

# Another Tragedy in Japan: The Targeting & Dissolution of the Family Federation of the Family Federation



**This booklet is dedicated to**

## **Toru Goto**

Hero of the Unification Faith Family  
Symbol of the strength of the  
Family Federation of Japan



Kidnapped by his family and forcibly confined from  
September 11, 1995 to February 10, 2008

Cover photo:  
Demonstration by Family Federation/Unificationist  
affiliated college student group (IFVOC) in Japan.

# **Another Tragedy in Japan: The Targeting & Dissolution of the Family Federation**

Second Edition  
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By James B. Edgerly  
Director, Higher Purpose Forum



“Yamagami’s political violence has proved stunningly effective. Political violence seldom fulfills so many of the predator’s aims.”

In “Shinzo Abe’s Assassination Achieved His Political Goals”  
*The Economist*, January 12, 2023

“From the Communist Party’s point of view, this is the final war against the Unification Church.”

Soichiro Tahara, Sunday Mainichi, November 6, 2022

## 1) Unificationism as a New Religious Movement

Unificationism is a new, worldwide religious movement. The central organization of Unificationism is the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU, formerly Unification Church), founded in South Korea in 1954, with several million members active in well over 100 countries.<sup>1</sup> Its founders are Reverend Sun Myung Moon (1920 – 2012) and his wife, Dr. Hak Ja Han (1943 – present). As is commonly seen with emerging and sometimes overzealous religious movements, Unificationism has been through a period of controversy, hostility and persecution almost everywhere it has established a presence.

The persecution of Unificationism in the United States included hearings before the U.S. House Subcommittee on International Organizations chaired by Representative Donald Fraser (D-MN), (1977-78); a ten-

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<sup>1</sup> Since its founding in 1954 until today, the formal name of the church is the “Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity” (HSA-UWC). During its formative period, the organization’s nickname was the “Unification Church.” In 1997, the Founder of Unificationism, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, formally changed the name (dba) to the “Family Federation for World Peace and Unification” (FFWPU). Generally, a simpler name is used: “Family Federation.” A name commonly used to refer to the broader activities of Unificationism is the “Unification Movement.” Members of the movement refer to themselves as “Unificationists.” Importantly, not all who consider themselves to be “Unificationist” are involved with the Family Federation. Over the past five decades, the Family Federation has continuously requested the media to discontinue use of the disparaging term “Moonies.”

year period of professional kidnapping, forced confinement and faith breaking (“deprogramming”) of church members (1975 – 1985); and the unjust trial and 18-month imprisonment of Rev. Moon, which concluded in 1985. We believe this phase is behind us. The Family Federation in the United States is now largely in the hands of a younger generation of activists.

In the three years since the tragic assassination of Japan’s former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8, 2022, the Family Federation of Japan has faced an avalanche of hostile media coverage which generated vigorous persecution from the Japanese public. Responding to the intense pressure of media and post-assassination public negativity, in October of 2023, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) initiated a legal proceeding to dissolve the Family Federation of Japan and liquidate its assets. On March 25, 2025, the Tokyo District Court granted that request and issued a dissolution order.<sup>2</sup> The decision, which is now under appeal, was based upon claims of “manipulative fundraising practices” and other civil code violations.

Throughout this unimaginable three-year process, my assumption had been that anti-Unificationist religious persecution in Japan is not dissimilar to what Unificationists have experienced in the U.S. and elsewhere. However, watching video recordings of two press conferences at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan on March 26 and 28 caused me to abruptly reconsider that naive assumption.

## **2) Press Conferences at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan (FCCJ), March 26 & 28, 2025**

The two FCCJ press conferences took place in the wake of the March 25 Dissolution Order by the Tokyo District Court. The first, on March 26<sup>th</sup>, featured the President of the Family Federation of Japan, the second (on March 28<sup>th</sup>) featured the leadership of the anti-Unificationist lawyers’ network.

During the March 26<sup>th</sup> FCCJ press conference, the Family Federation of Japan President Tomihiro Tanaka did not direct a single disparaging

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<sup>2</sup> In response, The Family Federation of Japan filed a 287-page appeal before the Tokyo High Court on April 7, 2025.

comment towards his opponents, the anti-Unificationist lawyers. His presentation referred to records of the Tokyo District Court.

He explained that the court records indicate a “drastic decrease” in the number of civil cases, out-of-court settlements, and consultations in Consumer Centers, with no civil cases for the past seven years. Civil cases that are the basis of the dissolution order occurred an average of 32 years ago. All damages have been fully paid, and all cases have been settled.

Tanaka reported examining each testimony used in the court proceedings. He determined that 78% of plaintiffs were ex-members whose faith had been broken under extreme (now illegal) conditions of mental and physical coercion (so-called “deprogramming”). The established view in the international legal community is that such witnesses are not credible and therefore their statements are not admissible. Other statements in the record were Ministry-originated documents that plaintiffs had simply signed. Remarkably, the investigation process leading to the trial excluded interviews and statements by active Unificationists.

Finally, he reported on the immeasurable human rights violations and trauma being endured by the 100,000 member Unificationist community of Japan during the post-assassination period of persecution.

The March 28<sup>th</sup> FCCJ press conference was a sharp contrast to the March 26<sup>th</sup> meeting. The spokesmen were three leaders from the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS), an anti-Unificationist organization.<sup>3</sup>

At the outset of the March 28th meeting, attorney Masaki Kito took pains to explain that Japan is a democratic country, “ruled by law.” Without providing specifics, he then stated (and later repeated) that “Unification Church claims are full of lies, and fabrications, and exaggerations without facts.”

