

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Masumi Fukuda on Outlawing Church - Japan's Human Cost

Knut Holdhus
April 14, 2026



The front yard of the Hamamatsu Family Church of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) on March 9, 2026, after being vandalized following the [High Court decision](#)



[Sekai Nippo](#)

As liquidators arrived and 260 churches closed, thousands of staff and believers were ordered out within hours, confronting an uncertain future

Tokyo, 11th April 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

[Opinion Contribution]

[Part 3 of a Series] Nonfiction Writer Masumi Fukuda: Tokyo High Court Decision on the Family Federation

Believers Moved to Tears by Landlord's Encouragement

by nonfiction writer Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ)



Masumi Fukuda – Japanese investigative journalist and award-winning nonfiction writer (2024)

See part 1 in the series: [Japan: Verdict Predetermined, Evidence Silenced](#)

See part 2 in the series: [Rapid Liquidation Implies Prearranged Verdict](#)

What was the situation at the local churches at that same moment? The leader of a church in the Chubu region recounts:

"I didn't think dissolution would happen. The [Family Federation](#) has absolutely no criminal cases involving senior leadership. On the contrary, the Ministry of Education [fabricated](#) and [altered statements](#) from former members. I also heard that Presiding Judge Motoko Miki (三木素子) declared that the High Court would adhere strictly to evidentiary principles. Furthermore, after the trial had concluded, the court even contacted us to say they wanted to use the content of the [resignation press conference](#) of former President Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広) from last December as evidence. I assumed that would work in our favor."

However, the [outcome](#) was again a betrayal, following the [first trial](#).

This same church leader had actually served as a pastor at another church for two years, and it just so happened - almost fatefully - that he was assigned to his new post as church leader on 4th March. He says,

"The [decision](#) came while I was still at my previous church. I was so shocked that the scene before my eyes seemed to lose all color. The successor pastor was also shaken, and a young woman in charge of accounting was crying, asking the head of the women's division, 'What should we do?' I then set out by car for my new post. [Liquidators](#) had already arrived there around 12 - 1 p.m., and I reached just before they began explaining the situation to the staff."

There were two [liquidators](#), and their demeanor was polite:

"We will proceed with operations in an orderly manner. Is the accountant here? We will take custody of the ledgers as they are. Please leave the keys. Take your personal belongings with you, but even personal computers should be left here for now. This facility can no longer be used. Vehicles are corporate property, so they cannot be used either."



The state took their places of worship. Must hold worship services in parks. AI illustration of [Family Federation](#) members gathering in a Japanese park for their Sunday meeting April 5, 2026.

That day, all staff were required to remove their personal belongings and vacate the premises by around 5-6 p.m. However, it was impossible for everyone to take everything in a single day.

At that point, the landlord of the church parking lot offered help:

"You can store your things in my apartment."

He also encouraged them, saying,

"You haven't done anything wrong. This is tough - hang in there."

Some believers were moved to tears by these words.

Even the Church Leader Could Not Hold Worship

The church leader had originally planned to hold an inaugural service that day. Instead, he gave a greeting via the believers' group messaging app. From 5th March onward, over several days, he visited 17 locations and met 70 - 80 believers, who were all happy he had come.

"What impressed me was how everyone was already saying, 'This isn't the end, is it?' and were trying to move forward. Of course, it's sad and painful not being able to enter the church. The biggest difficulty is that we can't use the prayer room, so we can't hold prayer vigil sessions. During those, people cry out and shed tears while praying, so such meetings can't be done outside the church."

As for worship, believers can gather outdoors, but church staff, now considered employees of the liquidation entity after the dissolution, are not allowed to conduct worship during working hours, even outside.

"We expect dismissal notices from the liquidation entity soon. However, religiously, I am still the church leader."

He remains determined to stay close to the believers.

Concerns Over Cemeteries



The "Central Japan (Chu-Nihon) Cemetery" spreads across a mountain area in Suzuka City, Mie Prefecture, Japan

One of the biggest concerns among those involved in the [religious organization](#) was what would happen to its [cemeteries](#). There are currently eight [cemeteries](#) nationwide where believers are buried. Of these, five are registered under the [Family Federation](#)'s name: [Oze Cemetery](#), Chū-Nihon Cemetery, Hokuriku Cemetery, Osaka Peace Cemetery, and Kochi Cemetery.

A believer, Mr. T, manages [Oze Cemetery](#). Originally, the land in Katashina Village, Gunma Prefecture, belonged to his grandfather, who donated it to the former [Unification Church](#). It opened as [Oze Cemetery](#) in 1982. Since then, three generations of his family have maintained the [cemetery](#) and assisted visitors.

