

UN Submission Invites States to Review How Religious Minorities are Assessed

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A written statement to the United Nations Human Rights Council encourages decisions about faith communities to rest on verifiable evidence.

London, 24 July 2026: Two international human rights organisations have submitted a joint written statement to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The submission was made by United for Human Rights and the Coordination of Associations and Individuals for Freedom of Conscience (CAP-LC), an organisation holding special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. It was filed to the 62nd session of the Council on 25 May and circulated on 10 June under document number A/HRC/62/NGO/236.

The statement invites public authorities to draw on established facts when reaching decisions that affect religious communities. It also encourages states to consider the criteria they use when assessing minority faith groups.

A question with wider significance

CAP-LC presents the matter as one that reaches beyond any single community. The organisation asks how a religious minority might best be assessed, and suggests that objective evidence offers a helpful starting point.

The statement notes that information circulating internationally can inform administrative decisions in other countries. In the United Kingdom, CAP-LC refers to the outcome of an application to register Shincheonji as a charity, alongside the use of the word "cult" in public discussion. In Germany and other German-speaking countries, the organisation says some members have described difficulties in their professional and social lives.

For CAP-LC, these examples illustrate why the sourcing of information matters. The organisation suggests that careful assessment helps communities to take part fully in public life.

The proceedings in South Korea

The submission refers to legal proceedings involving Lee Man-hee, the 95-year-old chairman of the church. He was detained on 24 June in connection with alleged violations of the Political Parties Act, and was indicted on 29 June. Investigators allege that between July 2021 and January 2024 he directed the registration of around 50,000 church members with a particular political party.

The Church has responded that individual members took part in political activity of their own accord and has cooperated throughout the investigation, including with searches and seizures, and has

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expressed regret at the detention of a man of 95.

CAP-LC does not take a position on the merits of the case. The organisation restates two long-standing principles. Every person facing prosecution benefits from the presumption of innocence.

Any deprivation of liberty is expected to meet the tests of necessity and proportionality.

The statement also notes that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognises the right of every citizen to take part in political life. Discussion within the academic community

Religious scholars signing an appeal requesting an end to Chairman Lee's detention.

Related themes were discussed at the Ninth Annual Conference of the European Academy of Religion, held in Rome on 3 July. A session titled "Shincheonji, a Korean New Religion in Global Context" brought together scholars presenting academic papers on the church.

Dr Massimo Introvigne, founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions, observed that legislation across European Union countries generally treats the imprisonment of people over 80 as exceptional. He referred to the United Nations Mandela Rules, which set out that pre-trial detention is not intended to be the norm.

Eric Roux, president of the European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom, spoke about human dignity, and suggested that the circumstances would benefit from review.

Alessandro Amicarelli, a solicitor of the Senior Courts of England and Wales and chairman of the European Federation for Freedom of Belief, described South Korea as a country he has long regarded as a firm democracy in which human rights are upheld.

An invitation to reflect

CAP-LC closes by encouraging states, courts and international institutions to consider how religious minorities are assessed, and to ensure that decisions rest on evidence that can be verified.

Freedom of religion, equality before the law and the right to a fair trial are described in the statement as foundations of democratic society. The organisation offers the case as an opportunity for reflection, in a spirit of welcome towards communities of every belief.

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