

## Assassin targets Japan's former PM Shinzo Abe when Hak Ja Han does not appear at rally

Anthony Kuhn  
July 28, 2022



*A woman prays after offering a bouquet of flowers at the memorial area set up for former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.  
Hiro Komae/AP*

TOKYO - Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was an improbable target, and his assassination on July 8 was a bizarre and shocking twist of fate for the nation's longest-serving prime minister and a well known global diplomat.

The assassination has focused public attention on the religious movement that was apparently the target of the alleged assassin's hatred - and its decades-old ties to Japan's leaders and ruling party.

The original target was reportedly Hak Ja Han Moon, the head of the Unification Church and widow of its founder, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon. The self-proclaimed messiah and "true father" of his followers, Moon founded the Unification Church in South Korea in 1954.

Japanese media have [reported](#) that the alleged assassin, 41-year-old Tetsuya Yamagami, told police that he held a longstanding grudge against the church because his mother had donated more than \$700,000 to it, bankrupting the family.

He allegedly had plans to target members of the church, including the head, but switched his focus to Abe instead after viewing a video message Abe had made at a virtual church-linked event last September.

Abe did not belong to the church. But like other Japanese politicians, he had made appearances at church-related events, including last September's, where former President Donald Trump also spoke.

### **Renewed scrutiny on the church's role in Japan**

The church immediately distanced itself from the assassination. Tomihiro Tanaka, president of its Japan branch, officially known as the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), told a [press conference](#) that Yamagami was not a member of the church, but his mother was.

"As for the motive for suspect Yamagami's crime, and the donation issue reported by the media," Tanaka said, "we'd like to refrain from discussing it, as the case is under police investigation."

On Wednesday, Yamagami's mother told investigators that she felt sorry for having caused trouble for the church. "To her, the Unification Church is everything. It is life itself. She thinks nothing about her son," another relative [was reported as saying](#).



*An undated family picture shows Shinzo Abe's grandfather Nobusuke Kishi and his wife Ryoko with Abe and brother Hironobu Abe (on the lap of his grandfather).*

*-/AFP via Getty Images*

### **The Unification Church has longstanding links to Japanese politics**

Abe's ties to the church go back generations, including his father Shintaro Abe, and grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi.

At the end of World War II, his grandfather was [jailed](#) as a suspected war criminal. In prison, Kishi contacted other right-wing nationalists, including businessman and politician Ryoichi Sasakawa.

When the Rev. Moon created an anti-communist group in South Korea in 1968, he made Sasakawa honorary chairman of its Japan branch - whose headquarters were located on a plot of land next to Kishi's residence.

"They established the Federation for Victory over Communism and Kishi supported it," says [Hiromi Shimada](#), an expert on religion at Tokyo Woman's Christian University. "And this situation laid the foundation for Abe's assassination."

The church has long provided volunteers to help Abe's Liberal Democratic Party at election time, Shimada says. And while LDP politicians haven't been able to completely shield the church from lawsuits or criticism, they have turned a blind eye to allegations against it, he says.

Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi - who is Abe's brother - [said this week](#) that Unification Church members had volunteered in his own past election campaigns. And the head of Japan's agency investigating security lapses in Abe's killing told reporters that he headed the executive committee for a church-linked event in 2018.

### **The church has faced a series of lawsuits and bad publicity**

Despite the current burst of public attention, the Unification Church, like other new religions, has lost influence since its rise in popularity during Japan's period of rapid economic growth in the 1960s.

"It was a time of urbanization, which produced many new believers," explains Shimada. "Now that period is over. The believers are aging, and not many new ones are joining."

The church's anti-communist mission lost relevance with the end of the Cold War, he says. A string of lawsuits against the church also dented its popularity.



