

Megachurch Pastor Kong Hee Still Wading Through Singapore Church Financial Scandal

After a setback on Monday when Singapore's City Harvest Church failed to get its case dismissed in court, it appears the megachurch's two-year legal drama is still not over.

A judge ruled that six current and former leaders—including the church's founding pastor, Kong Hee—need to answer allegations that they misused millions in church funds to finance the career of Kong's pop-star wife, Sun Ho.

The 20,000-member church, founded in 1989, has become one of the country's largest and fastest-growing churches. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, City Harvest's followers are "drawn by its charismatic style of evangelism and teachings that material wealth is compatible with Christian beliefs."

The newspaper adds, "The case has stoked debate over the growing wealth and influence of megachurches in the multireligious city-state, which takes pride in maintaining social harmony with secular policies."

Presiding judge of the state courts, See Kee Oon, dismissed the arguments from Kong's defense lawyers that prosecutors haven't produced enough evidence to show a crime was committed.

The other defendants are Pastor Tan Ye Peng, members Chew Eng Han and Lam Leng Hung, and accountants Serina Wee Gek Yin and Sharon Tan Shao Yuen. They all face 10 to 20 years if convicted.

Prosecutors last month said that church leaders conspired to misuse around 24 million Singapore dollars (\$19.2 million) in donated money, which was to go to building-related expenses, to help fund Ho's career. Additionally, four of the six—not including Kong—allegedly misused 26.6 million Singapore dollars (\$21.3 million) to cover up the previous transactions.

The charges of conspiring to engage in criminal breach of trust were filed in mid-2012 following a two-year investigation by Singapore's commissioner of charities and the police. All six have denied the charges.

Ho, who has not been accused of any wrongdoing, resumed her role as City Harvest's executive director last year after her suspension was lifted. Kong continues to lead the church as senior pastor.

The trial is expected to resume in July.