"The [cemetery](#) is about the size of two soccer fields. Around 420 people are buried in graves with headstones, and the cremated remains of about 1,070 people are also housed here. On 5th March, the day after the [dissolution decision](#), three [liquidators](#) came to inspect the site. We had concerns beforehand, but in practice, access remains free - people can visit graves, the columbarium keys haven't been taken, and the chapel is accessible. However, these decisions seem to vary depending on the liquidators."



In Katashina Village, Gunma Prefecture, Japan: Oze Cemetery, full of [Family Federation](#) members.

Avoiding a Forced Auction?

The [liquidators](#) requested to view building registries. With dissolution, property tax exemptions are removed, and the [liquidators](#) must now pay those taxes. While the keys to a microbus were confiscated, work vehicles such as a HiAce van and a light truck can still be used. Burials and interments that had been reserved before 4th March are allowed to proceed.

However, large-scale religious events such as the annual joint memorial service attended by the president have been prohibited.

What lies ahead? It seems likely that the worst-case scenario - auctioning off the [cemeteries](#) - can be avoided. Legally, [cemetery](#) management is typically conducted by local governments, religious corporations, or foundations, so transferring them to another religious organization is now a possibility.

However, ownership of remains and gravestones lies with the bereaved families. Any transfer must satisfy the families and align with the president's intentions, making selection of a recipient organization difficult.

(According to the [religious organization](#)'s legal department, the group has designated Tenchi Seikyō (天地正教) [See editor's note below] as the recipient of its assets after dissolution, meaning the [cemeteries](#) would also go there. However, National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales argues that any remaining assets should not be transferred to Tenchi Seikyō [See editor's note below] and is calling for special legislative measures, so the outcome remains uncertain.)

Future of Employees

The [religious organization](#) currently employs 1,933 staff members. It is easy to imagine how difficult it will be for them to find new employment after dismissal by the liquidation entity.

The [court decision](#) merely notes that they may receive unemployment insurance or welfare benefits. Is this really how one should address innocent believers? It can only be described as utterly lacking in compassion.

(Although Mr. Masaichi Hori (堀正一) is officially referred to as "former president", the term "president" is used here in accordance with believers' usage.)

See part 1 in the series: [Japan: Verdict Predetermined, Evidence Silenced](#)

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[Editor's note: Tenchi Seikyo (天地正教), translating to "True Teachings of Heaven and Earth," was founded in 1987 by Kawase Kayo as the Spiritual Stone Worshippers Club. In 1988, it was reorganized and officially registered as a religious corporation under Japan's Religious Corporations Law. The group venerates a pure white marble statue of the Seated Maitreya (Miroku Bosatsu), aligning with certain Buddhist traditions. According to researcher Thomas H. Pearce, as of 1994, Tenchi Seikyo reportedly had approximately 111,000 members across 73 centers throughout Japan.]

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Collusion Narrative Unravels As Probe Closes

April 15, 2026 • Knut Holdhus

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Probe ends, but reputational damage lingers after 11 months with widely circulated Unificationism-politics collusion narrative – failing to produce evidence



Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (정성수). Photo (2025): Segye Ilbo

Segye Ilbo, the South Korean newspaper, published on 12th April an opinion piece by religion correspondent Jeong Seong-su (정성수) about the recent decision by the joint investigation headquarters to end its high-profile investigation into Unificationism political ties and influence.

세계일보

The logo of the Segye Ilbo

See also [Alleged Unificationism Influence Case Collapses](#)

The article discusses a major legal and political controversy in South Korea that has now come to a significant turning point. At the center of the issue were allegations of improper ties – often described as “collusion” – between religious organizations and political figures. Specifically, the case focused on claims that members of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification – in Korea often referred to as Unificationism (통일교) – had provided money or

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favors to politicians across party lines. These allegations led to a wide-ranging investigation involving both prosecutors and police and attracted intense media attention.



Alleged [Unificationism](#) influence case collapses. Illustration: ChatGPT, 11th April 2026.

However, as of 10th April 2026, the joint investigation team officially [closed the case](#) without bringing charges against any of the key individuals involved. This outcome has prompted a broader reassessment of the narrative that had dominated public discourse for months: the idea that there was a systemic pattern of “church–state collusion”.

To understand the significance of this decision, it is important to look at how the case developed. Initially, the allegations appeared serious and far-reaching. Reports suggested that multiple politicians – both from the ruling party and the opposition – might have received unlawful payments connected to religious groups. Because these claims touched on issues of political integrity, religious influence, and corruption, they quickly gained traction. Media outlets reported extensively on the story, and public concern grew.