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<sup>3</sup> The organizational name used at the press conferences was “Lawyers from Across Japan for the Victims of the Unification Church.” The speakers were Hiroshi Yamaguchi, Masaki Kito, Katsuomi Abe. The name of this lawyers’ organization has gone through numerous iterations, the most well-known being the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS). They claim to have 350 lawyers in their organization, who presently represent 194 “victims” for whom they are seeking to collect 5.7 billion yen (\$US 60 million) in repayments and damages. The basis for the payment of these damages will be the liquidated assets of the Family Federation.

The lawyers found a way to characterize the legal proceedings as “not a case of religious persecution,” but rather “based on the actions of the (religious) corporation.”

Remarkably, spokesman Katsuomi Abe explicitly denied the occurrence of over 40 years and 4,300 cases of coercive abductions by professional kidnappers, forced confinement and forced de-conversion (so called “de-programming”) of Unificationists in Japan. Kito stated reference to such events “is a ridiculous and false claim.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the lawyers repeatedly disrespected the Holy Blessing Ceremony, a sacrament of the Unification faith, characterizing the ceremonies as “forced mass weddings,” claiming they are a violation of the Japanese Constitution and basic human rights.

At the end of the March 26<sup>th</sup> press conference by the Family Federation leadership there was silence. At the end of the anti-Unificationist lawyers press conference on March 28<sup>th</sup> there was applause from the journalists.<sup>5</sup>

The press conferences made a striking and unexpected impression on me. After pondering what I had observed and then watching both press conferences a second and third time, my conclusions regarding the anti-Unificationist legal team were as follows:

- The lawyers, who since 1987 have been the leading opposition to Unificationism in Japan, are entirely confident in their undertaking.
- Their words portray a license to publicly and freely mischaracterize and express disdain and disrespect for Unificationism and Unificationist members and leadership.
- They are disinterested and dismissive of any and all facts and information presented by the Family Federation.
- There is no possibility whatsoever for their thinking to be changed on this matter.
- They are confident that journalists, public opinion and the government in Japan unhesitatingly support their purpose.

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<sup>4</sup> Attorneys Yamaguchi, Kito, and Abe have been active in organizations complicit in abductions and de-conversions from the late 1980's until the practice was effectively outlawed by a Supreme Court decision in 2015.

<sup>5</sup> To verify these observations, the video recordings of both press conferences can be found on the website of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ).

After watching these press conferences in the context of the hideous persecution suffered by Unificationists across Japan over the past three years, it was obvious that I had to rethink my understanding of the nature of religious persecution in Japan.

In the US, there is institutional vigilance and a general public tolerance protecting both individual and organizational religious freedom. The painful period of professional kidnapping of our members was intense but far shorter in duration than in Japan.<sup>6</sup> In the U.S., the terms “cult” and especially “brainwashing” have largely been debunked and are no longer regarded as viable terminology in professional circles. In Japan, such terms remain in full force.

The institutional and cultural climate faced by new religious movements in the U.S. appears to be fundamentally different than what has been faced by the Family Federation of Japan.

### **3) Assassination of Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe**

On July 8, 2022, Japan’s longest serving Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe,<sup>7</sup> was assassinated in Nara, Japan while giving a public speech on behalf of Kei Sato, a local candidate for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The assassin used a homemade shotgun, killing Abe in broad daylight, making no effort to flee. The event has had a traumatic impact on the people of Japan. Comparisons have been made to what the United States public experienced with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.<sup>8</sup>

The killer’s name is Tetsuya Yamagami. At the time of the shooting, he was 41 years old, unemployed and in debt. He had been planning the assassination of Shinzo Abe since September 2021. After his arrest, Yamagami clearly explained his specific motivation to kill Abe: because the former Prime Minister was a long-time supporter of and collaborator

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<sup>6</sup> In the US, kidnapping, forced confinement and faith-breaking of believers occurred from 1975 until the late 1980’s. The practice continued for four decades in Japan, beginning at about the same time as in the U.S. and continuing until the Supreme Court victory by Mr. Toru Goto in 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Shinzo Abe’s terms as Prime Minister were 2006 – 2007 and 2012 to 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Stated by Tomohiko Taniguchi, former Special Advisor to Shinzo Abe, to CNN on July 8, 2022. (Source: Wikipedia).



with the Family Federation of Japan. He claimed the Family Federation caused the bankruptcy of his family in 2002 due to his mother's excessive donations to the organization. The stated objective of his assassination of Shinzo Abe was to catalyze the dissolution of the Family Federation of Japan.



Yamagami, with weapon, being apprehended by police.

*(Photo: Nara Shimbun via Kyodo)*

Curiously, Yamagami has remained in prison for three years and has not yet been tried. He does not mention that half of his mother's donations had been returned in 2009, nor why he waited twenty years after the family bankruptcy to undertake the assassination.

Tetsuya Yamagami's testimony includes claims of deprivations that the family suffered because of his mother's continuous giving. It is this deprivation, which he blames on the church, that drove Yamagami to devise and implement his plan to achieve the dissolution of the Family Federation of Japan through political assassination. In the days following the assassination, massive nationwide media attention was focused on the assassin's suffering and family dysfunction. By mid-July the mood of the Japanese public had swung to sympathy for Yamagami and hostility towards the church of his mother and sister.

