

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Dispelling Myths Behind Japan's Horrendous Persecution of FFWPU

Knut Holdhus
June 2, 2025



A truck driving through the streets of Osaka, Japan June 2, 2025 with large posters from the [Family Federation](#)



June 2025 issue of the Japanese monthly magazine Seiron

Large monthly magazine lets religious head dispel some of the myths and lies on which the authorities and media base their dehumanizing treatment of faith minority

Part 4 (final part) of an interview (extensive excerpts) with Tomihiro Tanaka, President of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, published by the well-known monthly opinion magazine Seiron (正論) in its June 2025 issue. Translated from Japanese. Republished in English with permission. Seiron is a publication by the Sankei Shimbun, one of Japan's five national daily newspapers. Previously republished as two articles in [Bitter Winter](#) on [27th](#) and [28th May](#).

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Debunking Lies That Turn Victims into Perpetrators

Interviewer: Fumihiro Kato, author



Tomihiro Tanaka (Nov. 2024)

Concerns of discrimination and persecution

- We've heard from followers all over the country that they've experienced [discrimination](#) in their communities, workplaces, and schools. Denial of medical care, [loss of business opportunities](#), and bullying or harassment at school have become increasingly severe.

Tanaka: The moment Prime Minister Kishida declared severance of ties, the attacks began. First came a wave of phone harassment directed at our headquarters and churches nationwide. After the [dissolution order](#) was issued, the harm to followers escalated. We fear this could spread rapidly in the future.

At our Shibuya Church, located across the street from our HQ, we were asked by the owner to "vacate the building". There was even a case where employees of our [religious organization](#) couldn't use their credit cards simply for being associated with it. In [Shimonoseki](#), Yamaguchi Prefecture, facilities we'd used annually were suddenly denied to us on grounds of being "anti-social". There have been families [torn apart](#) by divorce or even the [suicide](#) of children. We are particularly concerned that [coercive deprogramming](#) [See editor's note below] through [abduction and confinement](#) might happen again.



The man who made the wave of persecution far worse: Former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, here, delivering a speech at the COP26 in November 2021

Political position and past alliances

- The [religious organization](#) has historically maintained political affiliations. What are your thoughts on this and your future political stance?

Tanaka: We've always taken a firm stance against communism. That's a fundamental, non-negotiable ideal for us. If we are to make this country a better place, we must never allow communism to take the lead. We are doctrinally committed to this stance.

The political party that aligned closest with our values - such as our [emphasis on family](#) and anti-communist ideology - was the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), so it was natural for us to support their lawmakers. However, we've also supported some members of the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP).

Now that our relationship with politics has been officially severed, we are not in a position to engage politically at the moment.

Not an anti-Japanese religious organization

- The [Family Federation](#) has been labeled an anti-Japanese religion and a financial pipeline to Korea.

Tanaka: The claim that we're "anti-Japanese" was shocking. We're working for Japan's benefit - being called anti-Japanese is utterly outrageous.

Ask any of our hundreds of thousand followers nationwide, and I doubt even one of them would describe the [religious organization](#) as anti-Japanese. I don't think anyone received anti-Japanese education from the [church](#) either. Our reality is clearly not anti-Japanese - if anything, we are patriotic. In Reverend [Sun Myung Moon](#)'s teachings, he explicitly states:

"Those who cannot love their country cannot love the world."

Leadership must be nurtured through love of one's country. That is our foundation.



The founders of the [Family Federation](#): [Sun Myung Moon](#) (1920-2012) and [Hak Ja Han](#) (Holy Mother Han). Here, in the 1970s

Our connection to Korea is spiritual, linked to our leaders [Hak Ja Han](#) and [Sun Myung Moon](#), whom we revere as messianic figures. Since our religious leaders are based in Korea, we naturally receive guidance from there, strengthening our faith. However, when it comes to money and donations, that's where misunderstandings arise.

Japan sends funds overseas as missionary support - not just to Korea, but to the global headquarters, which is currently located in Korea. From 1977 to 2009, the international HQ was in the United States, and during that time donations went to the U.S. It was never specifically about Korea. That part of the narrative has been twisted in media coverage, and we really want people to understand this.

- Could the [Family Federation](#) maintain its independence as a Japanese religious corporation?

Tanaka: For example, when the [Cheonwon Temple](#) (a sacred place) was being built in Korea, they called on worldwide support. If they say, "We hope Japan can contribute this much," then we in Japan discuss it in our board meetings and decide how much of our budget can be allocated.

- Regarding relations with South Korea, TV programs say the Japanese religious organization has no decision-making power.



From a demonstration in the city of Sagamihara in May 2025 against the horrendous persecution in Japan

Tanaka: Just as Catholics worldwide are encouraged by the Pope's words, we draw inspiration from [Hak Ja Han](#)'s messages. However, this does not serve as a directive to contribute funds based on our financial capabilities. The distribution of substantial amounts is decided during board meetings, and meticulous records are kept. We are not blindly following orders.

- Any concluding thoughts?

Tanaka: Our [organization](#) is not a perpetrator. We speak from the perspective of being victims. Prime Minister Kishida's declaration of severing ties is where it all started. That statement distorted everything and caused us to lose public trust. It has impacted over 100,000 followers. We believe Kishida bears a grave responsibility, and we want him to apologize.

Today's events will be remembered in history, and the burden of responsibility will rest on Prime Minister Kishida. We sincerely hope people will face the facts and realities of those who are wrongfully judged.

