

## Heaven's Gathering Leader Sentence Confirmed

The Hankyoreh

Gwang-seob Jeong, reporter ([iguassu@hani.co.kr](mailto:iguassu@hani.co.kr))

29 October, 2001

Sentencing was handed down in the 1st Supreme Court of Korea (Chief Justice, Gi-won Bae) in the case where the Heaven's Gathering leader and his wife used believers' church offerings and induced their followers to go to the bank, giving assurance for each other to obtain loans, in violation of the Additional Punishment Law on Specific Crimes. Defendants Mr. Haengryong Mo (67), and his wife Mrs. Gwi-dal Park (53) were sentenced to 8 years and 5 years, respectively, for their crimes. In the justices' remarks, they stated, "The defendants told their believers that doomsday was coming, and thereby extorted money from them. Furthermore, through this doomsday prophesy, they convinced their believers to go to banks, co-sign for one another, and receive further funds - a total of 30 billion won (300억 원)- through bank loans, in addition to the 3 billion won (30억 원) the leader and his wife took from their followers." In 2000, followers of the Heaven's Gathering movement sued the leaders, and in March, the Supreme Court handed out an innocent verdict and sent the case to a lower court. The case then went to the Seoul High Court, and the judges declared a guilty verdict. It was then redirected back to the Supreme Court when the defendants appealed the decision, whereupon the Supreme Court judges declared a definitive, guilty verdict.

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## Doomsday Group "Heaven's Gathering"'s 38.4 billion won Loan Scam Stole from 1500 Believers...Leader, Wife and 42 People in Total Charged

Chosun Daily

Myeong-Jin Lee, reporter ([mjlee@chosun.com](mailto:mjlee@chosun.com))

10 July, 2000

On 9 July, 2000, the Seoul Prosecutor sentenced Heaven's Gathering - a doomsday religious group with approximately 1500 members - for using its members to get approximately 38 billion won through bank loans. Mr. Hyo-nam Moon, director of the The Seoul District Public Prosecutor's Office's Major Crimes department, investigated the group (Heaven's Gathering), and leader Mr. Haengryong Mo and his wife, Gwi-dal Park, as well as the secretary (of finances), Nak-woo Lee (47), the group's lawyer, Dong-beom Gang (43), and others - a total of 42 people - and formally charged them. Furthermore, Mr. Hyo-nam Moon sought to prosecute another 113 members of the religious group. As a result of their investigation, it was discovered that the leader had told his followers that someone from heaven visited him on Cheonma Mountain and spoke to him personally. In addition, from 1985, the leader gathered disciples (additional followers) with the pretense of teaching them how to create *ki* [universal energy; spirit]. In 1990, the leader then prophesied that doomsday would come in 2000, and spread his prediction far and wide. Mr. Mo, the leader, continued to spread his prophesy and made 23 doomsday groups throughout South Korea. Using his followers, he was able to obtain 2,432 small loans from 5,000 banks around the country. According to the investigation, the total funds - for which there is evidence - obtained through this fraud amounted to 38.4 billion won (384억 원). The prosecutor suspects that the total is over 100 billion won (1000억 원). The investigation concluded that the leader, Mr. Mo, lied to banks to obtain 10 billion won (100억 원), through which he established 10 companies, together known as FM Group, and named his son as the Vice President. He spent 15 billion won (150억 원) to construct a building called Daeracheon Palace in Hongcheon city, in Gangwon Province. His

other victims in this fraud included numerous other individuals, involving civil servants in the central government, lawyers, oriental medicine doctors, teachers, military personnel, and so on, so-called white-collar workers who can easily obtain bank loans. Among those, the deputy director of the government's financial department, Mr. K (48) borrowed 540 million won (5억4천원) from the bank, but over time was not able to pay the interest payments, and retired from his job. Another victim, Mr. Y (41), along with a colonel in the army, Mr. C (46), borrowed large sums of money, and also, due to the high interest payments, had to quit their jobs. Dong-beom Gang (43), a lawyer, one of the perpetrators of this fraud, was directly involved in the group's members' borrowing of 2.1 billion won (21억원) from banks. When the leader, Mr. Mo, and his wife were arrested by the prosecutor, Mr. Gang insisted it was a suppression of religious freedoms. Mr. Gang told the followers that the leader declared that doomsday was delayed by one year. The prosecutor issued an arrest warrant for a high-ranking member of the church, and while attempting to trace the location of the slush funds collected by the leader through his scheme, the prosecutor requested the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to revoke the church organization's legal recognition, and also had its property seized. The prosecutor said, "Because Heaven's Gathering was a legally recognized religion, people didn't think it was fake, and believed it more easily. Thus, white-collar workers were more easily attracted to it. When there are incidents involving churches, usually they are not very significant, but this time, the amount of money involved is larger, and the methods were more sophisticated."

