even die because of me. She screamed at me to leave the room. As soon as I tried to go out and open the door that, as I knew, was locked, they got even angrier and started to threaten me. On another occasion, I tried to escape again but once more I was caught.

I kept shouting for help from the front door, but my mom slapped me and threw sand at me. She even wrestled me to the ground until I couldn't breathe. This scuffle went on for over an hour. Fortunately, the mailman heard my yelling and called the police.

I was afraid of being taken away again by my parents and begged the policemen to take me to the police station. Instead, they talked to my mom and told me to try to solve the issue by communicating and staying with my family. When they heard the whole story, they finally took me to the police station. I headed to the police station first but my parents did not although they had been asked to.

Since my rescue, I have been living with my sister. I am no longer in touch with my parents but I am still filled with fear and anxiety.

22 March 2019 Friday

During my detention, my friends had filed a missing person's report to the police. I was in a post-traumatic state after this ordeal and could only go to the police station a month later to file my statement. Unfortunately, there is not much progress in the case and the police have not taken any action since then.

My sister who was also kidnapped sued my father, and I sued the lady who was involved along with my aunt, instead of my mother."

Conclusions

Once again, the teachings of Presbyterian pastors about the de-conversion of their lost 'sheep' had destroyed a family.

The European Court of human rights (ECTHR) has no jurisdiction outside the European continent but its decisions are often referred to by courts in countries outside the Council of Europe. One of them concerns the tearing apart of families whose cohesion is destroyed by a change of religion. Who is responsible? The case *Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow v. Russia* (Judgment on 10 June 2010) should be a source of inspiration in South Korea:

"111. It further appears from the testimonies by witnesses that what was taken by the Russian courts to constitute "coercion into destroying the family" was the frustration that non-Witness family members experienced as a consequence of disagreements over the manner in which their Witness relatives decided to organise their lives in accordance with the religious precepts, and their increasing isolation resulting from having been left outside the life of the community to which their Witness relatives adhered.

It is a known fact that a religious way of life requires from its followers both abidance by religious rules and self-dedication to religious work that can take up a significant portion of the believer's time and sometimes assume such extreme forms as monasticism, which is common to many Christian denominations and, to a lesser extent, also to Buddhism and Hinduism.

Nevertheless, as long as self-dedication to religious matters is the product of the believer's independent and free decision and however unhappy his or her family members may be about that decision, the ensuing estrangement cannot be taken to mean that the religion caused the break-up in the family. Quite often, the opposite is true: it is the resistance and unwillingness of non-religious family members to accept and to respect their religious relative's freedom to manifest and practise his or her religion that is the source of conflict. [emphasis added]".

Hye Jeong LIM: VIDEO of her kidnapping masterminded by her family and a Presbyterian pastor



Click [here](#) to watch the full video.

HRWF (18.09.2019) - It is not usual to film a live kidnapping in broad daylight and in the middle of a crowd, but that is what happened to Hye Jeong Lim, when she was 21 years old.

She was near the university in Chonnam city when it occurred. A car stopped and strong guys pushed her into a big car despite her resistance, her screams and the opposition of some people around. The scene was video-taped by a passer-by from the other side of the street.

The masterminds of this abduction operation were her family and, behind the scenes, a pastor involved in the controversial de-conversion program of the Presbyterian Church of South Korea.

Hye Jeong Lim had been educated in the Christian faith by her family who were members of the Presbyterian Church but she had decided to join another religious denomination, the Shincheonji Church, a new religious movement with a different Christian-based theology.

The intentions of her family was to confine her until she would break down and promise to stop attending another Church. It was not their first attempt, but this one was successful.

The first time, her mother tried to pay her an unannounced visit with a Presbyterian evangelist at her apartment, but she managed to escape.

The second time, a few months later, her mother invited her to a restaurant on the occasion of her birthday. From there, they went to a café and there her mum started to make several phone calls. Hye Jeong Lim found this suspicious and escaped from the restroom.

The third time, her mother made an appointment with her at a shop but suddenly, five strong men showed up and took her by car to her grandmother's house, which is a four hour drive from her city. They confiscated her mobile telephone. Her mum, a social worker, could rely on her ex-boyfriend who had friends in the police and a former colleague. In the morning, she managed to escape through the window of the restroom, ran away barefooted and took a taxi.

When Hye Jeong Lim was again kidnapped, there was a huge media coverage of the incident because the video had been posted on internet and circulated through the social media.

When she recovered her freedom, the media interviewed her mother and supported the reasons of her kidnapping operation. Other newspapers attributed it to the Shincheonji Church, either mistakenly or intentionally to boost sales. When Hye Jeong Lim held a press conference to rectify the truth, there was no press coverage at all.

After these incidents in 2012, the relations between mother and daughter became stormier than ever but with the passing of time, she regretted to have followed the advice of the Presbyterian pastors. Trust was slowly restored and the relationships between Hye Jeong Lim and her mother are now appeased. Her relations with her brother were also strained after the last incident, but they have improved since then and they are now closer. Hye Jeong Lim had already lost her father when she was a young child. It would have been a pity if she had lost any contact with her closest relatives.

Hye Jeong Lim is now working for a marketing company.

The result of the forced de-conversion policy by Presbyterian pastors in South Korea is the disruption of families. This is an accusation these same pastors attribute to religious groups such as the Shincheonji Church.

This family is now reunited despite the illogical methods used by some in the name of religion.



Picture of Hye Jeong Lim

HRWF does not defend any religion or belief system but defends the right of a person to have the beliefs of her/his choice as it is guaranteed by Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration.

50 days of confinement for forced de-conversion: Management of the case by the police and the judiciary (2)

Judgment of Daegu Provincial Prosecutor's Office

By Willy Fautré, Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (02.09.2019) - Hyeon-Jeong KIM, the victim of kidnapping and confinement for the purpose of religious de-conversion, was born in 1989. Her parents, Sung-Jo Kim and Eun-Su Kim, are Presbyterians and they educated their children in their faith. Her father is a retired teacher and her mother a housewife. They were all living together in Daegu, the fourth largest city of Korea, at the time of the incidents. In 2015, at the age of 27 years, Hyeon-Jeong Kim started attending the religious services of the Shincheonji Church. Her family kidnapped her and sequestered her for 50 days until she managed to escape.



On 13 July 2018, Daegu Provincial Prosecutor's Office published its ruling concerning the accused Sung-Jo Kim, Eun-Su Kim and Kyung-Hee Kim. It is to be noted that no Presbyterian pastor was on the list of accused although they had masterminded the operation. (*)

The official charge was "Violation against the law on violent act and punishment (Joint confinement)".

In the section of the judgment titled "*The result of the investigation and viewpoints*", it is noteworthy that the accused did not deny the facts – the kidnapping, the confinement and the coercive attempt of religious de-conversion – but argued that it was for the well-being of the victim that they wanted to organize a "conversion education program" (counseling), or what scholars in religious studies qualify as "forced deprogramming".

