FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Closing Family Fed Does Not End Our Faith

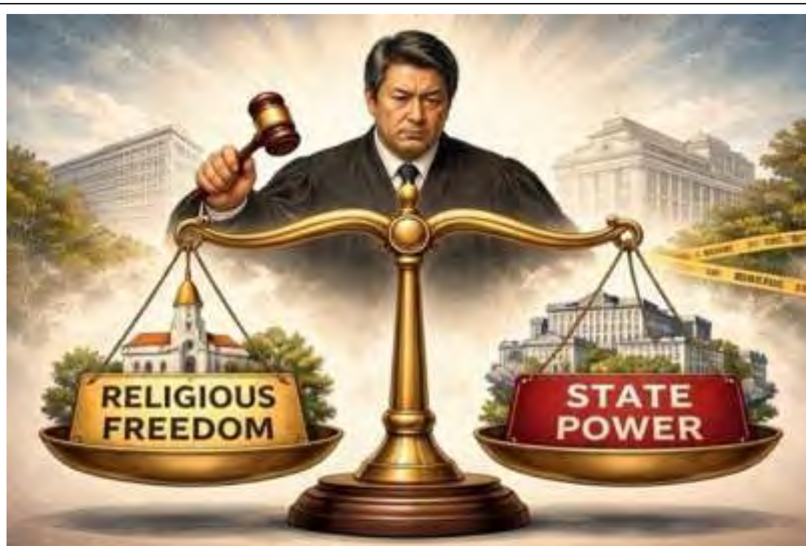
Knut Holdhus
March 12, 2026

Japanese believers gathering for prayer March 2026. AI-generated Illustration

세계일보
Segye Ilbo

Observers argue that dissolving the religious organization called the Family Federation could create unforeseen problems for the Japanese authorities and easily make the cure more damaging than the disease

A major debate about religious freedom, government authority, and the limits of state power has emerged in Japan following a court decision to dissolve a religious organization. The case involves the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, formerly known as the Unification Church.



A major debate about religious freedom, government authority, and the limits of state power has emerged in Japan following a court decision to dissolve the Family Federation. Illustration: Chat GPT

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For decades, it has been subjected to a veritable witch hunt, often orchestrated by leftwing forces afraid of the Federation's growing influence with its teachings openly opposed to God-denying Communism. Other times, opposition came from nationalist forces, critical to the international marriages the Family Federation has become so famous for. Rightwing nationalists were especially hostile to Japanese citizens marrying South Koreans, from a race long considered inferior due to historical imperial ideology, pseudoscientific racial theories imported in the 19th century, and colonial propaganda.

On 4th March, a Japanese court approved the government's request to dissolve the group as a religious

corporation. This decision triggered a complex process in which authorities began closing facilities, restricting access to religious buildings, and managing the organization's remaining assets.

Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (2025)

For many observers, the move represents a strong effort by the Japanese government to hold a religious institution accountable for alleged misconduct. However, others argue that the consequences of dissolving an entire religious organization may be far broader than intended.

An opinion article 10th March by religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (정성수) published in Segye Ilbo, a South Korean newspaper, argues that the decision could have significant social, legal, and political repercussions - not only for the group involved but also for Japan's approach to religious freedom.

The article raises a fundamental question: Can a democratic government eliminate the legal structure of a religious organization without undermining the freedom of belief that its own constitution guarantees?

Closing Institutions Does Not Eliminate Belief

Japan's constitution explicitly protects freedom of religion. In theory, the state can revoke the legal status of a religious corporation - meaning it can dissolve the organization as a recognized institution. But belief itself cannot be dissolved through legal action. Personal faith exists within individuals and communities, not only within buildings or official structures.

A closed Family Federation branch in Chiryu, Aichi Prefecture, Japan

The article argues that closing churches and dismantling an organization does not automatically end the religious beliefs of its followers. Hundreds of thousands of believers associated with the group may still want to practice their faith. If official worship spaces are shut down, they will simply look for other ways to continue practicing.

History suggests that faith communities often adapt when faced with restrictions. When public religious practice becomes difficult or impossible, believers frequently shift their activities into private spaces - homes, small gatherings, or informal networks. In this sense, attempts to suppress organized religion can unintentionally push it underground rather than eliminating it.