*Couples from around the world participate in a mass wedding ceremony arranged by the Unification Church, at the CheongShim Peace World Center in Gapyeong, South Korea, in 2014.*  
Ahn Young-joon/AP

### **Former church members say they were conned**

A former church member who goes by the pen name of Fumiaki Tada, because he says the church targets its critics, claims the church duped him into joining as a student. He says their representatives withholding their true identities for months, and says they brainwashed him and then conned him out of his money.

"They plant fear in you, saying that you are full of sin and corrupted, you will end up in hell, and your family will face a similar fate," he says.

In addition to the sins of Adam and Eve, Tada says, church members are taught about the sins of Japan's colonial rule over Korea from 1910 to 1945.

But the church also offered followers a path to salvation.

"We were told that we must make up for it with money," Tada says. "So to the church's South Korean headquarters, the Japan branch is their wallet."

Tada later became a church official in the city of Sendai. He says that church headquarters in South Korea sent fundraising quotas for branches, sub-branches and individual followers to meet. Followers who could not meet the quotas, he says, were often told to borrow money to contribute to the church.

Tada says his family eventually compelled him to leave the church. His successful lawsuit against the church helped him come to grips with his ordeal and share his experiences with fellow plaintiffs.

But that's an opportunity he says Abe's suspected killer never had.

"He was the child of a believer, and he had nobody to talk to," Tada says. "This is one of the reasons he committed the crime, and I feel sorry for that."

*Chie Kobayashi contributed to this report in Tokyo.*

The Asahi Shimbun > National Report > article

# Unification Church: Murder suspect's mother still a member

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

July 12, 2022 at 16:34 JST

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Tomihiko Tanaka, chairman of the Japanese arm of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, speaks at a news conference on July 11 in Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward. (Sayuri Ide)

The Unification Church said the mother of Shinzo Abe's suspected assassin is a member of the religious group but did not detail her donations that may be connected to the motive behind the shooting.

The group, formally named the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, and known as Toitsu Kyokai in Japanese, told a news conference in Tokyo on July 11 that the suspect, Tetsuya Yamagami, and the former prime minister were never members of the organization.

According to investigative sources, Yamagami, 41, told investigators after the July 8 fatal shooting of Abe that his mother had joined a religious group, donated lots of money, and drove the family into financial ruin.

Yamagami said he wanted to target the organization's leader but decided to attack Abe because he thought the politician had close connections to the religious group, according to the sources.

Tomihiko Tanaka, chairman of the Japanese arm of the Unification Church, told the news conference that he was informed that Yamagami's mother became a member around 1998 and was declared bankrupt around 2002.

"But I am not aware of what family circumstances drove (his mother) into bankruptcy," Tanaka said. "That is very much what police are investigating, and we hope to cooperate with figuring out his motive."

Tanaka also said he did not know how much the mother donated to the church.

"We were unable to track the records dating as far back as a couple of dozen years ago," he said. "I hope to learn about it through the police investigation."

Tanaka said if Yamagami's reported grudge against the church was behind the attack on Abe, then the group would have to take such revelations very seriously.

But he added, "There is a fairly long distance between holding a grudge toward the church and committing the murder of former Prime Minister Abe, and we are at a loss to understand it."

A relative of Yamagami told The Asahi Shimbun that the mother made large donations to a religious group after her husband died. The relative said he believes Yamagami blamed the group for the financial hardships he endured.

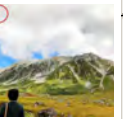
Investigative sources quoted Yamagami as saying that his mother continued to give donations

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to the group even after she was declared bankrupt.

When asked about this at the news conference, Tanaka said, “We have no records of soliciting a large amount of donations from her after (she) underwent bankruptcy.”

Tanaka said Yamagami himself “has never been a member” of the group.

He also said Abe “sent a video message to an event hosted by our friendship organization.”

However, Abe “has never been registered as a member of our group, nor has he served as an adviser to our group,” he said.

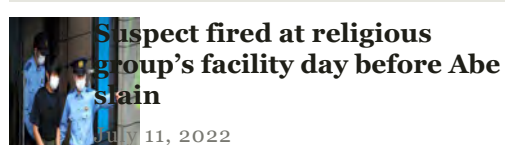
The Unification Church was founded in South Korea. Followers are known as “Moonies” after the group’s founder, Sun Myung Moon.

