

Stigma Across Borders: Concerns Grow Over Discrimination Against Shincheonji Members Abroad

International human rights group CAP LC submits written statement to U.N. Human Rights Council, urging that administrative and judicial decisions be based on verifiable evidence

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Joint written statement submitted by United for Human Rights, Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 May 2026]

Washington, D.C, District of Columbia Jul 9, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.IssueWire.com)) - Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony, said on July 9 that the international human rights organization CAP LC, the Coordination des Associations et Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, had submitted a joint written statement to the U.N. Human Rights Council expressing concern over the spread of discrimination and stigma against members of Shincheonji Church of Jesus.

In the statement, CAP LC focused less on the controversy surrounding Shincheonji Church of Jesus itself than on the standards by which such matters are assessed. The group expressed concern that negative perceptions and unverified materials formed in South Korea, if disseminated abroad, could have a serious impact not only on public opinion in other countries but also on administrative and judicial decisions.

CAP LC therefore urged governments to base any decisions concerning Shincheonji Church of Jesus on verifiable evidence and clear legal standards.

Shincheonji Church of Jesus said the statement showed that if unfounded stigma were allowed to gain international acceptance, other religious minorities could also be judged in the same manner, underscoring the responsibility of states to protect the rights of all religious minorities.

CAP LC, which holds special consultative status with the U.N. Economic and Social Council, or ECOSOC, is an international NGO that has consistently raised internationally watched cases involving religious freedom. It has previously brought before the United Nations issues including the persecution of the Church of Almighty God in China and concerns over violations of religious freedom stemming from the Japanese government's request for a dissolution order against the Unification Church, formally known as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification.

Shincheonji Church of Jesus said the fact that such an international NGO had issued a statement on the matter demonstrated that the case involving the church was not merely a domestic controversy in South Korea, but one that was also drawing attention in light of international human rights standards.

The statement cited cases in the United Kingdom and German-speaking countries, saying that negative perceptions of Shincheonji Church of Jesus members had gone beyond public opinion and led to administrative proceedings and interference with individuals' social lives.

In the United Kingdom, the Charity Commission rejected Shincheonji Church of Jesus' application for registration, describing the church as a "cult," a term whose legal definition remains unclear. CAP LC pointed out that the use of such terms without a clear legal basis in official administrative procedures can produce a strong social stigma.

In Germany and other German-speaking countries, cases have been reported of members facing workplace discrimination amid negative public sentiment driven by certain media outlets and church figures. CAP LC said a critical book published in 2025 by evangelical activists was a major factor in deepening such discriminatory perceptions.

Shincheonji Church of Jesus said such cases were not limited to isolated instances of harm identified in some countries. It said unfounded stigma and unverified claims were causing disadvantages for individual members in their workplaces, families and broader social lives, and called for administrative and judicial decisions in each country to be based on clear legal standards and verifiable evidence.

The statement also shed light on controversy in South Korea over political participation. CAP LC criticized claims by some political forces that the party membership of Shincheonji Church of Jesus members amounted to "religion-politics collusion," saying that political participation should not be treated as grounds for suspicion solely because those involved are members of a particular religion.

On that basis, CAP LC called on the South Korean government to uphold freedom of religion, the principle of non-discrimination and the state's religious neutrality.

Amid these concerns, South Korea is conducting an investigation into allegations related to church members' party membership. On June 24, a court issued an arrest warrant for Chairman Lee Man-hee, citing concerns including possible destruction of evidence. On June 29, the government joint investigation headquarters indicted Lee while in detention on charges including violations of the Political Parties Act.

While the final determination of the charges will be made through the trial process, Shincheonji Church of Jesus maintains that this case, too, should be handled in accordance with due process and objective evidence, rather than social perceptions or political controversy. The church said this position was also in line with the concerns raised in CAP LC's statement.

The necessity and proportionality of detention during the investigation have also emerged as issues. Shincheonji Church of Jesus maintains that the necessity and proportionality of detention should be subject to stricter scrutiny, given that Lee, born in 1931 and now 95, is of advanced age, has actively cooperated with the investigation, and that key materials have already been secured through searches and seizures.

Shincheonji Church of Jesus said the cases of discrimination cited in CAP LC's statement and the investigation in South Korea raised a common question: what standards should state judicial and administrative authorities apply when dealing with religious minorities?

The church said the issue went beyond controversy over a particular religious group and served as a measure of whether the rights of religious minorities are being equally protected in domestic and international procedures. It also said this was why the international community was watching the case — to determine whether legal grounds and the principles of due process are being consistently upheld in South Korea's investigation and in administrative and judicial decisions in other countries.

Ultimately, the church said, how the case is resolved would serve as a test of the strength of social and institutional trust in the protection of religious minorities, beyond the matter of a single religious organization.



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