It is interesting to read the part of the judgment reproducing the facts admitted by all the parties, the statements of each accused and the review of the Prosecutor's Office:

➤ **"Facts that are recognized"**

The Suspects having the plan of giving the conversion education through religious counseling to the Victim for having Shincheonji faith booked the officetel in Jadong Haeundaegu Busan in advance. In the morning of the incident (April 27, 2018), they kidnapped the Victim in a car and drove to Busan and confined her for 50 days in the officetel, She was cut off from outside and was not allowed to exit until the day she was found on June 16, 2018 after running away. Everything appears to be true.

The Victim is testifying that she was taken by force by her parents and her aunt in a car to Busan and was confined in an officetel for 50 days until she could finally escape.

Her testimony includes: she was with her parents and her aunt in the officetel and was forced to take the conversion education (counseling). She was threatened not be able to leave the room until she promise to receive the education. The door was blocked with piles of many water bottles and the shoe rack covered the door handle so that the Victim could not leave the room. (Record Page 197 Written Testimony)

➤ **Statement of the Suspect Sung-Jo Kim**

The suspect decided that the only way for his daughter (the victim) who had converted to the Shincheonji religion, to return to the Presbyterian faith was through a cult counseling (coercive conversion) in Busan. On the morning of the incident, he kidnapped the victim on their way to work and drove her to an officetel in Busan that was already prepared. All of the phones were turned off and water bottles were piled up in front of the entrance door. The shoe rack was used to block the handle of the door and so on. He admitted that victim was held in captivity against the victim's will for about 50 days, including the fact that he didn't let her escape. (Record page 213 of Suspect interrogation report)

➤ **A statement by the Suspect Eun-Su Kim**

The suspect, charged with her daughter's (victim) 'counseling' along with her aunt (suspect Kyung-Hee Kim), arrived in Busan the day before the incident. She obtained a room by signing an officetel in advance, and later moved the victim to Busan by force with her husband (Sung-Jo Kim). She admitted the fact that she held the victim in captivity for about 50 days against the victim's will. (Record page 229 of Suspect interrogations report)

➤ **Statement of Kyung-Hee Kim**

The suspect, admits that she first received a request from her brother (suspect Sung-Jo Kim) to get an officetel for the 'counseling' (conversion education) for the victim because she is deeply involved in the religion of Shincheonji. The suspect signed a room with another suspect (Eun-Su Kim) the day before the incident, and admits that she went to the parking lot of the World Cup Stadium later to pick up the victim and the suspect in her Lacetti vehicle. She claims that she was there just to help the victim and suspects with food, but that act was against the will of the victim and also helped the suspects from 27/4/2018 to 5/30/2018 despite knowing the victim was in confinement. (Record page 252 of Suspect interrogation report)

➤ **Review**

The suspects claim that only the counseling (conversion education) through cult consultant would bring the victim from the Shincheonji faith back to her normal life. Even though she was in a confined environment, the suspects argue that she was with her parents and it was all for the victim. However, it is clearly recognized as an illegal confinement for kidnapping her in the car on the way to work, taking her to Busan where she was completely cut off from the outside and trapped inside for 50 days because the entrance

door was blocked. All of this was against the will of the Victim until the day of the escape to be found.”

The Opinion of the Prosecutor’s Office was “The suspicion of the Suspects has been recognized, so it is viewed as to be charged (indictment without detention)”.

In this case, it means the criminal charges were acknowledged. However, as the accused were first-time offenders, had confessed to and repented for their crimes, and as the victim was able to resume her life as per normal, the prosecution’s civic committee suggested a suspension of the indictment. For this reason, the court ruled that although the charges are acknowledged, the prosecution will be suspended for a probation period of seven years.

Hyeon-jeong Kim filed a petition with the Constitutional Court against the prosecutor of the Daegu District Public Prosecutors' Office, alleging that his decision was infringing her basic rights, “including equal rights and the right to state in hearing proceedings.” However, on 28 June, the judges of the Constitutional Court unanimously dismissed the claim.

Abduction, confinement and forced de-conversion are criminal activities

The activists of the Presbyterian Church who work within a national framework in charge of the deconversion of its leavers (opt-outs?) have been trained in a specific way. If the convert has not signed an agreement clearly stating that he or she voluntarily wants to join a so-called “religious conversion program” or “counseling session” (forced deprogramming imposed by family members), they must avoid any direct involvement in a forced change of religion operation.

The Presbyterian Church adopted this policy after the Shincheonji Church started to sue some of their deprogrammers. They now train their evangelists (such as Choo Jin Wook and Cho Hannah) to organize meetings and consultations with parents, and conduct the deprogramming sessions, sometimes with former Shincheonji members.

In concrete terms, Presbyterian pastors are the masterminds of the kidnapping, confinement and coercive de-conversion operations behind the scenes, but they never participate directly in these illegal and criminal activities. They leave this responsibility to family members. As to the agreement to be signed, this is left to family members “to get it”. The pastors turn a blind eye to the way it can be extorted: threats, psychological and physical pressure, violence, and detention. In the case of Ji in Gu in January 2018, it was violence to the point of her death. She was a young woman in her early twenties and a male member of her family was responsible for her murder.

In the case of Hyeon Jeong, an exception was made. A three-person deprogramming team appeared at the place of confinement although she was still firmly refusing, after 50 days, to sign such an agreement and return to the Presbyterian Church. Moreover, their visit triggered the conditions for her escape attempt and her successful call for help that was heard by neighbors. After that, the police arrived and all persons involved were transferred to the police station for a hearing. This was a very dangerous and unexpected situation for the deprogrammers.

Moreover, the deprogrammers were aware that Hyeon-Jeong was sequestered by family members. They decided not only to deny assistance to a person in danger, but also to become accomplices to the perpetration of a criminal activity and to physically contribute to the prolongation of her confinement.

In another country, such deprogrammers could be prosecuted for taking an active part in

a criminal activity. In South Korea, they should be aware that incitement to perpetrate illegal and criminal activities could send them to prison in the future.

Human Rights Without Frontiers recommends that the Presbyterian Church in South Korea stop training specific staff to incite other people to forcibly de-convert former members.

Human Rights Without Frontiers recommends that the South Korean authorities prosecute cases of forced change of religion involving abduction, confinement and the use of psychological and physical violence by family members with or without the direct/indirect assistance of outside actors as criminal cases of domestic violence.

(*) Source: Decision of the Court (translation in possession of the author of the article).

