

Brisbane and Gold Coast faith leaders and peace advocates call for release of Chairman Lee at Declaration of Religious Freedom & World Peace Conference

On the 1st of August 2026, the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony – Brisbane Branch hosted the Declaration of Religious Freedom & World Peace Conference from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm in Brisbane, Australia.

The conference brought together religious leaders, pastors and human rights advocates to provide a platform for dialogue on religious freedom, human rights and peaceful coexistence.

The primary focus of the event was the recent detention of Chairman Lee and what organisers described as its implications for religious freedom in South Korea.

According to publicly reported information, Chairman Lee was detained on 24 June and indicted on 30 June over alleged breaches of South Korea's Political Parties Act. Investigators allege that he directed the registration of approximately 50,000 Shincheonji Church members with a political party between July 2021 and January 2024. Shincheonji Church has denied the allegations, maintaining that members participated voluntarily as individual citizens and stating that both the church and Chairman Lee have fully cooperated with investigators throughout the inquiry, including during search and seizure procedures.



Presentations during the Brisbane conference introduced Chairman Lee, the 95-year-old Chairman of Shincheonji Church of Jesus, noting his service as a veteran of the Korean War and his longstanding emphasis on peace, reconciliation and interfaith cooperation. These experiences during the war shaped Chairman Lee's commitment to preventing future conflict through dialogue and mutual understanding.



The keynote address by a Shincheonji spokesperson outlined the purpose of the conference and emphasised the importance of protecting religious freedom and promoting peace. Further presentations provided an overview of Chairman Lee's leadership, teachings and peace initiatives, as well as Shincheonji's humanitarian work and international engagement in fostering interfaith dialogue. An overview of the current legal proceedings was also presented, followed by an invitation for attendees to support the Declaration of Religious Freedom & World Peace and consider signing a joint petition advocating for the protection of religious freedom and peaceful coexistence in South Korea.

Several speakers shared their experiences with Shincheonji Church and Chairman Lee, while others spoke on the importance of religious freedom. Speakers stated that Chairman Lee's experience as a survivor and veteran of the Korean War has influenced his lifelong commitment to peace and reconciliation. They also stated that Shincheonji Church has cooperated fully

with the investigation since search and seizure operations began in January 2026 and noted that no court verdict has yet been delivered.

Several speakers expressed the view that minority religious groups can face prejudice because they are outside traditional denominations and argued that legal processes should remain impartial regardless of a group's religious affiliation. Reference was also made to Chairman Lee's previous detention during the COVID-19 pandemic under South Korea's Infectious Disease Control Act. Speakers noted that he was detained for 104 days before later being found not guilty in those proceedings, arguing that this illustrated the importance of due process and the presumption of innocence.

The conference also featured remarks from guest speakers Dr Arsalan M. Falarti, Reverend Peter Moore and Pastor Desire Ntahiraja.

Dr Arsalan spoke of having met Chairman Lee at several conferences and peace events in South Korea. Drawing on those personal experiences, he described Chairman Lee as a person of kindness who demonstrated a genuine commitment to peacebuilding. He said he believed the detention was unfair and unjust.

Pastor Desire remarked:

"I am not here to say whether Mr. Lee Man-Hee is guilty or innocent. That is for the courts to decide. But from my understanding, every person should be treated as innocent until proven guilty. I believe this is one of the most important principles of justice and a fundamental human right.

Earlier in his life, Chairman Lee served in the defence of the Republic of Korea during the Korean War. Whatever people's opinions of him may be, I believe he deserves the same fair legal process and dignity as every other person.

I also understand that the court may have genuine concerns about protecting the investigation, including possible interference with witnesses or evidence. I respect that responsibility. At the same time, I believe it is reasonable to ask whether detention is the only way to achieve those goals."

Other attendees also expressed surprise at Chairman Lee's age and his detention. Pastor Akopa Deng encouraged those present to stand together in support of religious freedom, saying that issues of justice affect everyone regardless of religious affiliation. He suggested that people should consider how they would wish to be treated if they found themselves in similar

circumstances to Chairman Lee. He endorsed the need for petitions and events such as this to raise awareness of the issue.

Evangelist Chris Ebare expressed support for the purpose of the event and welcomed the gathering. He said he hoped to involve other ministry leaders in future events and emphasised the need to raise awareness internationally and encourage other nations to lend their voices in support.



The conference concluded with religious leaders and attendees signing the Declaration of Religious Freedom & World Peace together with a joint petition calling on South Korean authorities to consider Chairman Lee's age, health and the non-violent nature of the allegations when determining whether continued detention is necessary.

Several Brisbane and Gold Coast religious leaders expressed concern that the continued detention of a 95-year-old religious leader in a case involving non-violent allegations raises important humanitarian and human rights questions. Speakers concluded by encouraging continued dialogue, respect for due process, protection of religious freedom and peaceful coexistence among all faith communities.