The author refers to historical precedents, such as early Christian communities in ancient Rome. During periods of persecution, Christians gathered secretly in catacombs and private homes. The pattern illustrates a recurring phenomenon: when religion is excluded from the public sphere, it tends to reappear in hidden forms rather than disappear altogether.

The Risk of Escalating Social Costs

Another major concern highlighted in the article is the potential for increasing social and administrative costs. Dissolving a large religious organization does not end a conflict; instead, it can create a new series of legal and social challenges.

For example, the liquidation of the organization's assets may lead to lengthy court battles. Determining how to distribute property, buildings, and financial resources could involve complicated disputes among the government, former members, and related institutions.

The dissolution could also affect the livelihoods of people who worked for the organization. Staff members who depended on the Federation for employment may suddenly lose their jobs. In addition, ordinary believers might experience social isolation or confusion if their religious community suddenly disappears from public life.

The article suggests that these consequences will ultimately fall on the state itself. Government agencies will need to manage legal disputes, social tensions, and administrative complications resulting from the decision. In this sense, the attempt to solve a problem could unintentionally create a much larger one.

The author describes this possibility using a familiar idea: sometimes the cure becomes more damaging than the disease. If the policy creates more social disruption than it resolves, the government may end up spending significant public resources managing conflicts that could have been addressed more narrowly.

The Principle of Minimal Government Intervention

Modern legal systems often emphasize what is known as the "principle of minimal infringement". This principle suggests that when governments intervene in people's rights or freedoms, they should do so in the least intrusive way possible.

Dissolving an entire religious organization because of illegal acts committed by some individuals is not an appropriate response by state authorities. Here, selection from "Nameless", painting by Luis Vargas Santa Cruz (Q112692608) about clergy abuse in Catholicism.

The article also raises questions about how the decision might be perceived internationally. Freedom of religion is widely recognized as a fundamental human right. This principle is protected in global agreements such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states that governments should not arbitrarily interfere with people's beliefs or religious practices.

According to the article, if individuals within a religious group committed unlawful acts, the most appropriate response would be to investigate and punish those specific individuals. Holding the responsible parties accountable is consistent with the rule of law.

However, dissolving an entire religious organization may be seen as a much broader measure. Critics argue that such an action affects not only those who committed wrongdoing but also many ordinary members who were not involved.

From this perspective, the government's decision may appear disproportionate. Instead of precisely targeting illegal behavior, it eliminates the institutional framework that supports the faith of a large number of people.

International Human Rights Concerns

Japan is a signatory to this treaty, meaning it has committed to upholding these protections. Critics therefore worry that physically closing places of worship or dismantling a religious organization could attract scrutiny from international human-rights institutions.

Japan is often regarded as a leading democracy and an important member of the global liberal order. Because of this role, its domestic policies are closely watched. The article suggests that the country's credibility could be affected if its actions appear to contradict the values of religious freedom and pluralism that democratic societies promote.

Balancing Accountability and Religious Freedom

The central challenge highlighted in the article is finding the right balance between accountability and religious freedom. Governments have a responsibility to protect citizens from fraud, abuse, or other illegal activities. When wrongdoing occurs within a religious organization, authorities must investigate and respond.

At the same time, democratic societies must ensure that the actions taken against misconduct do not unintentionally restrict the broader freedom of belief. The principle of separation between religion and the state was originally designed to protect individuals from excessive government control over their spiritual lives.

The article argues that the separation of religion and state should function as a safeguard against government intrusion into personal belief. It should not become a tool that allows the state to dismantle religious communities entirely.

The Broader Implications

Finally, the article expresses concern about the potential loss of positive contributions that religious communities can make. Many faith-based groups participate in charitable work, promote dialogue between different religions, and advocate for peace or humanitarian causes. If government action unintentionally suppresses these positive activities, society may lose valuable sources of social

cooperation and moral engagement.

The author concludes by emphasizing that the purpose of government is to provide stability and predictability for its citizens. Instead of deepening social divisions, state policies should create conditions in which people with different beliefs can coexist peacefully. In this view, addressing wrongdoing within religious organizations is necessary - but it must be done carefully, in ways that protect both justice and the fundamental freedoms that democratic societies seek to uphold.

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Political Party Challenges Dissolution Ruling

March 11, 2026 • Knut Holdhus

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Raising concerns over legal grounds for dissolution, religious-linked political party criticizes Japanese state action against Family Federation

Under the headline "The Happiness Realization Party Says Dissolution Order for the Family Federation Violates 'Freedom of Religion'", on 10th March the Japanese daily Sekai Nippo published a news item about a statement released by a political party the same day.