Remarkably, it was not the man who fired rounds into the neck of Shinzo Abe who was been put on trial. Yamagami remains in jail. No date for his trial has been given, no additional investigation details have been disclosed. Rather, the Family Federation, which has committed

no criminal offense, has been put on trial and is now on the brink of dissolution and liquidation.<sup>9</sup>

The extent of public hostility directed at the Family Federation since the Abe assassination is shocking. Members have been terminated from their jobs, evicted from apartments, bullied at school and harassed on social media. Property has been confiscated, commercial services denied, hospital treatments have been refused. Families have been broken with forced divorce and suicide. Attorney Tatusuki Nakayama has written: “So, the initiation of the trial of dissolution means ‘social death’ for believers.”<sup>10</sup>

Observing the relentless public hostility and persecution faced by the Family Federation since the killing of Abe, one must be impressed by the remarkable effectiveness of the assassin’s undertaking. *The Economist* magazine put it thusly: “Yamagami’s political violence has proved stunningly effective. Political violence seldom fulfills so many of the predator’s aims.”<sup>11</sup>

The assassination of Shinzo Abe is tragedy enough. But that horrid event catalyzed something much darker, and with negative long-term consequences for democracy in Japan. Events from July 8, 2022, until March 25, 2025 are the final battle in a 50-year ideological struggle between a nationwide alliance of left-wing, party-aligned lawyers on one side, and the conservative, anti-communist Unification Church/Family Federation of Japan on the other. Under the relentless pressure of a sympathetic left-leaning media, the people and government of Japan have allowed themselves to fall into a destructive “herd mentality,” unable to reconsider narratives and stereotypes. Multiple observers have called the Japanese government’s case against the Family Federation of Japan a “witch hunt” (see Appendix).

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<sup>9</sup>Only twice since WWII have religious organizations been dissolved and liquidated by the Government of Japan. In both cases, the leaders of the organization had been convicted of criminal acts (murder and fraud). There have been no criminal charges or convictions regarding the Family Federation of Japan.

<sup>10</sup> See “Dear Prime Minister Kishida: Why the Unification Church Should Not Be Dissolved,” *Journal of CESNUR*, November – December 2023, page 80.

<sup>11</sup> *The Economist*, January 12, 2023. See also “The Bizarre Story Behind Shinzo Abe’s Assassination” *The Atlantic*, 18 September 2023.

“Against stupidity we have no defense. Neither protests nor force can touch it. Reasoning is of no use. Facts that contradict personal prejudices can simply be disbelieved...”

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in a letter from Tegel Military Prison, 1943**

“In individuals, insanity is rare; but in groups, parties, nations and epochs, it is the rule.”

**Friedrich Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886**

“The crowd is untruth”

**Soren Kierkegaard in *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, 1847**

Owing to the frenzy of negativity, lines have been crossed and dangerous precedents set. Religious freedom, a bedrock pillar underpinning democratic social order, is on the threshold of being fundamentally compromised in Japan. Fortunately, a number of brave commentators – journalists, politicians, and Church leaders — not just in Japan, but also in Europe and the U.S. - have finally begun to raise issues of fairness, justice, religious freedom and the future of democracy in Japan. Unlike the anti-Unificationist lawyers, these individuals have met and spent time with active members of the Family Federation of Japan. The story that follows is based upon their numerous articles presenting research, interviews and legal expertise.

#### **4) The Historical Record: 1978 to 2025**

[Information in this section is largely based on research published by *Bitter Winter*, an online Italian magazine devoted to human rights and religious freedom. See articles between 2023 and 2025 by Massimo Introvigne, Masumi Fukuda, Toshikazu Masubuchi, Tatsuki Nakayama, Haruhisa Nakagawa and Kazuhiro Aoyama. A number of these articles were based upon prior articles published in Japan, primarily in *Monthly Hanada*. The fair-minded efforts of Senator Satoshi Hamada are also acknowledged.]

There is no mystery as to what powered the hurricane of anti-Unification “herd mentality” that quickly overcame Japan. A national network of expert, left-wing, anti-Unificationist lawyers, combined with left-leaning national media, swung into action as soon as the finger of accusation was pointed at the Family Federation. Within fifteen months of the Abe

assassination, the Mainichi Shimbun Poll (October 2023) found that 83% of the Japanese public supported government efforts to dissolve the Family Federation.

As reported in the May 6, 2025 issue of *Bitter Winter*, four weeks after the court's dissolution order (on April 18), the China Anti-Xie-Jiao Association<sup>12</sup> released a statement expressing satisfaction that the Family Federation in Japan, "a tool of the anti-Communist ideology," had finally been dissolved. The statement congratulated the efforts of NNLASS in "agitating public opinion" and expressed hope that other countries would follow Japan's example

The protracted five-decade process, that led to an outcome praised by an organ of the Chinese Communist Party, is summarized below in five phases.

### **Phase One: Late 1970's**

#### **IFVOC becomes a thorn in the side of the Japanese Left.**

An organization closely allied with the Unification Church is the International Federation for Victory Over Communism (IFVOC), established in Japan in 1968.<sup>13</sup> IFVOC proved highly effective in helping the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) confront the advance of the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) beginning in the late 1970s. Two events brought nation-wide notoriety to IFVOC and set off loud alarms for its left-wing opponents.

First was the highly-contested 1978 electoral defeat of Manabe Yutaro for Governor of Kyoto Prefecture. Manabe was a member of the Japan Socialist Party. His candidacy was supported by a broad leftist coalition, including the Japanese Communist Party. The unexpected victory by the candidate for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) ended the three-decade occupancy of the Kyoto Governor position by a representative of the

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<sup>12</sup> The China Anti-Xie-Jiao Association is a state-sponsored organization, operating under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party, dedicated to identifying, suppressing and eradicating religious groups.

<sup>13</sup> Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the founder of Unificationism, established the *International Federation for Victory Over Communism (IFVOC)* in South Korea in 1965. Its purpose was to expose and counteract the atheistic ideological foundation of Marxist-Leninist ideology. IFVOC was established in Japan three years later.

Socialist Party.<sup>14</sup> IFVOC mobilized thousands of volunteers to support the aggressive and ultimately successful LDP campaign. The crucial role of IFVOC in the April 1978 outcome was acknowledged by Communist Party leader Kenji Miyamoto. In the June 8, 1978 edition of “*Shimbun Akahata*” (Red Flag Newspaper), the party’s official daily, Miyamoto called on Party members to fight a “holy battle to defeat the IFVOC.”

