



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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**Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, a non-governmental organization 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.

[17 August 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **The Republic of Korea: The Jeongeup Murder Case and the Continued Persecution of Shincheonji**

On June 16, 2022, the Republic of Korea was shocked by a horrific murder case. A man killed his ex-wife and her sister-in-law at the house of her younger brother, who was seriously wounded, in Jeongeup. The Korean public opinion was deeply disturbed by the incident, and called for an exemplary punishment of the assassin.

However, on June 18 the Christian TV network CBS broadcast a statement of the murderer, who said he had committed the crime because his ex-wife was a member of a Korean Christian new religious movement, Shincheonji. It came out that in the days before the murder the assassin went through four counseling sessions with Pastor Oh Myeong-hyeon of the Heresy Research Center, an institution specialized in fighting Shincheonji and other groups it considers “heretic,” which also supports kidnapping and forced conversion (deprogramming). Obviously Pastor Oh did not suggest that the man killed his ex-wife, but he excited his hatred against Shincheonji. To deflect blame from himself, Pastor Oh later held a press conference where he claimed that Shincheonji was responsible for the crime and should be punished. If the wife had not joined Shincheonji the crime would never have happened, he said.

This is obviously a twisted and scandalous logic, which reverses the roles of the victim and of the perpetrator. However, it was amplified by CBS and other Christian media, which tried to turn the public opinion against Shincheonji rather than against the assassin and Pastor Oh who had counseled and excited him.

This incident, in which two lives were lost, cannot be considered outside the broader framework of the persecution of Shincheonji in the Republic of Korea through violence, harassment, and slander.

After an incident where a Shincheonji devotee had her COVID-19 infection misdiagnosed in a public hospital as a common cold, was sent home, and infected several co-religionists, Shincheonji and his leader, Chairman Lee Man Hee, were accused of having contributed to spreading the virus by not cooperating with the health authorities, particularly when they had requested a list of all the church’s members. On August 12, 2022, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Korea confirmed the first and second degree verdicts who had declared Chairman Lee not guilty of any COVID-related offenses, and acknowledged that that “there was no evidence of obstruction” of anti-COVID efforts by Shincheonji. On the contrary, after an agreement with the authorities about the lists to be submitted to them was concluded, “Shincheonji actively cooperated with the submission of data and promptly provided them to the CDCH [Central Disease Control Headquarters].”

When it learned about the incident involving one of its members, Shincheonji quickly moved online all its services and meetings. Actually, it did it before most other Korean churches. That Shincheonji acted as a voluntary “plague-spreader” was just fake news created by its opponents. The Supreme Court decision has confirmed that Shincheonji did not violate any COVID-related regulations, yet the fake news continue to be spread both in the Republic of Korea, where they have considerably limited the activities of the movement, and abroad.

For the fake news to circulate, somebody should spread them. The Jeongeup murder case has confirmed the sinister role played by organizations such as the Heresy Research Center and pastors such as Oh. They have kidnapped with the purpose of deprogramming more than 3,000 members of Shincheonji. Two female Shincheonji members have died in connection with deprogramming. In 2007, Kim Sun-Hwa (1959–2007) was beaten with a metal bar and killed by her ex-husband, whom she had divorced after the deprogramming instigated by him had failed. Gu Ji-In (1992–2018) was bound and gagged by her father while she was trying to escape deprogramming, which caused suffocation and eventually death in 2018.

The criminal practice of deprogramming is illegal in all democratic countries, but continues in the Republic of Korea where it is supported by the hate speech and propaganda of CBS and other Christian media. Without this continuous slander of Shincheonji, society and courts of law would not tolerate deprogramming.

The Jeongeup murder case confirms once again the sad truth that fake news, hate speech, slander, and the promotion of kidnapping and forced conversion kill.

CA Liberté de Conscience urges the Republic of Korea's government to guarantee the religious liberty of all religious minorities, including Shincheonji, and prevent and severely punish both hate speech and hate crimes such as the Jeongeup murder, without falling into the trap of those who, when confronted with serious crimes, blame the victims and absolve the perpetrators.

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