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### **Court Declares, "Heaven's Gathering Must Compensate its Believers"**

20 December, 2002 (Friday) 1:51 p.m.

(Seoul, Yonhap News)

On the 20<sup>th</sup>, Seoul District Court reached a verdict in civil case no. 18 (Chief Justice, Young-ho Kim), in which Mr. Moon (name has been changed) and 3 other believers of Heaven's Gathering sued the religious group and its leader, Mr. Haengryong Mo, to recover their money, in which Chief Justice Kim stated, "Mr. Mo (defendant) must pay to each of the plaintiffs (Mr. Moon and other believers) a sum of money in the range of 154,000,000 won to 416,900,000 won."

In his sentencing, the justice wrote, "The defendants insisted that the believers, through their own carelessness and imprudence, gave donations out of their belief and confidence in the church, but this excuse for the defendants' deliberate effort to gain funds illegally cannot be accepted."

The panel of judges further stated, "The [Heaven's Gathering] foundation insists that, because the believers accepted and were deceived by leader Mr. Mo's hollow dogma (regarding doomsday) the amount of money to be repaid to the plaintiffs should be reduced, however as it is obvious that the foundation is the personal property of the leader Mr. Mo, this argument cannot be accepted."

Mr. Mo used his believers to be a guarantor for one another to obtain 30 billion won (300억원) in illegal bank loans to gain funds in addition to the 3 billion (30억원) in offerings he received. In 2000, he was charged with this crimes and the first judge declared a sentence of 10 years' jail time. The case went to the Supreme Court, where a verdict of 8 years was handed down.

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## **Funds Given to Pseudo Religious Leader Through His Deceit Must Be Repaid, Verdict Says**

*(sub-title) Seoul High Court states, "It has been confirmed that believers were blinded by their leader into giving money"*

8 March, 2007

Yoon-seok Jeong ([pride@amennews.com](mailto:pride@amennews.com))

The leader who tricked his followers into believing him by telling them he was an immortal, absolute being and then accepted their large offerings has been ordered to repay a portion of these funds due to the believers' damage suit.

In Seoul High Court civil case no. 15, on March 6, Chief Justice Byeong-woon Kim stated, "The claims that Mr. A deceived Mr. J and Mr. L into believing that he was an immortal, absolute being who could cure their diseases, change their destinies, or make them immortal have been accepted. Mr. A convinced Mr. J and Mr. L that if they did not believe in him, a great calamity would befall them, and in their fear, they gave him large donations." The judge ruled that the defendant Mr. A must return 198,000,000 won (1억9천800만원) of the more than 580,000,000 won (5억8천여만원) which the plaintiffs, Mr. J and Mr. L, gave him.

The judges panel gave this verdict due to the statute of limitations on compensation for damages. In 1992 Mr. J joined the religious group, Gigwanggong (기광공), made by Mr. A, and Mr. L joined in 1994. Told by Mr. A that he would cure their diseases, ensure their business enterprises were successful, and protect them from evil spirits, Mr. J and Mr. L donated money to him. As time went by, Mr. J and Mr. L discovered that Mr. A could not do the things he claimed to do. Thus, in 2001, they sued him for fraud.

In 2003, the Supreme Court sentenced Mr. A to 2 years in jail, and in July of 2005, Mr. J and Mr. L sought the return of their unfairly given donations and sued Mr. A for damages. However, the statute of limitations for damages, 3 years, for the majority of the donated money had already passed.

On one hand, the verdict in the case - in which someone was deceived by a pseudo religion into giving offerings, and then the victim was able to receive some of their donated money from the religious leader in a suit for damages - is similar to one in 2003 involving the Heaven's Gathering group. On the 15 of July, 2003, in Seoul District Court civil case no. 22 (Chief Justice Woo-jin Yoon), the judge ruled in favor of the plaintiff, Mr. Yoo (82; name has been changed), a high-ranking leader in the Heaven's Gathering church, who was "deceived by the doomsday prophesies of the church, and donated an enormous sum of money", in his damages suit wherein he sued the leader of Heaven's Gathering and the group's foundation for the loss of 2.48 billion won (24억8천만원) that he donated to the church.

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### **Notes:**

#### **Figures (monetary values)**

*Figures included here rely on the American "billion" which is:*

*1,000,000,000*

*Thus, 2.48 billion won is equivalent to this numerical figure:*

2,480,000,000 won

**Terms**

*In addition, in keeping with the client's use of "Heaven's Gathering" to represent 천존회, in each instance of the latter in the articles, the former English expression was utilized.*