

Press Release

Austria: Unification Church recognized as „Confessional Community“

After 50 years of Mission Work:
Members welcome Decision of Office for Religious Affairs

VIENNA, 15.06.2015 – The Austrian branch of the Unification Church (UC) has officially been registered by the Office for Religious Affairs (Kultusamt) on June 15, 2015. About 40 years after the administrative interdiction of the community in Austria its members welcome the step by the federal government to grant the legal status of a „confessional community“.

With its newly acquired legal personality the UC has been granted “state recognition without privileges”. The church is currently the eighth confessional community that is officially registered in Austria. The constitutional lawyer Prof. Bruenner, who has accompanied the procedure of the petition, appreciates the recognition of the UC. “This is a sign of a pluralistic state under the rule of law. One of the most essential rights of a functioning democracy, namely the right to the freedom of religion, has hereby been granted“, Prof. Bruenner explained.

Since May 1965 the new religious movement has been active in Austria. Especially young people of the middle class were attracted to the community, as they found it to offer an inspiring ethical worldview and idealistic initiatives. In January 1974 the legal status of the growing community as an association (granted in 1966) was suspended through the Security Agency of Vienna, allegedly due to “formal reasons”. A renewed formation of an association was prohibited. However, despite the ongoing administrative and public discrimination the young movement continued its activities. Among other achievements the UC managed to send twenty Austrian missionaries into countries of the Communist Eastern bloc during the Cold War.

„It has been a long road. Finally our movement has been rehabilitated through the decision of the Office for Religious Affairs“, Peter Zoehrer, leader of the UC in Austria, said. The alleged “threat of public security and order” through the teachings and practices of the UC – as it has often been purported by so-called cult experts – has been exposed by sociologists and scholars of religion as myth already in the early 1980s. Such prejudiced attributions have now been rebutted also on the part of the Austrian Federal Government.

The current head of the international religious movement is Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the wife of the departed founder. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the European UC she visited Vienna, Austria’s capital city, on the 10th of May. The following day Dr. Moon spoke in the Vienna International Centre at the United Nations’ 70th anniversary on the importance of resolving the tensions on the Korean peninsula. The members of the movement continuously aim to pro-actively contribute to social peace. The focus of their activities is to promote the spiritual progress of society, intercultural cooperation and an ethical consciousness for the sake of future generations.

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