



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jubilee Campaign Delivers Joint Letter Calling on the South Korean Government to Cease Religious Persecution in Response to COVID-19

The letter from 266 organizations and 14,832 individuals representing 57 countries highlights the troubling practices of the South Korean government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

WASHINGTON D.C., September 1, 2020 - Jubilee Campaign, a religious liberty and human rights NGO, delivered a joint letter to South Korean President Moon Jae-In today regarding persecution and scapegoating of religious groups and individuals in South Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic. The letter, sent in cooperation with the North Korea Freedom Coalition and members of the international religious freedom community, was sent on behalf of 266 organizations and 14,832 individuals from 57 countries around the world.

In recent months, media outlets and South Korean government officials, including President Moon himself, have targeted religious communities in South Korea accusing them of causing the spread of COVID-19 throughout the country. These public attacks have especially focused on Protestant Churches and their followers, even though infections have also been traced back to secular gatherings, businesses, public transportation, and other transmission methods. However, the South Korean government has offered little or no rebuke for these methods.

Throughout the summer, millions of individuals continued to flock to beaches, sporting events, political rallies restaurants, coffee shops, bars, karaoke rooms, markets, and tourist attractions across South Korea. However, Church congregations faced the brunt of public outcry and government criticism in the face of rising cases despite many Churches following health guidelines such as mandating masks and social distancing at their gatherings.

Ann Buwalda, Executive Director of Jubilee Campaign, stated, “Scapegoating and persecution of religious communities in any country is troubling, but I am shocked to see this coming from South Korea. I have worked hand-in-hand with South Koreans on issues of religious freedom and human rights for decades. I truly hope that President Moon will reconsider these tactics and honor the ‘first freedom’, which is religious liberty, an inalienable human right.” Suzanne Scholte, Chairman of the North Korea Freedom Coalition and President of the Defense Forum Foundation, stated, “The Moon administration's attacks on North Korean defectors and human rights advocates and its targeting and jailing of journalists has expanded to the targeting of Churches and people of religious faith. President Moon must uphold the principles of freedom enshrined in South Korea's constitution as well as its international obligations.”

The joint letter also highlights the possibility of an outbreak of religious persecution in South Korea and other parts of the world and emphasizes that the South Korean government's recent actions have the potential to undermine religious tolerance and social unity in a nation founded on liberty. Jubilee Campaign and the signatories of the letter call on the South Korean government to uphold the fundamental right of religious freedom and to cease targeting specific communities, especially religious ones, for the alleged spread of the coronavirus.



August 28, 2020

His Excellency Moon Jae-In
President of the Republic of Korea
c/o Embassy of the Republic of Korea to the United States
2450 Massachusetts Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20008

Re: Religious Persecution in South Korea

Your Excellency:

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, work to promote inalienable human rights and religious freedoms in various nations across the world. We are deeply troubled to see that the spread of the novel coronavirus has led to your government infringing on religious freedom in the Republic of Korea. This unjust treatment and persecution occurs even though many religious organizations have temporarily halted in-person worship services and complied with national health regulations. Specific religious communities have also come under fire by your government. In early July, it was announced that Protestant churches are prohibited from holding bible studies, choir practice, and other activities. They are also banned from singing and praying loudly and are required to keep digital records of active church participants. While these regulations appear to address health concerns regarding large gatherings, they fail to mention new coronavirus cases in secular contexts and have discriminatorily presented churches as responsible for the pandemic.

In a statement by the United Christian Churches of Korea (UCCCK), they explained that what matters is not public gatherings, *per se*, but compliance with quarantine guidelines.¹ They also pointed out that government efforts are contrary to the preventative efforts of many churches. The UCCCK itself has taken steps to limit and prevent the spread of the virus by cancelling and postponing religious events and asking its churches to close or decrease the capacity of services.

Nevertheless, South Korean citizens report having received text messages pleading with them to not attend religious services. The municipal government in Guri even offered a cash reward to anyone who reports religious congregations holding events or 'disobeying' preventative measures. There have been reports that restrictions on public gatherings primarily target religious activities and worship and have not been similarly implemented for other non-religious gatherings, such as political party gatherings, entertainment venues, and public transportation, locations where person-to-person contact is extremely common, promoting the spread of the virus. Former Gyeonggi Provincial Governor Kim Moon-soo observed:

"If we're talking about infectious disease spread, how about the subway? It is so crowded. Then they must halt the subway operations. 3.5 million people use the subway daily. When we go to church, we check our temperatures, we sanitize our hands, we write our contact information, of course we check to make sure we wear masks, and we sit apart a good distance. The service is short and then we go home. We cannot not take the subway. I use the subway multiple times a day. So everyone can carry on as usual. Only church services are prevented. Isn't this clearly an oppression of the right to worship?"²

¹ Protestant community protests government's ban on church gatherings, *The Korea Herald*, 9 July 2020.

² A Young Energetic IT attorney, Will Fraud in South Korea's 2020 Election be Uncovered?, *Kim Moon-soo TV*, Translation by *East Asia Research Center*, 2 June 2020.

To view the letter in its entirety, please click [here](#).

About Jubilee Campaign: [Jubilee Campaign](#) is a non-governmental organization that promotes the human rights and religious liberty of ethnic and religious minorities in nations around the world, aids and assists refugees and victims of human trafficking, and acts as a voice for those suffering in silence. Jubilee Campaign also specifically focuses on North Korean human rights and is a founding member of the North Korea Freedom Coalition.

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A Vital Voice for Those Suffering in Silence

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