Similar electoral outcomes were achieved in Tokyo (1979), Osaka (1979) and Saitama (1992).<sup>15</sup> IFVOC was involved in each of these cases, leading major Japanese cities away from leftist candidates, in favor of the LDP. Toshikazu Masubuchi, a member of the Tochigi Prefectural Assembly throughout this period, recalls that “IFVOC saved Japan from its left-leaning tendencies. On the other hand, for the Japanese Communist Party and its sympathizers, IFVOC became an “irreconcilable enemy.”<sup>16</sup>

Second was the Levchenko Affair. From 1978, IFVOC became a leading player in a national campaign to enact the “Espionage Prevention Bill.” Their goal was to collect 30 million signatures in support of the law. The following year, a top Soviet KGB agent named Stanislav Levchenko defected to the US. Levchenko revealed the names of approximately 200 Japanese politicians and journalists associated with both the JCP and JSP who were paid agents for the USSR. (These claims were later confirmed through post-USSR archival research in Russia.) This revelation brought considerable momentum to the cause of the “Espionage Prevention Bill”<sup>17</sup> for which IFVOC was the leading advocate.

In 1983, the JSP denounced the Levchenko affair as a conspiracy by IFVOC and the American CIA. IFVOC successfully sued the JSP for false claims, eventually winning a 2-million-yen settlement.

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<sup>14</sup> Torazo Ninagawa served as Governor of Kyoto Prefecture from 1950 to 1978. (Source: List of Governors of Kyoto Prefecture, Justapedia.) Ninagawa was affiliated with the Japan Socialist Party and was supported by a coalition of left-leaning organizations including the Japan Communist Party.

<sup>15</sup> See “Unification Church Case in Japan: A Politician Speaks Up,” by Toshikazu Masubuchi in *Bitter Winter*, February 27, 2024.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Also referred to as the “Anti-Spy Act,” “Anti-Spy Bill,” “Anti-Secrecy Act” and “National Spy Law.”

Ultimately, the JSP and the JCP were successful in preventing the passage of the “Espionage Prevention Bill.” However, these two affairs – the 1978 Kyoto Governor election and the “Espionage Prevention Bill” – positioned IFVOC as a highly effective faction of Unification activities in Japan, a close ally to the conservative program of the LDP<sup>18</sup> and a serious opponent to the ambitions of the Japanese Socialist and Communist Parties.



IFVOC Event in 1972 (Photo: IFVOC)

Banner reads: “Condemnation of the Japanese Communist Party”

## **Phase Two: From the 1980s to 2009**

### **Controversial Fundraising Practices by the Family Federation**

During the 1980’s the Family Federation of Japan and its allied organizations rapidly expanded their membership, organization and activities, particularly on college campuses. As with any non-profit, religious organization, expansion necessitated fundraising. With encouragement from the church’s international leadership, Family Federation fundraising in Japan became ambitious, aggressive and, owing to the dedication of its members, highly successful. Funds raised in Japan supported the national movement and were contributed to support Unification activities in South Korea, the United States and elsewhere.

<sup>18</sup> In the March 26, 2025 press conference, Family Federation President Tanaka explained that the primary shared interest between the Family Federation and the LDP was a shared commitment to promoting “family values.” Cooperative relations between the Unificationist organizations and the LDP date back to the political career of Shinzo Abe’s grandfather.

The church's primary fund-raising method came to be known by its left-wing lawyer opponents as "spiritual sales." Customers would pay high prices for modest products, such as marble vases and miniature pagodas, in hopes of experiencing the future benefits of good fortune for themselves, their family and their ancestors. This fundraising method, not uncommon in Japan, is widely used by numerous Buddhist organizations. The church's fundraising campaigns were highly successful but, as the organization came to regret, personal selling tactics became excessive and controversial. Additionally, church members were encouraged to make generous personal donations in pursuit of aggressive fundraising goals of their local church community.<sup>19</sup>

It was during this period (1990's) that Tetsuya Yamagami's mother became a member of the Family Federation. By any measure, based upon publicly available records, the extent of her donations seems excessive, including cash, her home and a parcel of inherited land. She declared personal bankruptcy in 2002.

### **Phase Three: 1981 to 2025**

#### **National Network of Lawyers Against "Spiritual Sales"<sup>20</sup> and the "Defection Business"**

Appreciating the above background information relating to the 1978 election outcomes in Kyoto, the events surrounding the Espionage Prevention Bill in the 1980's, and the so-called "spiritual sales" of the Family Federation of Japan from the 1980's until 2009, is essential to understanding the powerful, thoroughly prepared, and well-organized political and ideological forces that led to the dissolution order.

Research undertaken by award-winning journalist Masumi Fukuda (originally published in the Japanese Journal *Hanada*) established that

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<sup>19</sup> Looking back, the Family Federation of Japan regrets, and has issued public apologies for, these excesses. As explained later in this article, the church underwent a wholesale reform in 2009 to discontinue these controversial fundraising practices.

<sup>20</sup> Information in this section is largely based upon the well-documented writings and personal investigations of Masumi Fukuda (an award-winning non-fiction author and investigate journalist), Toshikazu Masubuchi (nine-term member of the Tochigi Prefectural Assembly in Japan) and Tatsuki Nakayama (Japanese attorney and legal scholar). Their writings on topics related to the Family Federation of Japan beginning in 2022 can be found in the Japanese news magazine *Monthly Hanada* and the online Italian human rights magazine, *Bitter Winter*



from the early 1980's a sequence of left-leaning, and leftist-party-aligned legal groups organized to oppose the Family Federation and related organizations in Japan. As explained above, this opposition began as a response to IFVOC. In 1981, the Social Cultural and Legal Center ("the Center") was established under the auspices of the (now defunct) Japan Socialist Party. Working closely with the lawyers associated with the Japanese Communist Party, the Center's initial efforts were to protect the rights and status of Zainichi (non-resident) Koreans. In developments spawned by the Levchenko Affair (explained above), the Center came into a head-to-head confrontation with IFVOC in 1986 due to its strong public advocacy for the "Espionage Prevention Bill" (also referred to as the "Anti-Spy Law.")