The Unification Church became known for its mass wedding ceremonies. It also attracted attention over its “spiritual sales method.”

Members would intimidate or scare fellow followers and others into buying expensive items from the organization, such as pots and seals, as well as donating large sums of money.

“It is true that we had troubles regarding donations in the past,” Tanaka said. “But since 2009, when the then chairperson issued a statement, our attitude toward donations has changed.”

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## Mother of suspected Abe shooter feels sorry for causing trouble for Unification Church



Tetsuya Yamagami leaves a police station in Nara on Monday to be taken to Osaka for a mental competence exam. | KYODO

JIJI

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**OSAKA** - The mother of the man arrested over the killing of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says she feels sorry for causing trouble for the religious group known as the Unification Church.

The mother of the 41-year-old suspect, [Tetsuya Yamagami](#), expressed the feeling at a hearing at the Nara District Public Prosecutor's Office, said Yamagami's uncle, who attended the hearing.

Since the [fatal shooting of Abe](#) in the western city of Nara on July 8, the mother has been staying at the uncle's home.

During investigations by the Nara Prefectural Police, Yamagami has expressed resentment against the religious group, formally known as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification.

Yamagami told the police that his mother, a member of the group, went bankrupt after making a large amount of donations to the group, causing his family to collapse.

According to the uncle, the mother joined the Unification Church in 1991 and donated a total of some ¥100 million.

Regarding her conversations with investigators during the hearing, which lasted about four hours, the uncle said, “Their communication failed as she lives in a spiritual world.”

Talking in undertones during the hearing, the mother looked depressed for causing troubles for the religious group, according to the uncle.

The Unification Church claimed to have returned ¥50 million of her donations.

The uncle said he remembers the mother speaking about ¥50 million over the telephone. “I guess she is still in contact” with members of the church, he added.

He said the mother brought books and documents related to the Unification Church to his home.

“To her, the Unification Church is everything. It is life itself. She thinks nothing about her son,” the uncle stressed.