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The logo of the Sekai Nippo

The paper writes,

> "On 10th March, the political organization Happiness Realization Party (幸福実現党) released a statement regarding the Tokyo High Court's decision ordering the dissolution of the former Unification Church, arguing that 'a dissolution order based on civil-law torts leads to a violation of freedom of religion'.
>
> In the statement, the party argued that creating a precedent in which the state determines the rightness or wrongness of a religion based on civil-law wrongdoing and orders its dissolution could 'leave room for arbitrary judgments by the state'.
>
> It further emphasized that if the organization's assets – including places of worship – are liquidated, religious activities would be severely restricted, resulting in 'a clear violation of freedom of religion'.
>
> The statement also claimed that it is 'obvious that the shooting incident involving former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) had a significant impact' on the dissolution order. It argued that treating 'an individual's crime' as a problem of an entire organization cannot be considered the stance of a state governed by the rule of law."

The

The logo of the Happiness Realization Party. Author: 幸福実現党. Public domain image

Happiness Realization Party (HRP) is a small Japanese political party founded in 2009 that is closely tied to the religious movement *Happy Science* (幸福の科学). It functions essentially as the political wing of that religious organization.

Master Ryuho Okawa speaking at Osaka Shoshinkan, Japan, 15th February 2015. Photo: Happy Science. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped

It was founded by Ryuho Okawa (大川隆法 – 1956-2023), the spiritual leader of *Happy Science*. The party was created to translate the movement's religious and ideological ideas into political policy.

Happy Science itself is a new religious movement founded in 1986 that mixes elements of Buddhism, Christianity, New Age spirituality, and Okawa's own teachings.

The party describes itself as conservative, and typical policy positions include strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance and revising Article 9 of Japan's constitution – the pacifist clause.

The economic policy includes tax cuts and creating new industries to boost growth. The party also puts an emphasis on religious values in politics and promotes a "spiritual foundation" for the Japanese state.

Despite fielding many candidates, the party has never won a seat in Japan's national parliament. In the 2009 general election, it ran hundreds of candidates but failed to win seats. It has had some minor success in local councils, with a small number of local representatives.

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So politically, it remains marginal, though it maintains visibility through activism and media.

The *Happiness Realization Party* (幸福実現党) commenting on the dissolution case of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* is not accidental. Both *Happy Science* and the *Family Federation* are religious movements actively involved in creating a world of peace. It can be said that the HRP has a direct institutional interest in how the state treats religious groups.

The RO logo of Happy Science. "RO" are the initials of its founder. Photo: The old (老). License: CC ASA 4.0 Int

Their concern is that if courts establish a precedent where the government can dissolve a religious organization based on civil-law violations, similar legal reasoning could potentially be applied to other religious movements, including *Happy Science*.

So the party frames the issue as a broader defense of religious freedom, not merely support for the Family Federation.

The case revolves around whether the government can dissolve a religious corporation based on civil-law torts rather than criminal convictions.

Historically in Japan dissolution orders for religious corporations have been rare. They were typically tied to serious criminal activity, such as in the case of Aum Shinrikyo after the Tokyo subway sarin attack in 1995.

In the current case, the government argues that repeated civil-law violations justify dissolution. Groups like the HRP worry this expands the legal grounds for dissolving religious institutions.

The issue became politically explosive after the assassination of Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in 2022. The assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), claimed he targeted Abe because of perceived ties to the Family Federation, which he held a grudge against because of his mother's donations.

The HRP's statement argues that the emotional and political fallout from the assassination influenced the legal process.

The HRP often presents itself as a defender of civil liberties and religious freedom against state overreach. By opposing the dissolution order, the party can reinforce its ideological stance, appeal to religious voters, signal solidarity with other religious groups concerned about government intervention.

Even though the HRP and the Family Federation are separate movements, they share an interest in resisting what they perceive as state intrusion into religious affairs.

The *Happiness Realization Party* is speaking out because the case could establish a legal precedent allowing the Japanese state to dissolve religious organizations based on civil liability, which religious movements – including the one behind the party – see as a potential threat to freedom of religion.

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***Text**: Knut Holdhus, editor*

***Featured image** above: The Happiness Realization Party campaigning in Umeda, Osaka 2nd December 2012. Photo: Ogiyoshisan / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp*

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