

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan Censured At Religious Freedom Event

Knut Holdhus
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Featured image above: On January 31st, a panel discussion was held at the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit in Washington DC, U.S.A., discussing the Japanese government's request for the dissolution of the former Unification Church. From left to right: Suzan Johnson Cook, former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom; Massimo Introvigne, director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR); Jan Figel, former European Union (EU) Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief; Cole Durham, Honorary Professor at Brigham Young University Law School; and Katrina Lantos Swett, co-chair of the summit Photo: Yosuke Yamazaki.

Japan censured by religious freedom champions at Washington summit



Sekai Nippo

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Former U.S. officials 'cannot accept' Japanese government's former Unification Church dissolution request:

International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington, U.S.

by [Yosuke Yamazaki](#)

On 31st January, the second day of the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit aimed at promoting religious freedom worldwide, held in the capital Washington DC, saw harsh criticism from former U.S. government officials and scholars regarding the Japanese government's issuance of a request to dissolve the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)) in October of last year.

Katrina Lantos Swett, co-chair of the summit and chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2012-2013 and 2014-2015, pointed out during a panel discussion at the luncheon that the Japanese government's response to the [Unification Church](#) had reached a "unacceptable level." She stated, "There is a saying, 'If you're a friend, don't let your friend drive drunk.' Japan is in a situation where it is indeed trying to drive while intoxicated," indicating the necessity for the United States to advise Japan.

Furthermore, she also appealed that "targeting specific faith communities or imposing collective

punishment is not acceptable."



Katrina Lantos Swett at the special luncheon 31st Jan. 2024 at the IRF Summit



Jan Figel at the special luncheon 31st Jan. 2024 at the IRF Summit

Jan Figel, former European Union Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, noted that the movement led by the Japanese Communist Party and leftist lawyers to dissolve the [Unification Church](#) has a "half-century history" and has now reached "a very dangerous stage." He warned, "Freedom of religion is the litmus test for all human rights. If this is not respected, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and association will undoubtedly be restricted, suppressed, and violated."

The luncheon was co-sponsored by The Washington Times Foundation and the Universal Peace Federation (UPF). In addition to the panel discussion, Suzan Johnson Cook, who served as Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom in the Obama administration, Massimo Introvigne, representative of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), and Cole Durham, Honorary Professor at Brigham Young University Law School, shared their opinions. Subsequently, a declaration in support of religious freedom in Japan was signed.



Newt Gingrich delivering message 31st Jan. 2024

Furthermore, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich sent a video message, stating, "What we discovered was that the dissolution effort was really started by the Japanese Communist Party, which as early as 1978 began attacking the [Unification Church](#) because the Church's [God](#)-affirming message was directly contrary to the atheistic beliefs of the Japanese Communist Party " He further asserted, "We have to make sure that the Japanese government understands that this is a key test of the future of Japan, a key test of the future of religious liberty."

Read the [speech of Newt Gingrich](#)



Mike Johnson at the IRF Summit 31st Jan. 2024

At the summit on the same day, Speaker of the House Mike Johnson also delivered a speech, condemning China for "forcibly placing Tibetan Buddhists and Falun Gong practitioners in labor camps and having their organs harvested by the Chinese Communist Party" He also mentioned, "In the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, there is genocide (mass killings) being carried out against Islamic minority groups through forced sterilizations, forcible detentions, and re-education." He emphasized, "The United States has both the opportunity and the obligation to prevent mass atrocities and punish those who commit them."

Text: Yosuke Yamazaki

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Some of the speakers at the special luncheon on 31st Jan. 2024 at the International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington DC. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission.

Extract from a special pre-recorded message presented 31st January at the International Religious Freedom Summit 2024 in Washington DC, by senior American politician Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the US House of Representatives. He delivered his presentation during a conference luncheon sponsored by The Washington Times Foundation and the Universal Peace Federation on the last day of the summit.

I can't tell you how important I think it is that we recognize the threat all around the world to religious liberty as we see people killed in places, in Africa, in India, as we see repression in China. But particularly today, this special luncheon helping Japan overcome its religious freedom crisis is very timely and very important.

I've been working a great deal on the issue of what's happening in Japan, and it's really very shocking and very surprising. The Japanese had had a long tradition since World War II of honoring religious liberty, of enforcing the rule of law, and of respecting the conscience of individuals.

And yet now there's a real effort to dissolve the [Family Federation](#) [...] The government now has spent over a year in deep investigations, and after that year of investigations, they've not found a single crime that justifies going after the [Family Federation](#).

But the political pressures and the dishonesty of the Communist Party of Japan and the dishonesty of the lawyers who made a living out of some 20 years of attacking the [Unification Church](#), and then the [Family Federation](#), all of those risk overriding the rule of law.



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida swayed by communist campaign. Here, 16th April 2023. Photo: [首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#)

When the Prime Minister announced on 18th October 2022 that the [Unification Church](#) could not be dissolved because there's no breaking of a criminal law, I sort of began to relax. Yet the very next day, he said maybe we can use civil settlement cases to try to dissolve them.

Now, there's no provision for civil settlement to be a cause for dissolving. It has to be criminal. And the Prime Minister himself has admitted that there is no such criminal case.

My team did a lot of research on this, and we take it very seriously. As many of you know, my wife

Callista was ambassador to the Vatican. She's taken on religious liberty around the world as one of her major projects.

What we discovered was that the dissolution effort was really started by the *Japanese Communist Party*, which as early as 1978 began attacking the [Unification Church](#) because the [Church's](#) God-affirming message was directly contrary to the atheistic beliefs of the *Japanese Communist Party* to end free speech and to end freedom of religion.

Unfortunately, some elements of the media have joined in and at times have been I think very, very biased, something we also understand here in the United States.

But there was a



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Katrina Lantos Swett

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Featured image above: Left: USCIRF Chair Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett in Oslo 8th Nov. 2014. Photo: United States Commission on International Religious Freedom / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped. Right: Suzan Johnson Cook in July 2023. Photo: FOREF

RealClearPolitics [independent, non-partisan American media company] that Ambassador Suzan Johnson Cook and Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett wrote that explain that this is a very alarming moment for all of us who believe in religious liberty, because Japan is one of our greatest allies.

It's been a bulwark in the Far East of standing for freedom, for the rule of law, and for constitutional behavior. And that's why I think so many of us are now engaged in real concern for the future of Japan.

Everything that Callista and I have done, working with the [Family Federation](#) and its various associates, working with the [Universal Peace Federation](#) and working with [The Washington Times](#), have been aimed at promoting the value of faith for all communities.

I've been astonished to be in meetings where literally people from over 100 countries representing virtually every religion on the planet come together peacefully to share their mutual right to approach [God](#) on their own terms. I believe this is central to the whole cause of freedom, the core value of being able to approach [God](#) without interference, it really underlies all freedom.

A government which can block you from approaching [God](#) can block you from anything.

I'm calling
an



Rashad Hussain 15th May 2023. Photo: Chuck Kennedy / U.S. Department of State / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

ambassador Rashad Hussein, the IRF ambassador at large, to continue the good attention he's already given this issue to alert Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and to shine a very bright light on Japan.

We have to make sure that the Japanese government understands that this is a key test of the future of Japan, a key test of the future of religious liberty.

And that to close down an organization as a deliberately political act of retribution is a profound undermining of the very basis of freedom.

And I so much appreciate all of you being involved in this important 'cause.

Featured image above: Newt Gingrich at the special luncheon 31st Jan. 2024 at the 4th International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington DC. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission.

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