Hyeon-Jeong KIM: 50 days of confinement for forced de-conversion (1)

Presbyterian pastors inciting domestic violence and breaches of Korean laws

By Willy Fautré, Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (22.08.2019) - Hyeon-Jeong KIM, the victim of kidnapping and confinement for the purpose of religious de-conversion, was born in 1989. Her parents, Sung-Jo Kim and Eun-Su Kim, are Presbyterians and raised their children in the Presbyterian Church. Her father is a retired teacher and her mother is a housewife. They were living together in Daegu, the fourth largest city of Korea, at the time of the incidents. In 2015, at the age of 27 (1), Hyeon-Jeong Kim started attending the religious services of the Shincheonji Church (2).

Interview of Hyeon-Jeong Kim



Q: How did your parents know about your interest in the Shincheonji Church and how did they react?

A: They heard from one of my friends. They were quite opposed and put me under strict surveillance. They also contacted Presbyterian pastors to ask them what to do. Knowing th

at my father could be violent, I told him I would not go to that Church any more. I was a pharmacy student at the time and so I managed to continue attending their meetings secretly for the next three years.

Last year (2018), I got a job in a pharmacy, but my parents found out that I had not severed my relations with the Shincheonji Church. On 8 April, during dinner, my father had an angry outburst about my change of religion. I didn't say anything because I did not want to further inflame the situation. During this incident my father tried to hit me with a glass container and my mother held me by the neck while my brother also tried to hit me. This family crisis lasted for two hours.

In the aftermath of that fateful day, my parents did some research on the internet about the Shincheonji Church. They only found negative papers posted by the Presbyterian Church and media influenced by the Presbyterian Church. After that, they took my phone away and my father followed me to and from work every day as if I were a child. I was 30 years old at the time. In the meantime, they had been told by Presbyterian pastors to show me films and articles denouncing the Shincheonji Church as a heretic Christian movement. After work, I wasn't allowed to leave the house and was denied access to my cell phone. I had to watch and read Presbyterian propaganda against the Shincheonji Church every day. My brother, who was married and was not living with us, was also taking sides with my parents and was threatening me.

Q. Did you try to get assistance from outside?

A. There was a police station near the pharmacy with a Women and Youth department counseling center. I thought I could get some help from them. However, due to the close surveillance of my father, I could only go to the police at lunch time. I did so and told them everything, including the reasons behind the domestic violence I was experiencing. The police response was catastrophic. They called my father and told him to give me back my phone and to put an end to my surveillance. My action further fueled his anger towards me.

At the pharmacy, I told my boss and my colleagues that I feared I was at risk of being abducted and confined by my family because of my change of religion.

Q. And were you abducted?

A. Yes. A few weeks later, on 27 April. My phone had 'disappeared', but I knew they had taken it away. I was very angry and I threatened to call the police on my father. I told my mother I would leave for work earlier and have breakfast in a nearby shop. She thought I was planning to run away from home forever and ran after me. My father caught me and forced me into his car. As I was screaming, passers-by tried to help, but my father told them I was *his* daughter and he was saving me from a heretic religious movement. He informed our family that he was taking me to my aunt's, Kyung-Hee KIM. It was approximately a 15-minute drive. This is how my kidnapping and confinement started.

Q. Had the abduction been planned as an option in the minds of your parents?

A. Without any doubt, but not only in their minds. At my aunt's place, about 15 minutes away, we were joined by my mother and brother. I was deprived of all my possessions, tied up and transferred to a faraway place: Hae-woon-dae, Busan. It took two hours by car. I was pushed into a studio on the 7th floor of a building.

My family had made this plan based on recommendations from the Presbyterian pastors. This option had been partially prepared and partially improvised as no date had been fixed. The renting contract of the studio was signed at the last moment, a day before the abduction, by my mom and my aunt.

I was locked in a room with closed curtains for 50 days under the surveillance of both my parents and my aunt. They threatened that I would never be able to leave if I did not agree to enter a de-conversion program. Members of my brother's family who visited us on weekends cursed at me and threatened me as well. One day, my father tried to strangle me because I was still refusing to give up my faith. My mom and my aunt stopped him just in time. Otherwise, I would have been killed in the same way as another woman a few months earlier: Ji-in Gu (25 years old).

After about a month of staying at the studio apartment, my aunt went back to Daegu and the rest of the family remained with me. I started suffering from claustrophobia.

Q. The Presbyterian deprogrammers do not appear anywhere during your captivity? How do you explain that?

A: During the 50 days that I spent in captivity, no de-conversion pastor showed up because they do not want to be accused of complicity in a case of abduction and confinement for the purpose of forced change of religion, which is illegal in South Korea. However, they were in regular contact with my family and gave them instructions about how to force me to return to the Presbyterian faith. Of course, I do not have any records of their telephone conversations, but whenever I clashed with my parents, one of them would leave the room to make a phone call. So, I am assuming that they were receiving instructions on how to act in such situations.

For more than seven weeks I resisted the psychological pressure and the threats of my family and their Presbyterian advisers. I was alone against all of them, without any help or support, but I won my battle for my faith. I continued refusing to sign any agreement stating that I was freely asking to be de-converted in the framework of a so-called "conversion counseling program".

Since my parents saw no solution in sight, some people from the Suyongro Presbyterian Church in Busan were sent to the apartment. This gave me the opportunity to attempt to escape. I was unsuccessful but was able to leave the apartment long enough to call for help. When I tried to escape that day, my family *and* the three envoys from the Presbyterian Suyongro Church dragged me back into the apartment. These three envoys were directly participating in my sequestration. Their names are **Cho Hana** and **Choo Jin Wook**, both evangelists of the Presbyterian Suyongro Church, and an unknown woman.

Q. How did you manage to recover your freedom?

A: On 16 June, the 51st day of my confinement, a combination of circumstances gave me an opportunity to run away. I was cleaning the bathroom when someone rang the front doorbell. My father started to remove the water bottles that were stacked at the front door to let the three people mentioned above into the apartment. When my father opened the door, I rushed out, barefoot and calling for help. However, I was on the 7th floor and so my parents were able to catch me. I was brought back into the apartment and the three visitors came inside for my de-conversion program.

I continued to scream and refuse anything they tried to force me to do. One of the neighbours came to our door and asked what was happening. I said, "Please call the police!" and my father closed the door again. That neighbor did call the police.

When the police came, they took everybody to the police station. My mother, my father and myself were in the same car and two of the deprogrammers - **Cho Hana** and **Choo Ji Wook** - were in another police car. My brother was in Busan and came to the police station an hour later after my parents called him. All I wanted was to be separated from my family.

After several hours of discussion, the police brought me to a women's emergency shelter in Busan despite the opposition of my family. Not long afterwards, my brother managed to find my safe place and so, for my own security, I had to move to another shelter in Daegu. The police followed my case and I thank them for that.