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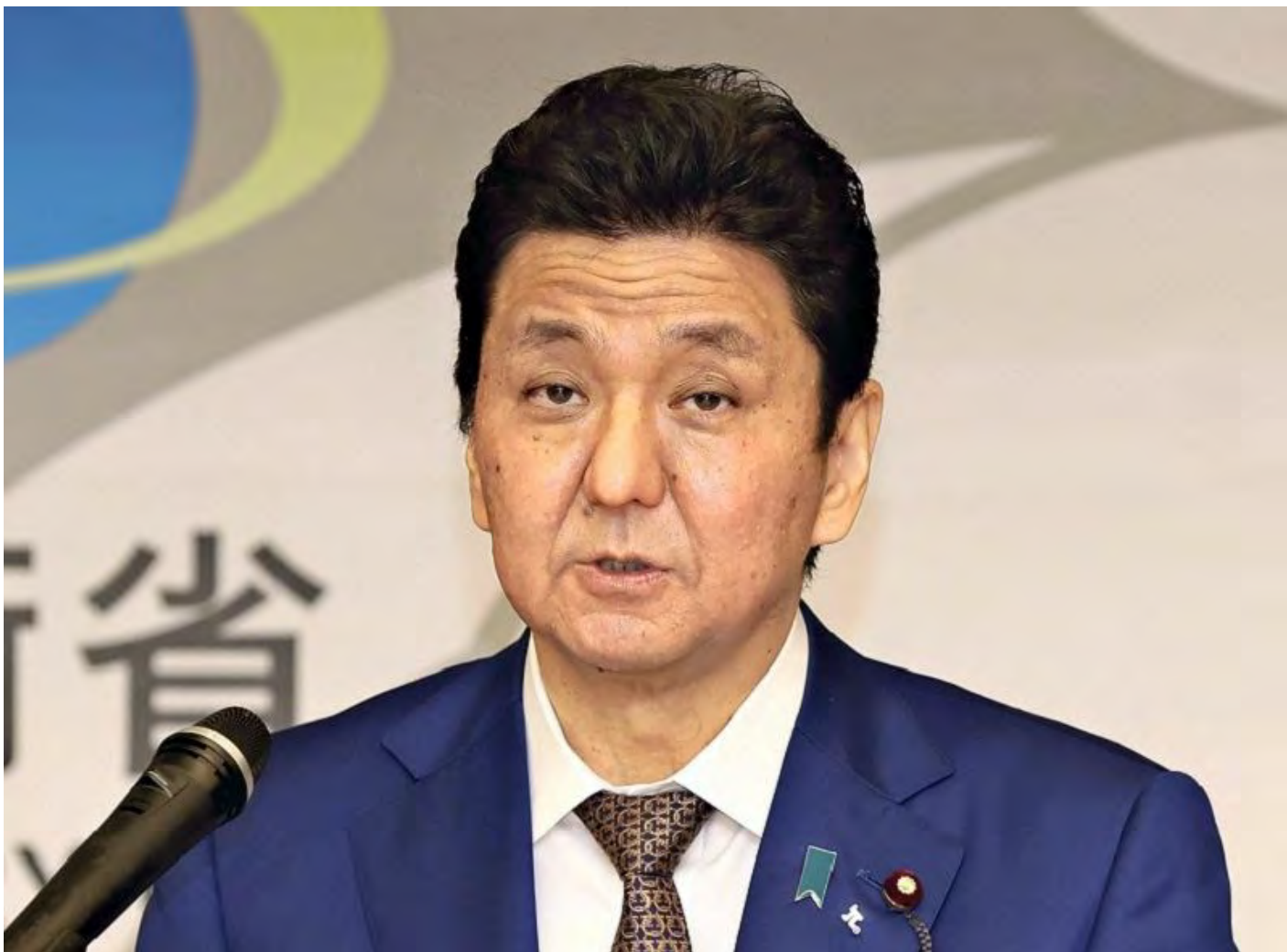


POLITICS &amp; GOVERNMENT

## Japan's Kishi admits support from Unification Church members

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Yomiuri Shimbun file photo  
Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi

### Jiji Press

11:57 JST, July 27, 2022

TOKYO (Jiji Press) — Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said Tuesday that members of the religious group known as the Unification Church worked for him as volunteers in his past election campaigning.

Followers of the group worked as volunteers, making telephone calls to ask for votes and doing other work related to the campaigning, Kishi told a press conference.

“The members helped me as volunteers rather than the Unification Church supporting me.

It's necessary to have many supporters to get elected," Kishi said.

He declined to say whether he will receive such support in the next election.

Kishi is the younger brother of the late former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was fatally shot during a stump speech July 8.

At a separate press conference, National Public Safety Commission Chairman Satoshi Ninoyu said that he headed the executive committee of the 2018 Peace Road event in Kyoto Prefecture, which was related to the group.

Ninoyu said that he only let his name used as requested.

Among other cabinet members, education minister Shinsuke Suematsu last week said that people affiliated with the group bought fund-raising party tickets.

The Unification Church has been criticized for collecting massive donations from members and selling goods expensively.

The suspect in the July 8 shooting has told investigators that he shot Abe because of rumored links between Abe and the religious group. The suspect has a grudge against the group, of which his mother is a member.

The incident has stirred controversy over the Unification Church's close ties with politics.

Also on Tuesday, Liberal Democratic Party Secretary-General Toshimitsu Motegi said the ruling party has no formal ties with the Unification Church.

"It has been confirmed that the LDP, as an organization, has no relations" with the group, Motegi told a press conference after some party members were found to have participated in events related to the group.

Motegi said he wants LDP lawmakers to be cautious about having ties with controversial organizations.

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