

A Global Joint Statement Condemns Cancellation of International Religious Event in South Korea

Gyeonggi Provincial Government's Sudden Cancellation Raises Concerns of Bias and Violation of Rights

Joint Statement of Protest to the Gyeonggi Provincial Government of the Republic of Korea

We express our deep shock and grave regret regarding the cancellation of the "Religious Leaders' Forum for Freedom, Peace, and the Reunification of Korea and Graduation Ceremony" that was scheduled to be held at the Imjingak Peace Nuri in Gyeonggi Province, Republic of Korea, on October 30th. This was a global and international event where more than 30,000 participants from 78 countries were to gather to discuss peace and celebrate religious freedom. However, the Gyeonggi Provincial Government and the Gyeonggi Tourism Organization unilaterally notified us of the venue cancellation on the day of the event without any prior notice.

The Republic of Korea has been recognized as a global advanced nation, distinguished by its sophisticated culture and high level of civic consciousness. We are appalled that such a nation is now perpetrating irresponsible and violent administrative actions that violate the constitutional principles of religious freedom and separation of church and state. The event preparations were carried out legally over several months, and even the day before the event, we received explicit confirmation that "there were no plans to cancel the venue reservation." Nevertheless, on the day of the event, the Gyeonggi Provincial Government and the Gyeonggi Tourism Organization succumbed to pressure from privileged Christian groups and unilaterally cancelled the venue reservation. We find the grounds for cancellation incomprehensible. Given that other events have proceeded at the same venue without any restrictions, it is evident that the sudden cancellation by the Gyeonggi Provincial Government and the Gyeonggi Tourism Organization constitutes religious oppression through abuse of public authority. Is this how biased and arbitrary administrative decisions are made in the Republic of Korea? How can any citizen trust and follow the nation's administrative system when it has lost its principles, fairness, and transparency?

Melbourne, Victoria Dec 2, 2024 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.IssueWire.com)) - An administrative decision by a South Korean government agency sparked international controversy, raising concerns about religious freedom. On November 27, religious leaders and opinion leaders delivered a joint protest statement to the Government of the Republic of Korea condemning the cancellation of the venue rental on October 29th as an act of biased religious oppression through public power. Signed by 402 organizations, 758 religious representatives, and 977 individuals across the globe, totaling 1,735 signatories, the statement emphasized the psychological and financial damage caused to the international participants and highlighted the need for accountability.

On October 30 the “Religious Leaders Forum and Graduation Ceremony,” a joint initiative by two prominent religious organizations, was set to take place in Paju, South Korea. The event was expected to draw over 30,000 participants from 78 countries, including 1,000 religious leaders representing Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism.

However, the Gyeonggi Tourism Organization (GTO), a public entity under Gyeonggi Province, abruptly canceled the venue rental at 11 pm on the morning of the event, when preparations were already underway. This decision, made without prior notice, has resulted in significant financial damage to the international event and its organizers. As The first clause of Article 20 of the South Korean Constitution states: "All citizens shall enjoy freedom of religion.", they argue that the cancellation constitutes an unconstitutional act of discrimination against a specific religion, violating religious freedom, human rights, and due process of law and an act that divides the people and divides the country into two.

The Joint Protest Statement demands accountability for this situation and calls for an official apology from the Gyeonggi Provincial Government and the Gyeonggi Tourism Organization to both domestic and international religious organizations and the global community. It also requires the government to take appropriate disciplinary actions against the officials responsible for handling this matter and to strengthen fair and transparent venue reservation procedures and preliminary consultation systems.

Over 88 global leaders including international law experts, religious leaders, education experts, heads of organizations, journalists from around the world sent official documents and protest letters to the Republic of Korea upon hearing the news of the cancellation of the event, expressing shock and disappointment at this administrative action and demanding prompt and appropriate measures. In particular, international law experts from around the world, including those with experience as prime ministers, vice ministers of justice, chief justices of the Supreme Court, presidents of the Constitutional Court, lawyers, and professors of international law, pointed out that the cancellation of the event on this day was an act that violated the Constitution, and religious leaders expressed concern that it was a biased decision and an anti-peaceful act that infringed on religious freedom.

Since November 15, Religious leaders and members of Shincheonji Church of Jesus have held rallies outside the Gyeonggi Provincial Office and Gyeonggi Tourism Organization, condemning the biased cancellation urging the government to address the issue and take measures to prevent recurrence.

Timeline of Events Leading to the Cancellation

- **July 22:** Notification of approval for the rental from 29th to 31st October by GTO.

- **October 2:** Full payment of the rental fee.
- **October 16:** A working-level meeting was held to discuss the event's size, arrangements, safety plans, and special effects. The GTO reviewed all details and completed a safety inspection. While Paju City was designated a danger zone due to potential North Korean provocations, officials assured organizers that this designation would not impact the event.
- **October 23 & 28:** Officials confirmed twice that "there are no plans to cancel the rental."
- **October 28:** A rally was hosted by 'SUGICHONG', a Christian council of the capital area of Korea urging the cancellation of a venue rental.
- **October 29:** At 11 o'clock on the day of the rental while the event was being set up, the Gyeonggi Province Governor Kim Dong-yeon unilaterally notified the cancellation, citing security concerns related to recent North Korean actions and activities by a North Korean defector group. Organizers allege that pressure from opposing groups, including vested religious interests, influenced the decision.
- **October 19-20, November 4:** Notably, other events in the same area proceeded without disruption.

The venue cancellation has resulted in losses of tens of billions of won invested in event preparations, and the psychological damage suffered by participants from around the world is far more severe. Religious freedom has been ruthlessly trampled upon, and the Republic of Korea's national dignity and credibility have plummeted. How can this possibly be compensated? We demand accountability for this situation and call for an official apology. The Gyeonggi Provincial Government and the Gyeonggi Tourism Organization must acknowledge their responsibility for this incident and formally apologize to both domestic and international religious organizations and the global community. Appropriate disciplinary actions must be taken against the officials responsible for handling this matter to restore Korea's reputation as a nation where the rule of law and principles prevail. Furthermore, to prevent any future discriminatory and biased administrative actions based on demands from privileged groups, it is imperative to strengthen fair and transparent venue reservation procedures and preliminary consultation systems.

We strongly urge the Republic of Korea to respect the religious freedom and human rights guaranteed by its Constitution. If this incident, which has undermined the fundamental principles and common sense of a democratic society, is left unaddressed, the nation's dignity and credibility will be irreparably damaged, and the foundation of respect and harmony that sustains our society will collapse. The Governor of Gyeonggi Province, who bears responsibility for all these events, must formally apologize to the 30,000 religious leaders and distinguished individuals from various sectors across 57 countries who were scheduled to attend this event. Furthermore, to ensure that our collective efforts to protect religious freedom and fairness in the Republic of Korea are not in vain, we demand prompt action from the government and a response to this statement.

November 27, 2024

Jointly signed by 402 organizations, 758 religious representatives, and 377 individuals across the globe, totaling 1,738 people



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