Q. What happened at the police station?

A. The police checked the identity of the persons to be heard and asked me why I was held in the apartment.

I said that during 50 days my family had tried to force me to leave the Shincheonji Church, because they believed it was a cult, and to go back to the Presbyterian Church. To this end, they wanted me to follow a religious reeducation program run by the Presbyterian Church and to sign an agreement saying it was my personal decision. But I kept refusing because it was not my choice and they kept me in confinement.

A policeman took me to another room and said that what my family did was a crime. Additionally, since the victim – myself – wanted to be separated from the perpetrators, they have to abide by the victim's wishes and provide a safe place.

The members of the Presbyterian Church in Busan - **Cho Hana** and **Choo Ji Wook** - emphasized that they were just normal believers and started to slander the Shincheonji Church. They also cursed and slandered me, and took sides with my family, saying I should go to a 'normal church'.

The police listened to the slanders and accusations and did not make any comment.

Q. Could you get your position back at the pharmacy after almost two months of absence?

A. On the day of my abduction, my boss from the pharmacy received a call from my maternal uncle. He said that they were with me at a restaurant in Kyunggi-do (Kyunggi province) and that we were in the midst of a family trip, and then he immediately hung up.

Because of what I had told my boss about my family problems and risk of abduction, he filed a missing person's report with the police.

Fortunately, I could get my job back.

Q. How are your relations with your family now?

A. When I was at the women's shelter in Daegu, my father sent me a letter saying that I could return home and he would respect my religious choice. The local police, who had been informed of my situation by my boss, escorted me home. Now, I am living with my family again. I said I would live with them as long as they respect my religious choice. I feel better, but the trauma has not disappeared. (End of the interview).

WANTED



Cho Ha-Nnah Choo Jin-Wook

The three deprogrammers from the Presbyterian Suyongro Church who showed up at the place of detention of Hyeon-Jeong Kim were aware that she was sequestered by family members. When she tried to escape, they decided not only to deny assistance to a person in danger, but also to become accomplices of the prolongation of her confinement. Abduction and confinement of Hyeon-Jeong Kim for the purpose of forced change of religion are illegal and criminal activities in South Korea. The family members were prosecuted but not those who helped them to reincarcerate Hyeon-Jeong. (3)

- **Cho Ha-Na** is a member of the Sooyoungro Church. She is a de-conversion counselor and directly consults with family members who come to the church for the coercive conversion program.

- **Choo Jin-Wook** is a member of the Sooyoungro Church. He is a de-conversion counselor and directly consults with family members who come to the church for the coercive de-conversion program).

- **Unknown woman** is a member of the Sooyoungro Church.

1. In South Korea, a baby is considered to be one year old on the very first day of his/her birth.
2. Shincheonji Church of Jesus Temple of the Tabernacle of Testimony (Shincheonji in short) is one of the largest Korean Christian new religious movements. The Church was founded in 1984 in South Korea by Chairman Man Hee Lee and currently has more than 200,000 members in 29 countries.

Shincheonji teaches that it is the promised church in the Bible, pledged to appear in the times of the fulfillment of Revelation prophecies. It also teaches that, in this special time when the prophecies are fulfilled, the messenger of Jesus, i.e. Chairman Man Hee Lee, starts a new religious world to spread the gospel of the fulfillment of Revelation and to heal the nations. Because of its original theology and rapid growth, the Church has encountered the hostility of traditional Christian denominations.

3. The details and the analysis of the prosecution will be the main theme of the next report about this case.

Story of O: Korea's #1 Bigot Harasses Refugees (and Many Others)—Again

On July 22, new false demonstrations against refugees from The Church of Almighty God start in Korea. The bigot promoting them is spreading hate against all minorities.

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (20.07.2019) - <https://bit.ly/30Rk5N0>

Ms. O Is Coming—But who is Ms. O?

Ms. O Myung-Ok, a notorious Korean pro-CCP and “anti-heresy” activist, has announced that on July 22, she will start demonstrating against the Chinese asylum seekers of The Church of Almighty God in Seoul. She will bring some thirty relatives of the refugees, coerced or manipulated by Chinese State Security agents and induced to come to Korea asking for their family members to “come home.” Obviously, should they go back to China the refugees would not go “home,” they would go to jail. In a document distributed in Washington DC during this week’s Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, 13 NGOs have vigorously protested Ms. O’s false demonstrations.

It is important that Korean and international media understand exactly who Ms. O is. She frankly admits that she endorses co-operation with the Chinese authorities against The Church of Almighty God and other groups the CCP does not approve of. She uses the same pattern of action against a number of minorities, spreading hatred and bigotry. Her scheme repeats itself. She promotes false “spontaneous demonstrations” where either (or both) a handful of her friends or relatives of persons whose lifestyle she does not approve of, ask the latter to “go home.” If they are foreign asylum seekers, they should be deported back to their home countries (where they will be arrested and worse). If they are members of Korean minorities, they should be given back to their angry relatives and to some Christian pastors, who will detain them and try to induce them, using various forms of physical and psychological violence, to change their lifestyles. This applies in Korea to both members of groups Ms. O denounces as “heresies” and to homosexuals. For some, Ms. O simply proposes to put them in jail.

Against “heresies” and Falun Gong

Clearly, these proposals can only be sustained by what in other countries would be sanctioned as hate speech. “Heresies,” with a special focus on those the CCP persecutes in China, such as Falun Gong and The Church of Almighty God, are depicted as criminal, and asylum seekers as “false refugees.” In order to de-humanize members of the groups she hates, she should claim they are not really religious or spirituals, but “pseudo-religions,” a claim she also applies to Falun Gong.

To send back “home” (i.e. to the dreaded transformation through education camps) Uyghur refugees, she connects them to terrorism, in the usual style of CCP propaganda. She claims that “the international community accuses them [Uyghurs] of terrorism,” confusing China and its allies in the Axis of Shame with the international community . She even claimed that Nurgul Sawut, an Australian leader of the secular Campaign for Uyghurs, represented “radical Islam” at a conference co-organized by Bitter Winter in Seoul on June 20, where she showed her long black hair and appeared in public without a veil, something which should have alerted everybody but Ms. O to the fact that she is not a fundamentalist.

Against Uyghurs

She devotes an inordinate number of words to argue that Xinjiang is part of China, and Uyghurs should behave as good Chinese citizens. One wonders what this exactly has to do with a Korean Christian organizations ostensibly fighting "Christian heresies," but whatever suits the CCP finds a soft spot in Ms. O's heart.

Or perhaps the Uyghurs are not even real Muslims. She writes that those who "advocate anti-Chinese sentiments and resistance in Xinjiang are actively using anti-government-related Islamic terms. and Islamic religious discontent to justify their actions." In fact, she argues, "Uyghur followers of Islam are [part of] fake camouflage groups."

Against Islam

Were the Uyghurs, in Ms. O's mind, real Muslims, it would be even worse. Ms. O goes beyond the usual anti-Uyghur CCP propaganda and insults Islam in general, claiming it is merely "heresy" rather than "one of the world's three major religions."