In the 1980's the attention of the leftist lawyers' network began to shift to the opportunity presented by the growing controversy over the Unification Church's "spiritual sales." In January 1987, Center member attorney Hiroshi Yamaguchi authored an essay in *Center News* calling attention to the "spiritual sales"<sup>21</sup> practices of the Unification Church, criticizing both sales methods and use of funds to support the Unificationists' public policy agenda, including advocacy for the Anti-Spy Law.<sup>22</sup>

Building on the work and the organization of the Center, in February 1987, Yamaguchi and fellow attorneys Kazuo Ito and Yasushi Higashizawa established the "Lawyers' Network for Relief of Damages Caused by Spiritual Sales." The organization was later renamed "National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales" (NNLASS), with Yamaguchi as its long-standing Secretary General.<sup>23</sup> The Center and NNLASS shared the common goal of opposing the Unification Church's fundraising activities. Both lawyers' associations (the Center and NNLASS) targeted the selling methods used in "spiritual sales," which they considered to be "coercive" and even fraudulent, as part of the broader left-wing campaign for human rights, social justice, and separation of religion and politics in Japan.

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<sup>21</sup>Use of the term "spiritual sales" in the context of fundraising for a religious organization is a misappropriation of a term used in for commercial transactions in Japan.

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that Attorney Yamaguchi referred to the "Anti-Spy Law" in the March 28, 2025 press conference described earlier.

<sup>23</sup> The name of the lawyers' network evolved once again to become the "Lawyers from Across Japan for the Victims of the Unification Church," as was the name used at the March 28, 2028 press conference at the FCCJ.



In January 1987, when Yamaguchi announced the collaboration of the two organizations, he essentially declared war on the Unification Church of Japan and its affiliate IFVOC.<sup>24</sup> One month later, on February 20, 1987, Attorney Yamaguchi told the Socialist Party's newspaper *Shakai Shimpo* that the ultimate aim of the lawyers' association was to persuade 'the Ministry of Education (MEXT) to revoke the registration as a religious corporation' of the Unification Church. Therefore, what unfolded in Japan following the Abe assassination in July of 2022 was already in the mind of Yamaguchi in 1987.<sup>25</sup>



Attorney Hiroshi Yamaguchi, speaking on behalf of the  
 “Lawyers from Across Japan for the Victims of the Unification Church”  
 at The Foreign Correspondents' Press Club of Japan,  
 March 28, 2025

Beginning in the 1990's NNLASS played an important and long-standing role in a nationwide faith-breaking (so-called “deprogramming”) effort directed at members of the Unification Church since the 1970's. NNLASS provided legal advice to parents of Church members in undertaking efforts to break the faith of their child, including putting the family in contact with

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<sup>24</sup> On January 31, 1987, the official Center's newsletter, “Center News,” published an article by attorney Hiroshi Yamaguchi attacking the “spiritual sales” and claiming that “the money earned from such sales goes to fund the Unification Church and the IFVOC's efforts to enact the National Secret Law [i.e., the Anti-Spy Law]... Now, the members of the Social Cultural and Legal Center who have been working on the issue of spiritual sales have decided to join together to form the ‘Liaison Committee for the Defense of Spiritual Sales Damage Relief’ (tentative name), and we would like to take this opportunity to call for the participation of all our members.”

<sup>25</sup> See Massimo Introvigne in “Yamaguchi's Plot to Destroy the Unification Church in Japan,” in *Bitter Winter*, July 6, 2023.

paid, professional “deprogrammers.” If the faith-breaking was successful, the lawyers would then work with the ex-member in undertaking legal suits against the Church, pursuing allegations of financial exploitation and psychological harm.

A book supporting this effort was *All About the UC’s Mind Control* written by lawyer Masaki Gouro, a prominent member of NNLASS.<sup>26</sup> The essential doctrine presented in the book and advocated by NNLASS is that “All Japanese followers of the Unification Church are to be considered as victims of deceptive evangelism and mind control. Therefore, they should be rescued or redeemed from these evil influences.”<sup>27</sup>

At the hands of professional “deprogrammers,” Church members were abducted and confined in securely locked apartments. Confined believers were deluged with daily rantings and abuse by “deprogrammers” mocking the doctrines of Unificationism and framing Church leadership with scandal. Testimonies from kidnapping victims state that abuse by faith-breakers was not only verbal, but on occasion physical and even sexual.

These extreme conditions continued until believers expressed their decision to abandon their faith. To confront pretended de-conversion, faith breakers required the victims to take multiple measures to prove disaffiliation. These included letters of apostasy, disclosure of member name lists, behavior explicitly against church rules, annulment of church marriages, and initiation of civil suits against the Church. Faith-breaking in Japan involved about 4,300 believers<sup>28</sup> from the mid-1970’s until a 2015 judgment in the Toru Goto case by the Supreme Court of Japan.

One can reasonably ask, what kind of legal process is it when decisions, statements, and legal demands resulting from such extreme conditions of coercion and duress are allowed to be entered into legal proceedings? Tatsuki Nakayama’s article in the September 22, 2023 issue of *Bitter Winter* revealed an almost one-to-one ratio between forced defections via

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<sup>26</sup> Information in Wikipedia and *Greenwich Times* indicates that NNLASS filed approximately 35,000 compensation claims with recoveries of over \$205 million. In additions, in- and out-of-court settlements have exceeded \$132 million, involving about 1,500 individuals.

