

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's Media Reports Distorted to Attack Family Fed

Knut Holdhus
July 22, 2026



Japanese journalist and fact-checker Fumihiro Kato and literary critic Eitaro Ogawa



Bitter Winter, the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights



Positional relationship between former prime minister Shinzo Abe and the shooter Tetsuya Yamagami on his assassination

Fact-checker reveals how media framing turned Japan's Family Federation into scapegoat during the national tragedy of the 2022 Abe assassination

In the aftermath of the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in July 2022, public attention quickly shifted from mourning the national tragedy to intense scrutiny of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)). According to an analysis presented by Japanese author, journalist and fact-checker Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏), this dramatic change did not occur naturally. Rather, he argues that it resulted from a carefully reinforced media narrative that transformed the [religious organization](#) into the focus of a nationwide political controversy.

Kato's findings were discussed in a lengthy interview with literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎) and later analyzed by Italian sociologist of religion Dr. Massimo Introvigne in [Bitter Winter](#), the international online magazine focusing on religious freedom and human rights. Using statistical analysis of thousands of news reports and social media posts, Kato sought to understand how public opinion developed so rapidly in favor of

dissolving the [Family Federation](#).

Rather than focusing primarily on allegations against the [religious organization](#) itself, Kato argues that Japanese media concentrated on political connections - especially alleged links between the [organization](#) and members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Through repeated reporting, he believes these political associations came to be viewed as inherently suspicious, creating an atmosphere in which calls for dissolving the [religious organization](#) gained widespread support.

Instead, the dominant terms referred to politics. Frequently appearing words included "lawmakers", "Prime Minister", "organization", "ties", and "Liberal Democratic Party" (LDP). Former Prime Minister Abe and then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida were mentioned repeatedly.

According to Kato, this suggests that the central theme of the reporting was political responsibility rather than alleged misconduct by the [religious organization](#) itself.



English reconstruction of one of the slides Fumihiro Kato used during a [presentation](#) in Tokyo 20th Jan. 2024. Illustration

The word "ties" appeared especially often. Although reports repeatedly referred to connections between politicians and the [Family Federation](#), they rarely explained precisely what those ties consisted of. Kato believes that, through constant repetition, the mere existence of any connection gradually came to be viewed as evidence of wrongdoing.

See more by Kato: [Main Target of Hounding Not Church, but LDP](#)

See more by Kato: [Study Shows Wildly Exaggerated Unfounded Claims](#)

To be continued. Part 2 coming soon.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

[Editor's note: The term "second-generation religious believer" - in Japanese 宗教2世 (shūkyō nisei - generally refers to people who were raised in a religion by parents who belonged to a religious organization, rather than joining it themselves as adults.)

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When Giving Becomes Grounds For Dissolution

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Using Abe's Assassination Against Unificationism

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When Japan’s Supreme Court **finalized the dissolution** of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (formerly the **Unification Church**) on 22nd June 2026, the **decision** immediately sparked debate far beyond Japan. While government officials and critics of the **movement** described the ruling as a necessary response to controversial fundraising practices, others viewed it as a watershed moment for religious liberty. Among the strongest critics was international human rights lawyer Patricia Duval, who argued that the judgment represents a dangerous expansion of state power over religious organizations.

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Logo of *Bitter Winter*, the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights.

In an **article** in *Bitter Winter*, an online magazine specializing in religious liberty and human rights, Paris-based international human rights lawyer Patricia Duval contends that the Supreme Court’s decision creates an unprecedented legal precedent. In her view, the Court did not dissolve the **religious corporation** because its leaders committed criminal acts or because it engaged in violence or fraud. Instead, she argues, the Court accepted the government’s position that the **organization** should lose its legal status because its members collected donations that funded religious and humanitarian work around the world.

Duval



Voluntarily giving substantial financial support to religious and humanitarian causes can itself become grounds for dissolving a religious organization in Japan. Here, a Japanese woman offering a donation at a meeting. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 10th February 2025.

believes this reasoning has implications extending well beyond one religious movement. If governments can dissolve a religious body because they disapprove of how believers voluntarily donate money in support of their faith and charitable missions, she argues, other religious organizations could one day face similar treatment. She also criticizes the Court for minimizing the practical consequences of dissolution. Although the judges acknowledged that believers would lose their churches and meeting places, they characterized these hardships simply as indirect consequences rather than violations of religious freedom. Duval rejects that distinction, maintaining that confiscating a **religious organization’s** assets while insisting believers remain free to worship is both unrealistic and legally inconsistent.

Dissolved for Supporting Humanitarian Work?