If you know the Muslims, Ms. O argues, you become hostile to them: "Chinese hostility toward Muslims has been strengthened by frequent contacts with Islam since the Yuan Dynasty. The Chinese considered Muslims to be crass, aggressive, greedy." This, Ms. O believes, needs to be repeated twice: "The Chinese traditionally regarded Muslims as selfish and greedy. For this reason, the abhorrence and contempt for Muslims became popular in China."

Quoting anti-Muslim books of one century ago, Ms. O entertains her readers with racist jokes: "When a Muslim travels, he will get fat and come back. On the other hand, if two Muslims go on a trip, they will become thin and return." But Muslim "crimes," she argues, are no jokes. Muslims are "able to carry out terrible crimes to achieve their goals." She offers a horror-movie-style example: "During Chinese New Year celebrations, Muslims who do not observe Chinese festivals spend their nights sleeping after inviting Chinese people to their mobile homes to have fun. The Muslims got up when the Chinese got drunk, tore the tent over their bodies and beat them to death. Then the Muslims put the body of the dead into a dry well and filled it with silver."

In most democratic countries, there are laws against such forms of hate speech against one of the world's major religions. Perhaps not in South Korea, but there should be.

Against human rights and conscientious objection

Some persons, when they pass by, cannot resist enter a boutique and buy new clothing. Ms. O cannot resist joining a demonstration for a bad cause. On July 2, 2019, she applauded demonstrations against the National Human Rights Commission of South Korea, noting approvingly that opponents of "heresy" and homosexuality had joined forces. It is clear that Ms. O does not like human rights in general. She wants the Commission "abolished and dismantled." She believes it protects "Satanic heresy," which in this case means the Jehovah's Witnesses.

For many years, South Korea has been criticized by the United Nations for sending to jail the Jehovah's Witnesses who are conscientious objectors, as their religion forbids them to perform military service. The U.N. noted that almost all democratic countries in the world have passed laws allowing for conscientious objection. Slowly, the situation is being solved also in South Korea.

In this case, Ms. O makes an exception to her familiar mantra of sending people "back home." Some Jehovah's Witnesses who are conscientious objectors were indeed sent back home from jail. Ms. O wants them back in jail.

Against homosexuals

The National Human Rights Commission, Ms. O argues, should be dismantled also because it promotes “anti-discrimination” policies that protect “homosexuals.” She doesn’t like “anti-discrimination,” and suggests to treat homosexuality as a “social disorder.” Religions have different positions about homosexuality, and calmly expressing them is also protected by religious liberty. The problem, however, is that organizations of the kind Ms. O endorses have been consistently accused in Korea to help their parents kidnap young homosexuals in the streets and subject them to forced therapies and indoctrination aimed at changing their sexual orientation. Kidnapped in the streets... just like the “heretics”! Ms. O wants them to “come home” too.

In an article justifying her position on homosexuals, Ms. O argues that we are not free to build our culture as we please. We should only be allowed to “build up the history and culture of humankind as God intended.” The problem is that we are asked to believe that only Ms. O knows what God intended for us. As the authorized spokesperson for God, she feels free to promote bigotry and offend all minorities.

In the West, *Story of O* is remembered as the title of the mother of all pornographic novels, written in 1954 by Anne Cécile Desclos (1907–1998) under the pen name of Pauline Réage. What the Korean Ms. O does is spiritual pornography, the promotion of the hate of fellow human beings—and of those who are most vulnerable, such as refugees—under the mask of a primitive, racist theology. Hate speech is not free speech. It is great time it should be stopped in South Korea.

A young woman died in an attempt to forcibly de-convert her in sequestration conditions

By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (08.07.2019) - During a fact-finding mission in South Korea in June last, the director of *Human Rights Without Frontiers* (HRWF) met a number of people who had been abducted and sequestered by their families because they had chosen to convert to another religion than their parents’. The purpose of the families was to forcibly de-convert them by submitting them to a special program, called ‘exit counseling’ or ‘deprogramming’, which was to be carried out by Protestant pastors during their sequestration.

In one case, the abductee died from a violent death during the session.



Ji-in GU: the victim

First abduction

On 23 July 2016, Ji-in Gu, then 24¹, was on her way home in her parents' car along with her older sister when she was abducted by her family and taken to the Catholic monastery of St Clare's in Jangseong county (South Jeolla Province) where she was kept in confinement during 44 days. Her sister, a teacher in an elementary school, was actively backing their parents' decision and tied Ji-in's arms to hers during the trip to prevent any escape attempt.

Concerned about the conversion of their daughter, her parents had previously consulted a Presbyterian evangelist, Woong Ki LIM about how to de-convert her. The advice had obviously been to submit her to an 'exit counselling' session to be carried out in 'isolation' (sequestration) conditions. Abduction and confinement are illegal activities repressed by Article 276 (False Arrest and Illegal Confinement, Those in Lineal Ascendant) of the criminal code² in South Korea which says:

A person who illegally arrests or confines another person shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than five years, or a fine not exceeding seven million won. (Amended by Act No 5057, Dec. 29, 1995)

When the crime as referred to in paragraph (1) is committed on the lineal ascendant of the offender or one's spouse, one shall be punished by limited imprisonment for not more than ten years, or a fine not exceeding fifteen million won. (Amended by Act No 5057, Dec. 29, 1995)

During her confinement, two Presbyterian evangelists, **Mr Woong Ki LIM**,³ and **Mr Jung Cheol PARK** pressured her to put her signature under a statement, already signed by her parents, asserting that she was willingly accepting to follow their 'exit counselling' program in order to renounce her beliefs in the teachings of the Shincheonji Church (See Annex). She did sign the agreement, because she thought that she would not be able to get out of confinement if she did not do it as she was then held under tight security. It was therefore not her free choice.

¹ Jin-in GU was born in 1992

² Source: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3f49e3ed4.html>

³ **Woong Ki LIM**

- Secretary General of the Gwangju Christian Church Council Anti-Cult Committee Gwangju East Presbyterian (Integrated Presbyterian Denomination) Anti-cult Committee, Expert Committee Member
- Advisory Committee of Anti-cult Committee of Jeonbuk Academy of Evangelization
- Korea Christian Cult Counseling Center, Director of Gwangju Area
- Gwangju Ju Won Church, Evangelist (Presbyterian (Integrated) Denomination)
- Jeonnam Province Daily Paper's Director of Missions Bureau



Presbyterian Deprogrammers Woong Ki LIM and Jung Cheol PARK

During 44 days of confinement, she was submitted to a forcible de-conversion program. When she left the monastery, the Mother Superior whose function is to train nuns said to her "Good job".