<sup>27</sup> Involuntary “deprogramming” (more accurately described as coercive faith-breaking) has been legally untenable in the United States for over thirty years. However, in Japan it continued until 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Estimate provided by the Family Federation of Japan.

abduction and civil cases against the Family Federation. Essentially, the NNLASS/Deprogrammer produced “victims” of Unificationism, now referred to as “manufactured victims,” for a period of at least 20 years. This well-honed practice generated enormous financial and legal rewards: fees for deprogrammers for their coercive faith-breaking services,<sup>29</sup> fees for lawyers when winning civil cases for victims, and eventually plaintiff statements for inclusion in the MEXT investigation and court proceedings.

The primary role of the lawyers’ network from that time until the present has been representing former members in court proceedings they initiated against the church as proof of their de-conversion. These suits were primarily directed towards return of donations and payment of associated damages. According to NNLASS, the total of such claims to date exceeds 124 billion yen (\$US 900 million).<sup>30</sup> Among Unificationists, this long-standing and highly lucrative operation is sarcastically referred to as the “Defection Business.”<sup>31</sup>

#### **Phase Four: 2009 to July 2022**

##### **The 2009 Compliance Declaration & Trial of Toru Goto**

Some church members, disenchanted by the continuous demands of fundraising campaigns, left the organization and became its vocal opponents. Condemnation grew within the media and also within the church. Numerous civil cases relating to fundraising methods arose against the Church and were successful. Finally, in 2009, fundraising methods were addressed by the leadership of the Family Federation of Japan through the issuance of a “Compliance Declaration.” The Declaration was comprised of a plurality of notices and letters to members. It was supported by member training, forms for fundraisers to fill out, and a nation-wide “key performance indicator” measurement system to monitor compliance.

The practice of “spiritual sales” rapidly diminished across the organization over the next 12 months. Long before the Abe assassination, the leadership of the Family Federation of Japan admitted and apologized for the excesses of “spiritual fundraising.” Compensatory payments were made

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<sup>29</sup> Fees paid to professional “deprogrammers” or faith-breakers averaged \$15,000 to \$30,000 in standard cases.

<sup>30</sup> From *Asahi Shimbun*, July 13, 2022.

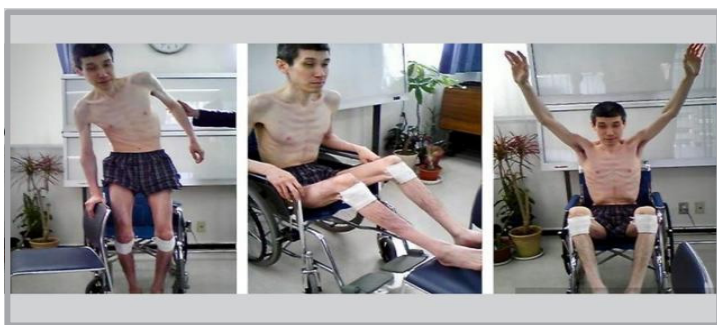
<sup>31</sup> Terminology from Family Federation Legal Affairs Bureau (see article by Tatsuki Nakayama in September 22, 2023 issue of *Bitter Winter*).

to thousands of aggrieved donors amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars. Among these was the 2009 repayment of a substantial portion of donations made by the mother of Shinzo Abe's assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami.

In a press conference three days after the assassination, Family Federation President Tomihiro Tanaka stated, "Over the past 13 years, we have promoted thorough compliance at every level of our organization. In this respect, I believe that the organization has changed significantly, including its attitude toward donations." Asked by a reporter, "So you are confirming that there is no such trouble now?" Tanaka responded: "That's right. Since 2009 we have not had any such trouble."

It is important to appreciate this point. Virtually all civil cases referenced in court proceedings against the Family Federation of Japan relate to events that occurred prior to the 2009 "Compliance Declaration," thirteen years prior to the Abe assassination. Civil legal actions relating to post-2009 fundraising by the Family Federation have been essentially zero since 2017.<sup>32</sup>

The practice of believer kidnapping and so-called "deprogramming," determined long ago to be criminal in the U.S. and Europe, continued in Japan for a period of four decades. It was finally made illegal in 2015 as a result a successful legal suit brought by church member Toru Goto. Mr. Goto had been kidnapped and forcibly confined for a period of twelve years and five months.



Family Federation member Toru Goto  
after over 12 years of forced confinement

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<sup>32</sup> See article by Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama in *The Journal of CESNUR*, Volume 7, Issue 6, November-December 2023, pages 70-92.

The “Toru Goto Case” sought damages for forced abduction, unlawful confinement and violations of religious freedom. Litigated for six years, Goto’s case culminated in a favorable ruling (including payment of damages) by the Supreme Court of Japan, issued on September 29, 2015. Toru Goto’s twenty-year ordeal played a pivotal role in ending the kidnapping, confinement and faith breaking of Unificationists in Japan. The practice of forced “deprogramming” was carried out over a period of 40 years and affected an estimated 4,300 victims.

### **Phase Five: April 2022 - Present**

#### **Manipulated Public Hysteria**

As explained above, the assassination of Shinzo Abe by Tetsuya Yamagami occurred on July 8, 2022. Just four days later, on July 12, 2022, the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS) held a press conference in the Chiyoda Ward of Tokyo. The primary spokespersons were Executive Director Hiroshi Yamaguchi and Acting Director Masaki Ito. Yamaguchi characterized the assassin as a “victim of the church.” He admonished that the public demand greater scrutiny of the Family Federation and stated that the Church’s claims to have ceased coercive fundraising practices in 2009 was “a lie.”<sup>33</sup>

This NNLASS press conference is what triggered the avalanche of hostility and persecution that came down upon the members, families and leadership of the Family Federation of Japan. The lawyers successfully turned the nation’s anger away from the assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami, now regarded as being a “victim,” and towards the Family Federation of Japan. The surge of national media hostility directed against the Family Federation had begun. Leading the campaign was the weekly news magazine *Shukan Bunshun*, TV broadcasts Hodo Tokushu and News 23, and journalist Eito Suzuki. This campaign proved to be pivotal in shaping vociferous public opinion, soon forcing the government into action against the Family Federation.