Yet, according to the investigators, the central problem with the case was the lack of solid evidence. While there were testimonies suggesting that money had changed hands, these statements were largely indirect. In other words, they were based on what people had heard rather than what they had directly witnessed. Crucially, there was no clear, verifiable proof showing who gave money to whom, when it happened, how much was involved, or under what circumstances the transactions took place.

In criminal law, these details are essential. Without them, it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to prove wrongdoing beyond a reasonable doubt. As a result, the investigators concluded that the evidence did not meet the threshold required to proceed with prosecution. This led to a decision of non-indictment for all those involved, including prominent political figures and leaders within the [religious organization](#).

The [article](#) emphasizes that this outcome highlights a fundamental principle of the rule of law: allegations alone are not enough. No matter how serious or widespread a claim may appear, it must be supported by concrete evidence in order to justify legal action. This principle is especially important in politically sensitive cases, where public opinion and media coverage can create pressure to act quickly or aggressively.

At the same time, the [article](#) acknowledges that the damage caused by the investigation cannot simply be undone. Even though no charges were filed, the process itself had significant consequences. Some political figures faced reputational harm or were forced to step down from positions of power. A [religious organization](#) and its affiliated groups were subjected to repeated searches and were portrayed in some reports as channels for illegal lobbying. This created a lasting stigma, affecting not only the institutions involved but also their members and supporters.

From this perspective, the case serves as a cautionary example of how quickly an unproven claim can escalate into a large-scale public controversy. What began as a single testimony eventually grew into a broad narrative implicating an entire network of political and religious actors. The media played a key role in this process by repeatedly reporting and amplifying the allegations, sometimes without sufficient verification.

The [article](#) also argues that the decision not to indict carries an important message about judicial independence. In a democratic society, legal decisions should be based on evidence and legal standards – not on public pressure or political considerations. If prosecutors had pursued charges despite weak evidence, it could have undermined trust in the fairness and neutrality of the justice system. By choosing not to proceed, the authorities reaffirmed the idea that the law must be applied consistently, even in high-profile cases.



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Will her detention continue after current [urgent medical release](#) even though she was cleared in one case of religion-politics collusion involving governing party member? Will special prosecutors insist on prolonging a detention that has already lasted more than 200 days in tiny cell? Will another case involving opposition party politician be treated differently by prosecutors appointed by current Lee administration? Here, [Hak Ja Han](#) (83), aka. as [Mother Han](#), being released on 27th March 2026 for [urgent hospital treatment](#). Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Looking ahead, the [article](#) suggests that this decision may have implications for other ongoing legal proceedings. For example, one prominent religious leader – [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), co-founder and current head of the [Family Federation](#) – is still on trial for related allegations in a case involving opposition party politicians.



Prominent politician in governing party cleared:

Jeon Jae-soo (전재수).
Photo (2023): [이데일리TV / Wikimedia Commons](#).
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There is a broader claim that there has been a pattern of financial exchanges between the [religious organization](#) and politicians. However, if that claim has not been substantiated in the above case involving a prominent political figure from the current governing party led by Lee Jae-myung (이재명), then similar arguments in the other case that includes important figures from PPP, the main opposition party, ought to now face increased scrutiny in court. Judges have the duty to question whether the underlying assumptions of these prosecutions are valid in all the current cases.

Beyond the legal details, the [article](#) calls for a broader societal reflection. It urges people to move away from emotionally driven debates and return to constitutional principles. One key concept discussed is the separation of religion and state. The [opinion piece](#) states,

“The principle of separation of religion and state is not intended to exclude religion, but to prevent state power from encroaching on matters of faith while also protecting religion from being exploited as a political tool.”

Importantly, the [article](#) does not suggest that religious organizations should be above the law. If individuals or groups engage in unlawful activities, they should be held accountable. However, it warns against treating an entire religion as inherently suspect based on unproven allegations. Doing so risks creating unfair generalizations and deepening social divisions.

The [article](#) frames the outcome of this case as an example of the legal system functioning as it should. Despite intense scrutiny and public interest, the decision was ultimately based on evidence – or the lack thereof. The author expresses hope that this episode will be remembered as a moment when legal principles prevailed over speculation and emotion.

At the same time, it serves as a reminder of the costs of such controversies. Even when accusations are not proven, they can leave lasting scars on individuals, institutions, and society as a whole. Moving forward, the [article](#) calls for greater caution, fairness, and adherence to the rule of law in handling similar issues, with the goal of fostering a more balanced and unified society.

See also [Alleged Unificationism Influence Case Collapses](#)

Text: [Knut Holdhus](#), editor

Featured image above: *Collusion narrative unravels as probe closes.*
Illustration: [ChatGPT](#), 15th April 2026.

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