The Presbyterian evangelists then thought that they had been successful with their program, but, in fact, she had only acted as if she was 'de-converted.' As soon as she was free and back home, she disappeared to escape the surveillance of her family and the post-reconversion program which included the attendance of religious services and classes about the Presbyterian faith in a Presbyterian church.

In 2017, her parents realized that she still believed in the teachings of the Shincheonji Church⁴ and planned another abduction operation.

Second abduction

New Year times are always a sensitive period for converts who fear an abduction attempt because they cannot escape family reunions and these are misused by families for kidnapping, confinement and coercive de-conversion. Ji-In GU was in such a mood at the end of 2017 and she shared her feelings with her closest friends.

On 29 December 2017, Ji-in parents pretexted a family trip to abduct her again. During her confinement and exit counselling, she lost her life in unclear circumstances. A media outlet⁵ said

"A 27-year-old woman, Ji-in Gu, was killed while she was being held captive at a secluded recreational lodge in Hwasun (Jeonnam, South Jeolla Province). On January 18, the parents of the woman were held responsible for the murder. According to the police department of Hwasun, they bound and gagged their daughter, leading to suffocation. The autopsy revealed a "high possibility of cardiopulmonary arrest due to hypoxic hypoxia. The death was ricocheted from a 'family matter' to a national issue, with more than 120,000 people gathering in Seoul and the other major cities of South Korea on January 28 to protest against coercive conversion, of which the woman was a victim." ⁶

⁴ Source: A video statement of the victim shot outside the place of confinement. It has not been made public but HRWF has access to it.

⁵ The Week Magazine: "In bad faith: Korean woman dies during forced conversion", 19 February 2018. <https://www.theweek.in/news/world/2018/02/19/in-bad-faith-korean-woman-dies-during-forced-conversion.html>

⁶ Most demonstrators were Shincheonji members. There were also some people who joined in the protests on the day on the streets, and some were friends of Shincheonji members.

After the death of Ji-in GU, more than 100 000 signatures were collected in support of an online petition asking for the punishment of those promoting forcible programs of de-conversion from Shincheonji Church. It was

The incident did not remain unnoticed by the US Department of State which noted in its annual country Report on International Religious Freedom published on 19 June 2019⁷:

“In January, following reports that parents killed their daughter while attempting to force her to convert from what the parents viewed as a cult to their own Christian denomination, 120,000 citizens gathered in Seoul and elsewhere to protest against coercive conversion, reportedly conducted by some Christian pastors. The protestors criticized the government and churches for remaining silent on the issue and demanded action.”

The father of the victim was indicted but is on the run, according to Ji-in’s co-religionists.⁸

Impunity: the responsibility of the South Korean authorities

After repeated cases of kidnapping and forced change of religion attempts, several victims of these practices have publicly called for the prosecution of the instigators and perpetrators in these cases; such actions are strictly forbidden by law. However, there appears to be no will on the side of various South Korean authorities to tackle this issue.

In the case of Ji-in Gu, a civil complaint was submitted to the Office of the President of South Korea but it was the police station of Gwangju Bukbu that was assigned to the case. The authorities replied that they tried to contact the family, but they were not at home and their phones were all turned off. No further action was initiated.

On 18 January 2018, Hye Jung LIM, a former victim of abduction for the purpose of de-conversion, posted a letter about the violent death of Ji-in Gu on the website of the Blue House, the executive and official residence of the President. In her post (that was soon deleted from the website) she recalled that on 4 June 2017, Ji-in Gu had called upon the government to prosecute Presbyterian pastors inciting illegal violent actions for the purpose of forced change of religion.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, in charge of religious affairs, received a copy of the civil complaint and answered the applicant in February 2018: “the state cannot interfere with an individual’s choice of religion, religious activities, or that of any particular religious organization, as the Constitution of the Republic of Korea guarantees freedom of religion and the separation between state and religious organizations in Article 20.”

ANNEX: What is the Church of Shincheonji?

Shincheonji Church of Jesus Temple of the Tabernacle of Testimony (Shincheonji in short) is one of the largest Korean Christian new religious movements. The Church was founded in 1984 in South Korea by Chairman Man Hee Lee and currently has more than 200,000 members in 29 countries.

delivered to the Blue House, the residential office of the President of South Korea, but it was deleted from the presidency’s website, and up to this point the Blue House has not provided an official response for this move.

⁷ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/>

⁸ As far as HRWF knows, Ji-in’s mother was a social worker but quit her job to prepare the first forcible program of de-conversion from the Shincheonji Church in 2016. After the first attempt, she went back to work as a contract worker.

Shincheonji teaches that it is the promised church in the Bible, pledged to appear in the times of the fulfillment of Revelation prophecies. It also teaches that, in this special time when the prophecies are fulfilled, the messenger of Jesus, i.e. Chairman Man Hee Lee, starts a new religious world to spread the gospel of the fulfillment of Revelation and to heal the nations. Because of its original theology and rapid growth, the Church encountered the hostility of traditional Christian denominations.

Some Press Coverage

<http://www.koreapost.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=8098>

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<https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Local/Peoples-Post/protest-against-forced-conversions-20180205>

<https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/forced-religious-conversion-victim-ji-in-gu-remembered-18710367>

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Hundreds of Chinese religious asylum seekers rejected in Jeju

Dispute grows over applications from the Church of Almighty God

By Ko Dong-hwan

08.04.2019 (08.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2D1M96w> - Hundreds of members of a Chinese Christian movement have filed for refugee status on Korea's southern Jeju Island, claiming religious persecution.

The Jeju Immigration Office, however, told The Korea Times that so far it has not granted asylum or humanitarian stays to any of the applicants from the Church of Almighty God. China's ruling Communist Party outlawed the CAG more than 12 years ago, labeling it an unorthodox religious cult. Beijing said members of the CAG — 4 million as of 2014 — have been involved in illegal activities, including swindling and inciting suicides, and have distorted China's "orthodox doctrine."

In a discussion that stemmed from the 37th regular session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations (OHCHR), held in March in Geneva, a Chinese government official said the central authority, while guaranteeing the public's religious freedom, will not tolerate any crime in the guise of religious activity.

Kang Young-woo from the Jeju Immigration Office, who oversaw the evaluation of CAG members, told The Korea Times he has seen about 800 CAG asylum seekers since 2014 when they started landing on the tourism-oriented island. He said about 200 sought asylum each year.

"We evaluated their refugee applications strictly based on the Korean Refugees Act," Kang said. "The laws state that those at risk of government persecution for religious reasons can be granted refugee status.

"Most of the applicants, however, didn't provide detailed, credible explanations on how they were actually persecuted in China. They just claimed they had concerns that they might be persecuted had they stayed there."

Kang said some have appealed or filed for administrative litigation to counter the island court's ruling. He said the immigration office did not keep track of how many had taken those steps.