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<sup>33</sup> Source: *Mainichi Japan*, July 13, 2022. Yamaguchi supported claims of continued Family Federation “spiritual sales” by citing a February 2020 ruling by the Tokyo District Court in favor of a former member who demanded return of a \$34,200 donation that was claimed to be “through an unfair method of stirring up anxiety and fear.” The Family Federation challenged and later appealed this ruling, but its appeal was dismissed.

**August 2022 - *Kyodo News* National Telephone Poll**

85% - LDP should sever ties with Family Federation and affiliates

**October 2023 - *Mainichi Shimbun* Public Opinion Survey**

83% - Approve the government's request for dissolution of Family Federation

The left-leaning public media in Japan prominently promotes human rights and social justice. Yet, in this instance, the media was indifferent to the human rights and social justice denied the Family Federation of Japan. The Church was regularly labeled an “anti-social” organization – a term traditionally reserved for “Yakuza” and other extortionist and extremist groups. The Church was portrayed as an “enemy of the people.” Following the tactic of the anti-Unification legal team, media commonly characterized those who donated to the Family Federation as “victims.”

“How can you say such things when there are many believers whose lives have been ruined by you? Do you turn a blind eye to the issue of abduction and confinement? Is the Family Federation excluded from human rights?”

Statement by younger generation Family Federation member, in response to October 13, 2023 statement by Hiroshi Yamaguchi stating he “hopes that (Family Federation) followers can “reclaim themselves’.”

Human rights and religious freedom experts referred to elsewhere in this essay consider the rhetoric of the left-wing media during this period to be manipulative, vilifying, and politically motivated (see Fukuda, Introvigne and Masubuchi).

The underlying offense of the Family Federation of Japan and its allied organizations has been its sixty years of activist support of traditional family values and opposition to the ambitions of left-wing political parties.<sup>34</sup> Their shared “conservative” orientation had been the basis for

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<sup>34</sup> The IFVOC and other Unification-affiliated organizations in Japan maintained close ties with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) because of their shared commitment to socially conservative and anti-communist ideologies. Primary issue areas have been advocacy for the Espionage Prevention Bill; support for constitutional amendments related to i) national security, and ii) emphasis on the traditional family as the foundation for society; opposition to the legalization

the decades-long cooperation between the Church and the LDP. In the frenzy of media hostility towards the Family Federation, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, representing the LDP, faced rising criticism from the public and from opposition parties for his apparent reluctance to take action against the Family Federation.

With his approval rating slipping to below 40%,<sup>35</sup> Kishida gave into relentless pressure from the public, his leftist political opponents, and anti-Unification lawyer groups and denounced the Family Federation. On August 31, 2022, he publicly instructed LDP leadership to cut all ties with the Family Federation and affiliated organizations, and called for revision of the LDP's governance codes to "thoroughly sever relations with the FFWPU and its related organizations." This decision further opened the floodgate of hostility towards the Family Federation by the national media.

Ironically, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone went through a similar leftist challenge in 1987 when the Communist Party of Japan demanded that the LDP sever all ties with the IFVOC. His response: "I think this is a manifestation of the Communist Party's dictatorial policy. I would like them to refrain from making such unconstitutional statements that violate freedom of thought and action."<sup>36</sup>

Although circumstances were different, Prime Minister Kishida appears to be a less courageous politician than his LDP predecessors Yasuhiro Nakasone and Shinzo Abe.

Primary features of the national media campaign were negative (but now largely discredited) testimonies of second-generation Unificationist family members, misrepresentation of the Church as being a "cult" rather than a new religion, and portrayal of the Family Federation of Japan as a vehicle for influencing Japan in the interests of South Korea, the Church's homeland. Favorable public statements, demonstrations, social media campaigns, and letter writing campaigns by active younger and older generation members of the Family Federations were all ignored by the national media.

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of same-sex marriage; opposition to ordinances constraining parental rights in disciplining children; support for LDP candidates in local and national electoral campaigns; and anti-communist advocacy.

<sup>35</sup> A *Mainichi Shimbun* poll conducted on August 20-21 reported Prime Minister Kishida's approval rating to be 36%.

<sup>36</sup> From "Political Motivations Behind the Request of a Dissolution Order" by Toshikazu Masubuchi, in *Bitter Winter*, February 29, 2024.



Monday October 17<sup>th</sup> to Wednesday October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022, proved to be a pivotal period in the mounting campaign by the coalition of forces working towards church dissolution.

On October 17, 2022, Prime Minister Kishida, speaking at a meeting of the Lower House Budget Committee, ordered an investigation into the Family Federation but confirmed that in the absence of a criminal conviction, a dissolution proceeding could not be initiated against the Family Federation. This was based upon the precedent of three previous failed attempts at dissolution by the anti-Unificationist lawyers' network (1994, 1998, 2012). However, just two days later, on October 19, 2022, Kishida announced a dramatic change in the government's stance regarding dissolution. The new stance was that, in the absence of civil convictions, violations of civil law could be the basis for seeking a court-ordered dissolution. This reversal, long sought by the anti-Unificationist lawyers, allowed the process towards dissolution to overcome its greatest impasse and move forward.<sup>37, 38</sup>

## 5) The Dissolution Process

Just three-and-a-half months after the Abe assassination, with public sentiment in Japan turned sharply against the Family Federation and the Kishida government having redefined the criteria for dissolution,

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<sup>37</sup> Steps were then taken in early March 2024 by the Supreme Court of Japan and consequently the Tokyo District Court to tacitly agree with the Prime Minister's reversal. Neither court has provided a legal basis for this novel and unprecedented reinterpretation of the Religious Corporation Act.