Tomihiko Tanaka

Born 1956, Hokkaido
Graduate of Hokkai Gakuen University, Department of Architecture
14th President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)
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[Editor's note: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

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Categories

See part 1: [Politics Overruled the Law in Dissolution Case](#) The front cover page or the June 2025 issue of the Japanese monthly magazine *Seiron*.

See part 2: [Justice Twisted: Assumptions Replaced Evidence](#)

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Rights Abuse Exposed: State Narrative in Crisis

Interviewer: Fumihiro Kato, author

History of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Renunciation of Faith

– Media outlets frequently report on alleged harm caused by the religious organization, but we rarely hear about harm it suffered.



Facsimile from page 174 in the June 2025 issue of *Seiron*

Tanaka: The media doesn't report on it at all, but in the context of the dissolution proceedings, there is something I want readers to understand: the issue of [abduction, confinement, and coercive faith-breaking](#) [See editor's note 2 below].

Since our founding, we have been branded as heretical by Christian churches, and that continues to this day. Christian pastors began to abduct our members and pressure them to leave our faith. This dates back to 1966, two years after we were recognized as a religious corporation.

By 1968, when our affiliated organization *International Federation for Victory Over Communism* was launched, left-wing groups and activists, including those affiliated with the Communist Party, began to [collaborate with Christian pastors](#) in such activities (faith-breaking) [See editor's note 2 below].



Illustration of faith-breaking victim Hideo Mima's [forced hospitalization](#). Photo: Hideo Mima. Used with permission.

One tactic we struggled with was having our believers kidnapped and [forcibly confined in psychiatric hospitals](#) allegedly connected to Communist groups, where they were pressured to abandon their faith. This did result in some media attention, and when we filed habeas corpus petitions [See editor's note 1 below], the courts recognized them, leading to a decline in such activities due to human rights concerns.

However, the practice did not disappear. It evolved. So-called “deprogrammers” (faith-breakers), who coached families on how to de-convert members, became central figures. Families – parents and siblings – would [abduct the believers and confine them](#) in apartments, where [pastors collaborated with deprogrammers](#) to pressure the members to leave the [religious organization](#).

This kind of violent forced de-conversion is known as “deprogramming” (faith-breaking) [See editor's note 2 below]. **In the United States, it has been recognized as a human rights violation and has all but disappeared.** However, in Japan, it continued until 2015, when civil courts finally ruled it illegal. Although the [abductions and confinement](#) were carried out by family members, deprogrammers guided and supervised the process from start to finish. **Even when police became involved, they would argue it was a “family matter”, and authorities would not intervene. No one has ever faced criminal charges for it. This is a major, largely unspoken scandal.**

The [confinement](#) would last until the believers renounced their [faith](#). In some cases, our members pretended to deconvert to escape confinement and then returned to the [religious organization](#). After

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that, even claiming to deconvert wouldn't result in release, and the confinements grew longer.

Can this be called a fair procedure?

– How does this relate to the dissolution order?

Tanaka: In the [December 2023 issue](#) of *Seiron*, a [harrowing account](#) was published about Toru Goto, a victim who was abducted and confined for [12 years and 5 months](#). He is not alone – at least [4,300 of our believers](#) are known to have been victims of abduction and forced renunciation, and 3,000 of them ultimately abandoned their faith.

Many of those who deconverted went on to work with the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (NNLASS), appearing in media reports and court cases.

Of the 157 written statements submitted by the government in support of the [dissolution order](#), 88% came from victims of [abduction and forced de-conversion](#). A significant portion of the 32 civil lawsuits cited by the government as grounds for dissolution **involved plaintiffs who were deprogramming** [\[See editor's note 2 below\]](#) victims.



Toru Goto in 2008, barely able to move after being held in forcible detention by his own family in league with professional faith-breakers for more than 12 years. Photo: Kazuhiro Yonemoto / [Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion](#)

Most citizens are completely unaware of this set-up. This “inconvenient truth” has been buried because it undermines the **narrative promoted by NNLASS, which is connected to deprogrammers and has become the primary source for the media**. The media continues to circulate only hostile portrayals of us, and **even the Japanese government proceeded with the dissolution request in collaboration with NNLASS**.

Behind the scenes, however, a **system that continuously produces “plaintiffs” and “victims” to attack the religious organization is being allowed to flourish**, and most people are unaware of it. One must ask,

“Why are so many former believers suddenly stepping forward as ‘victims’?”

You cannot understand the situation without acknowledging this context.

However, the government collaborated only with one side and proceeded with the process. Under such conditions, **there's no way that a fair image of the religious organization could emerge**. Although the court ultimately did *not* use the 32 civil lawsuits directly as grounds for the dissolution, it still reached its [conclusion](#) through [speculation](#).

Continued in [part 4](#).

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Featured image above: Illustration of Fumihiko Kato asking Tomihiko Tanaka questions during interview published in *Seiron* June 2025.

[Editor's note 1: A habeas corpus petition is a legal request to a court, usually made by someone who is detained or imprisoned, asking the court to determine whether their detention or imprisonment is lawful. The main purpose of a habeas corpus petition is to protect individuals from unlawful or arbitrary detention.

The detainee, or someone acting on their behalf (such as a lawyer or family member), files the petition with a court. The court reviews the petition and may issue a writ of habeas corpus, compelling the custodian (such as a prison warden or government authority) to bring the detainee before the court. At the hearing, the custodian must provide legal justification for the detention. If the court finds the detention unlawful, it may order the detainee's release.

Habeas corpus is considered a cornerstone of individual liberty and rule of law. It is enshrined in many constitutions and international human rights frameworks, including the U.S. Constitution (Article I, Section 9).]

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Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: *Members of [Soka Gakkai](#). Here students belonging to the faith in 2001. Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped*

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