When The Korea Times spoke to the CAG's Korean contact, a Chinese-speaking woman declined to answer inquiries. The group also did not respond to email questions.

The organization's website has contact information for 37 countries.

Observers have divided opinions on China's condemning of the CAG. The Korean religious media outlet churchheresy.com agreed with the Chinese government's view of the movement as pagan and said CAG members seeking asylum around the world should be denied this.

But European non-profit organizations campaigning for religious rights acknowledged the members as victims of Chinese religious persecution and demanded they be given refugee status.

The Italy-based Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), the largest international association of scholars specializing in the study of new religious movements, and three other European associations said following their March OHCHR session that CAG members "face an obvious risk of persecution if compelled to return to China."

"Their fear of persecution is very much real and they have a right to receive asylum in Germany under Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," the group said in the "Universal Periodic Review — Germany," an examination of Germany's human rights record, submitted to the U.N. in Geneva in April. They were concerned that 243 of 291 CAG members who sought asylum that month had been rejected.

Massimo Introvigne, an Italian sociologist and the founding director of CESNUR, said in a Korea Times op-ed in late October that the Chinese asylum seekers on Jeju were victims of "Chinese authorities' extensive fake news campaign in Korea to persuade the local authorities to deport" the migrants.

Fourteen relatives of asylum seekers came to the island in August to find their estranged family members. They held protests demanding the Korean immigration court reject the asylum seekers' applications so they could return to China. Introvigne said the Chinese visitors did not voluntarily protest but were "required to hold a banner reading 'my relative is not a refugee' and request that the court dismiss the asylum bids."

He said it was the Chinese government's plan to "take advantage of a new anti-refugee climate in Korea" — following the arrival of some 500 Yemeni asylum seekers on Jeju Island

who this year divided the country on whether they should be embraced or returned — to have the Jeju CAG asylum seekers rejected.

Oh Myeong-ok, who operates churchheresy.com, and online media outlet Nocut News have reported that the CAG is using Jeju Island as its base to spread its unorthodox doctrine globally.

The asylum seekers are believed to have landed on the island, which provides visa-free entry to Chinese, around 2013. After applying for refugee status, they were issued a temporary G-1 visa that needs to be extended every three months.

They were then believed to have joined other CAG members at camps set up in buildings the organization bought in Seoul, Daegu, Hoengseong County in Gangwon Province and Boeun County in North Chungcheong Province. About 700 asylum seekers stay in a heavily guarded four-story, 9,662 square-meter dormitory in Hoengseong County every weekend. CAG bought it at auction in 2016, according to the Kookmin Ilbo.

The believers reportedly made films and videos of testimony by the converted and spread them online, according to Oh. The material was also saved to SD cards and distributed in China. She said these activities were possible as long as they were done inside buildings registered as properties of a religious establishment, which have immunity under laws protecting religious freedom.

The United Nations Refugee Agency in Korea told The Korea Times it did not have an official stance on the CAG asylum seekers on Jeju Island.

"The UNHCR, in principle, is against the return of any individual who may face persecution upon repatriation to his or her country of origin," UNHCR Korea said. The statement is the code shared by Article 3 of the Korean Refugee Act.

"However, it is up to the respective government and its laws to determine who should be given status through a fair procedure on individual refugee claims. The UNHCR's role in Korea is to assist the Korean government so that its determination and protection procedures are in line with international standards."

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No more Jehovah's Witnesses in prison

Some years ago, Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) carried out a mission in South Korea and published a 200-page report entitled "For a South Korea without prisoners of conscience". After 15 years of advocacy, HRWF welcomes this decision of Seoul and this victory. Since 1953, over 19,300 Jehovah's Witnesses have been sentenced to a combined total of over 36,700 years in prison.

HRWF (01.04.2019) - For the first time since 1953, no more Jehovah's Witness is in prison in South Korea.

On February 28, 2019, the last Jehovah's Witness imprisoned as conscientious objector was released.

At the beginning of this year, E.H. Jeong and K.S. Cha were the last two Jehovah's Witnesses that remained in prison after hundreds of their brothers were released last year. They should have respectively been released on 20 August 2019 and 23 January 2020 at the end of their normal 18-month prison term.

1. **January 18, 2019**

Total of two of Jehovah's Witnesses serving prison terms for conscientious objection to military service.

2. **December 24, 2018**

Six Witness conscientious objectors who have served at least one third of their sentence released.

3. **November 30, 2018**

57 Witness conscientious objectors who have served at least one third of their sentence released.

4. **November 1, 2018**

Supreme Court acknowledges the right to conscientious objection based on genuinely held religious beliefs as "justifiable grounds" for refusing military service.

5. **August 20, 2018**

UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention renders a decision that the imprisonment of two Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors is arbitrary since it is in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

6. **June 28, 2018**

Constitutional Court rules that Article 5, paragraph 1, of the Military Service Act is unconstitutional, since it fails to provide alternative service.

7. **November 3, 2015**

CCPR adopts concluding observations, urging South Korea to provide an alternative civilian service program.

8. **July 9, 2015**

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9. **January 14, 2015**

CCPR adopts Views finding that South Korea violated Article 18 (right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion) and Article 9 (prohibiting arbitrary detention) of the ICCPR by denying 50 Witnesses the right to conscientious objection to military service and imprisoning them.

10. **June 30, 2014**

Twenty-eight cases pending with Constitutional Court on issue of conscientious objection to military service; 618 men imprisoned.

11. **January 28, 2014**

President grants a special amnesty and release on parole that shortens by a month or two the prison terms of about 100 Witness men incarcerated for conscientious objection to military service; 513 are imprisoned as of January 31.

12. **November 2013**

Total of 599 Witnesses detained for conscientious objection to military service.

13. **April 2013**

Seventy percent of Witness inmates are separated from the general prison population and placed in cells with fellow Witnesses.

14. October 25, 2012

CCPR adopts Views finding that South Korea violated Article 18 (right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion) of the ICCPR by denying 388 Witnesses the right to conscientious objection to military service.

15. August 30, 2011

Constitutional Court decision finds that the laws that penalize conscientious objectors who refuse military service do not violate Korea's Constitution.

16. March 24, 2011

CCPR adopts Views finding that South Korea violated Article 18 of the ICCPR by denying 100 Witnesses the right to conscientious objection to military service.

17. January 15, 2009

Presidential Commission on Suspicious Deaths in the Military releases a report confirming the South Korean government was responsible for the death of five young Witnesses from 1975 to 1985 who were imprisoned for conscientious objection.

18. December 2008

South Korea overturns plan to introduce alternative service for conscientious objectors.

19. September 18, 2007

South Korea's Ministry of Defense announces plan to allow conscientious objectors who refuse military service on religious grounds to perform alternative service, promising to revise the military service law and army reserve law.