Patricia Duval argues that Japan has taken an extraordinary step by dissolving the legal entity of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*. According to her, this may



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be the first time in a democratic country that a religious organization has lost its legal status largely because it raised money to support humanitarian and missionary activities around the world.

The [Supreme Court's decision](#) upheld the earlier ruling of the *Tokyo High Court*, meaning that the [religious corporation](#) would lose its legal identity and its assets could be liquidated. According to Duval, the [religious organization](#) has around 250 churches and hundreds of thousands of members in Japan.

Duval criticizes the Supreme Court for giving only a brief response to the arguments presented by the lawyers representing the [Family Federation](#). She says the Court largely ignored detailed claims that the dissolution violates fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion and freedom of association.

The Court stated that the dissolution merely removes the legal status of the [religious organization](#). According to the judges, it does not legally prohibit members from practicing their religion.



Taken by the state along with hundreds of other places of worship: The [Family Federation](#) Family Church in Seto, a city of 127,000 inhabitants, to the East of Nagoya, Japan. Photo: B. Wisp / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#)

However, the Court also acknowledged that losing all of the [Federation's](#) buildings and property would create obstacles for believers. It described these difficulties as indirect practical consequences rather than direct legal restrictions.

Duval strongly disagrees with this reasoning. She argues that taking away churches, meeting halls, and other property makes it much harder for believers to practice their faith together. Calling these losses “indirect” does not lessen their direct impact on religious life.

The Court further concluded that members of the [Family Federation](#) had, over many years, collected donations in ways that amounted to civil wrongdoing under Japanese law. These activities, it said, harmed the public welfare.

According to the judgment, the fundraising was carried out under the organized guidance by the [religious organization](#). The Court referred to the [founder's](#) teaching that Japanese believers should make financial sacrifices to support religious and humanitarian work in other countries. On that basis, it found that the [Family Federation](#) itself had encouraged the fundraising.

Duval emphasizes that the government never proved that the [religious organization](#) committed criminal offenses. No leaders were prosecuted for crimes such as fraud or extortion. Instead, the government relied on civil court judgments involving former members in order to justify dissolving the [religious corporation](#).





Supported by donations from the Japanese movement.
Jamoo2 Vocational School in Senegal. Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

She also notes that the donations were not intended for personal enrichment or commercial profit. According to information presented during the case, the [Family Federation](#) and related organizations operate in nearly 200 countries. Donations collected in Japan helped finance outreach work as well as schools, women's programs, and other charitable projects in Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere.

Duval argues that the Court effectively treated these international activities as evidence against the [Federation](#). Because Japanese believers were making unusually large donations, courts concluded that they must have been psychologically manipulated into doing so.

She rejects this conclusion. In her view, many former members who later challenged their donations had previously been subjected to forced confinement and so-called deprogramming or faith-breaking by opponents of the [religious organization](#). For decades, she writes, thousands of members were abducted, confined, and pressured to abandon their faith. She argues that the dissolution order is the final result of this long campaign against the [movement](#).

Duval says the ruling sends a troubling message. It suggests that voluntarily giving substantial financial support to religious and humanitarian causes can itself become grounds for dissolving a religious organization if authorities believe such giving is socially unacceptable.

She finds this especially unfortunate because, in her opinion, the [Family Federation](#) has supported humanitarian projects that have benefited disadvantaged communities around the world. She writes that volunteers in African countries and elsewhere are now facing the difficult task of explaining that schools, women's centers, and other projects have lost financial support because of the Japanese court decision.

Finally, Duval criticizes what she sees as a contradiction in the Supreme Court's reasoning. The Court said that members remain free to continue practicing their religion as individuals or as an informal group. Yet it also justified dissolution by saying there was a risk that the [religious organization](#) would continue encouraging donations in the future.

According to Duval, these two conclusions cannot easily be reconciled. If believers continue following the same religious teachings, she argues, any new organization they establish could again be accused of engaging in the same fundraising activities and could once more face dissolution.

For Duval, this reveals what she considers the central flaw in the decision. She believes the ruling ultimately targets not simply the legal corporation but the religious beliefs and practices themselves. In her view, that amounts to an infringement of the rights to freedom of religion, peaceful assembly, and association, rights that democratic societies are expected to protect for all faith communities.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Attorney Patricia Duval, member of the Paris Bar Association, specializing in international human rights law. Earned a degree in public law from Sorbonne University. Has defended the rights of religious

and faith minorities both in France and internationally, including at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), the Council of Europe (CE), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU), and the United Nations. Author of numerous academic papers on religion and freedom of belief. Here, speaking at the UN Office in Geneva 16th June 2025. Edited screenshot from UPF video.

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