

Fear of Covid-19 Coronavirus in South Korea Results in Fear of Shincheonji, Church of Jesus

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NEW YORK, NEW YORK, USA, March 2, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Fear of Covid-19 Coronavirus in South Korea Results in Fear of Shincheonji, Church of Jesus

The rapid proliferation of the coronavirus (COVID-19) resulted in 3,786 confirmed cases as of March 1, 2020 in South Korea according to the Korea Center for Disease and Control and Prevention. While the cause and solution of the infection have not been identified, over 500 church members of Shincheonji, Church of Jesus (SCJ) tested positive for the virus and have become the target of scapegoating and blame.



Fear of Covid-19 Prompts South Koreans to Wear Face Masks

On February 19, South Korean President Moon Jae-In stated that a full survey and diagnosis of Shincheonji members were necessary. On February 25, SCJ submitted a list of 210,000 members to health authorities with the condition the personal information of their members remain protected. The next day, health authorities began telephone surveys and tests on those who showed symptoms.

In reports on February 7 and 10, Chosun Ilbo, a major newspaper in South Korea, reported people with symptoms of pneumonia were found positive with the virus according to the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters. This was before any Shincheonji member was diagnosed. The medical community noted that the COVID-19 cases had already proliferated before the mass infection of members of the church. This raises doubts on reports echoed by some Western media that patient 31, a female Shincheonji member, had been the main agent spreading the infection throughout the country.

The mass infections focused attention on the Shincheonji Church. Unfortunately, several media reports relied on low-level internet sources and interviews with people who regard SCJ as a serious competitor and have labeled it a cult.

"Shincheonji members generally do not recognize themselves in reports they read in the media. For instance, they do not regard their founder, Chairman Lee Man Hee, as the second coming of Jesus or as God. Publishing these claims without fact-checking reveals media do not do their homework and only relied on bias sources," said Mr. Kim Shin Chang, General Director of Department of International Relations of Shincheonji Headquarters.

Another example of societal pressure against SCJ was covered by Munwha Broadcasting

Corporation (MBC), a leading South Korean television. They reported on February 26 a female SCJ member fell from a window of her house and died as a result of her husband's violence. The husband tried to coerce her to leave Shincheonji. Before her death, the police received reports of domestic violence.

As confirmed in several reports by Belgian NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF), Shincheonji members have been the main target of kidnapping and confinement promoted by pastors with the aim of compelling them to renounce their faith, called forced conversion or deprogramming, resulting in over 1,000 human rights violation cases.

When one of its members died during a coercive conversion attempt, Shincheonji reacted with protest of more than 120,000 Korean citizens in January 2018 to demand justice. The annual 2019 International Religious Freedom Report by the U.S. Department of State mentioned the incident. However, the Korean government did nothing.

"We are asked why we hide our identity or affiliation to Shincheonji. What is happening now with the virus outbreak clearly answers the question. When the fact that we belong to Shincheonji becomes known, we are forced to quit our jobs. We cannot send our kids to school. Vulnerable members are exposed to domestic violence. We fear the coronavirus, and we also fear the virus named hatred and insult." states a member of Shincheonji.

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