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21. August 26, 2004

Constitutional Court upholds the constitutionality of the law that punishes conscientious objectors.

22. 2001

Office of Military Manpower Administration discontinues forced enrollment, and prison sentences are reduced from a mandatory three-year sentence to a year and a half.

23. December 1, 1985

Kim, Young-geun dies as a result of the inhuman acts of violence by the military during his imprisonment for conscientious objection.

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28. **1975**

President Park Jeong-hee institutes coercive military conscription, demanding 100 percent participation. Witness men are forcibly taken to military recruitment centers.

29. **January 30, 1973**

Enforcement of Special Act on Criminal Punishment for Violation of Military Service Act, increasing maximum length of imprisonment for conscientious objectors from three years to ten years. Subjects some to repeated conscription.

30. **1953**

Imprisonment of conscientious objectors to military service by South Korea begins.

Only two Jehovah's Witnesses left in prison as conscientious objectors

JW.ORG (04.03.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2PHJrqw> - On November 30, 2018, authorities in South Korea released nearly all of Jehovah's Witnesses still imprisoned as conscientious objectors. With this historic event, the government has taken a monumental step toward ending its policy of prosecuting and imprisoning Jehovah's Witnesses for conscientious objection.

Since the end of the Korean War, South Korea has criminalized conscientious objectors and sentenced them to prison. However, the government has begun to alter its handling of these cases based on two landmark court decisions rendered in 2018.

On June 28, 2018, the Constitutional Court ruled that a portion of the Military Service Act (MSA) is unconstitutional because it fails to provide for alternative service for conscientious objectors. Then, just two months later, the Supreme Court heard the case of a young Witness convicted by lower courts for refusing military service. On November 1, 2018, the Supreme Court ruled 9 to 4 in his favor, concluding that conscientious objection is not a crime.

Based on these rulings, lower courts in South Korea now have the legal basis to reconsider over 900 pending cases concerning Jehovah's Witnesses who have been prosecuted for refusing military service. With this legal groundwork in place, young Witness men hope that these courts will render "not guilty" verdicts in their cases.

A Growing Resolve to Reform the MSA

Prior to the ruling in June 2018, the Constitutional Court had ruled twice before, in 2004 and in 2011, that the MSA does *not* violate the constitution, even though the MSA does not recognize the right to conscientious objection. Yet, regardless of those rulings, some lower court judges still believed they were violating the constitution when they sentenced conscientious objectors to prison. Some courageously declared these young men innocent, recognizing they refused to join the military because of their sincere religious beliefs. In time, more judges adopted this view.

By the time the Supreme Court rendered its decision in November 2018, local courts had already delivered 118 not-guilty decisions concerning Witness conscientious objectors, and 12 of these decisions were rendered by appellate courts. As more judges saw the need to reform the MSA, they suspended hearings in many cases, preferring to wait on the

decisions by the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court rather than render an unjust verdict.

Landmark Ruling From the Constitutional Court

Beginning in 2012, lower courts referred six cases to the Constitutional Court, asking it to rule again on whether the MSA is constitutional. On July 9, 2015, the Constitutional Court held a hearing to examine the matter for the third time.

After deliberating for almost three years, on June 28, 2018, the Constitutional Court acknowledged the right to conscientious objection. The Court ruled that failure to provide alternative service for conscientious objectors is unconstitutional and that the government must change the MSA. Although the present law will remain in force for now, the government must amend it by December 31, 2019, and provide alternative service for conscientious objectors.

The Ministry of National Defense has stated that it will respect the Court's ruling. However, to abide by international standards, acceptable alternative service must not be punitive, it must be truly civilian in nature, and it must not be under military control or supervision. The government has yet to implement an alternative service, but Jehovah's Witnesses hope that the new program will be acceptable for all conscientious objectors.

The Court also ruled on whether it was constitutional to penalize conscientious objectors under the MSA. It determined that criminal courts have the right to imprison those who evade military service. However, it also determined that, depending on the circumstances of each case, a conscientious objector could be found "not guilty" of evading military service based on the provision in the law of "justifiable grounds."

Milestone Decision From the Supreme Court

On November 1, 2018, the Supreme Court recognized the right to conscientious objection for the first time in the country's history. In its ruling, the Court quashed the earlier guilty verdict rendered by the Changwon District Court in June 2016 against a Witness who objected to military service. The Supreme Court stated that the original court had not fully examined whether the defendant had acted on a genuinely held religious conviction, and it returned the case back to the Changwon court for further review.

According to the new ruling, courts may accept conscientious objection based on genuinely held religious beliefs as "justifiable grounds" for refusing military service. In its majority opinion, the Court stated: "Forcing a military duty with criminal punishment or other punitive measures is an excessive restraint of freedom of conscience."

The Supreme Court not only recognized conscientious objection as a lawful right but also vindicated the neutral stance of Witnesses who had been imprisoned in the past. Additionally, the Court stated that "the existence of alternative service is not a prerequisite for the recognition of conscientious objection as a 'justifiable ground.'" Rather, according to the Court, if someone objects to military service because of deep, firm, genuinely held beliefs, this should be recognized as "justifiable grounds."

Far-Reaching Effects of the Supreme Court Decision

Since the Supreme Court decision, nine trial courts and four appellate courts have already handed down not-guilty verdicts for Witnesses who are conscientious objectors. The Supreme Court has also rendered 161 favorable decisions recognizing the rights of conscientious objectors and has referred those cases back to the appellate courts. On December 28, 2018, the government announced its new alternative service program. If

the Presidential Office approves it, the draft bill will then be submitted to the National Assembly for final review.

As previously stated, on November 30, 2018, Korean authorities released on parole 57 Witness conscientious objectors. They had served at least one third of their 18-month sentence. On December 24, 2018, six more Witness conscientious objectors were also released on parole. The remaining two Witnesses still in prison should be released once they have served at least six months of their sentence.

Jehovah's Witnesses welcome this shift in the government's policy. Over three generations, 19,350 Witnesses have been prosecuted and sentenced to a combined total of 36,824 years in prison for refusing to perform military service. Witnesses around the world rejoice at the prospect that South Korean conscientious objectors and their families may no longer have to endure unjust punishment for their sincere beliefs.

Paul Gillies, a spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, stated: "With these two decisions, South Korea has finally chosen to respect the rights of conscientious objectors, upholding its own constitution and international standards. Jehovah's Witnesses hope that all of their fellow believers imprisoned in South Korea for conscientious objection will soon be released. They are optimistic that the judges in pending cases will accept the decision these young men make in adhering to their Bible-trained conscience as 'justifiable grounds' to find them 'not guilty.' Jehovah's Witnesses also hope that the government will expunge the records of the 19,350 Witnesses who have been labeled as criminals for refusing military service based on their strongly held religious beliefs."

Timeline of the persecution of JW conscientious objectors

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