<sup>38</sup> The obvious question: What caused Kishida's crucial reversal? This important question was addressed by journalist Kazuhiro Aoyama in *Toyo Keizai*. He wrote: "Why did Prime Minister Kishida, who remained cautious about the dissolution order from the viewpoint of 'freedom of religion,' change his policy in a hurry?" His answer was that Kishida had just received a report prepared by a government "Investigative Committee" ("Investigative Committee on Measures Against Malicious Practices Such as Spiritual Sales"). The committee had been convened on August 29, 2022 by the Taro Kono, Minister in Charge of Consumer Affairs. Taro Kono had been an opponent of Unificationism in Japan since the days of the "Anti-Spy Bill." Kono loaded the Investigative Committee with opponents of the Family Federation: Maasaki Kito, Kimiaki Nishida, Shiori Kanno, and Masaki Guro. The committee's report was submitted on October 17. It endorsed the claims and recommendations of>NNLASS. Prime Minister Kishida's decision to allow MEXT to initiate the "right to question" was taken two days later.



NNLASS felt confident in taking its next step. On October 22, 2022, the lawyers' organization submitted yet another formal request to the Japanese government, urging it to dissolve the legal standing of the Family Federation under Article 81 of the Religious Corporations Law.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) responded to>NNLASS within three weeks. On November 11, 2022, MEXT initiated a formal investigation of the Family Federation of Japan under the Article 81 of the Religious Corporations Law. This procedure, which lasted until July 2023, included "report collection and the right of questioning." The Family Federation of Japan stated that it intended to contest the government's allegations but would fully comply with the requirements of the MEXT investigation.

### **The MEXT Investigation**

In response to the initial request by MEXT, the Family Federation submitted 10 boxes of church documents. A second round of questions followed in which the church responded with additional boxes of documents. All told, MEXT put the Family Federation through seven rounds of questioning, asking a total of approximately 500 questions.<sup>39</sup> International lawyer Tatsuki Nakayama wrote that MEXT's repeated use of the "right to question" procedure amounted to severe and unlawful religious persecution. He wrote that MEXT's intention was intended to "torture members of the Family Federation without killing them."<sup>40</sup>

The problem quickly arose that requests made by MEXT under the "right to question" were repetitious, some unanswerable, others were regarded as matters of personal privacy to members, or as being unreasonably obscure. MEXT eventually claimed the church was uncooperative and obstructing justice. The church considered MEXT to be proceeding in bad faith, doing everything it could to inconvenience, trap and frame the Family Federation.

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<sup>39</sup> This number is from Family Federation Mission Support, reporting that MEXT asked approximately 500 questions. The Family Federation did not respond to about 100 of these questions.

<sup>40</sup> See Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama's booklet, *Dear Prime Minister Fumio Kishida: No Justification for the Government to Request Dissolution of the Family Federation* as published The Journal of CESNUR, November – December 2023, pages 70-92.

Most controversial was MEXT's insistence that the Church provide detailed information regarding infant adoptions undertaken by members, a deeply personal matter for individuals and families involved. The church had a policy of no involvement in the adoption efforts of its members and thus refused to cooperate.

An obvious and critically important question must be asked: Why did MEXT need to go through an entirely unorthodox process of seven rounds of questioning with the Family Federation? At the start of the investigation process, the head of the Religious Affairs Department at MEXT made this statement, "We will collect enough evidence to avoid that it might be overturned in court."<sup>41</sup> The reason the process became so protracted was that MEXT was not able to find "enough evidence" to support dissolution.

MEXT also undertook 170 hearings and interviews, including meetings with NNCLASS lawyers and ex-church members (some 80% of whom were victims of faith-breaking<sup>42</sup>). MEXT did not speak to a single active member of the Family Federation. Younger generation (so-called "second generation") Unificationists organized a national campaign, collecting 25,000 petitions in support of the Family Federation. Their request to meet with the MEXT Agency during its "right to question" period was refused.

"Concerning the former believers or former second-generation believers, there are quite a number of lies in what they say. For such cases, the Agency of Cultural Affairs listened to their one-sided story, but when the second-generation members of ours had prepared 25,000 petitions nationwide and wanted to explain our view of things, the Agency called by phone and said, 'Please send them by post.' I can't help but think that this is a very cold response, and a very biased response."

Nobuo Okamura, head of legal affairs department of FFWPU Japan, at press conference at on September 8. 2023

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<sup>41</sup> As reported in an article by Masumi Fukuda in the July 2023 issue of *Monthly Hanada*.

<sup>42</sup> In the March 26 FCCJ press conference (referred to above) Family Federation of Japan President Tomihiro Tanaka explained that he reviewed every interview statement provided by ex-members during the MEXT "right to question" investigation. He determined that of the 100 individuals who provided statements, 78 were "manufactured victims" —that is, they were former church members who had been kidnapped, forcibly confined and subjected to coercive faith-breaking or "deprogramming" procedures.

Based upon its investigation, on October 13, 2023, MEXT filed a lawsuit in the Tokyo District Court seeking the dissolution of the Family Federation. Its primary evidence was 32 civil verdicts since 1980, involving 569 victims, where liability for damages had been recognized. This was presented as evidence of public harm caused by the organization.

## Evaluation of Civil Verdicts and Settlements

Having received the results of the MEXT investigation, the Tokyo District Court reached its dissolution verdict on March 25, 2025, based on the Church's fundraising activities.<sup>43</sup> Its proceedings took place behind closed doors. As mentioned above, because the Court had no criminal basis for its proceedings, it was reduced to the evaluation of civil cases.<sup>44</sup>

### *Civil Verdicts*

The court identified guilty verdicts in 32 civil cases over the Church's 61 years of operations. This amounts to an average of one verdict every two years across the entire country for a church with hundreds of thousands of active members.<sup>45</sup>

Of course, during that period there were also many civil cases relating to fundraising that the Church won. Tatsuki Nakayama reported in *Bitter Winter* (September 22, 2023) that he estimated the Church won 48% of its civil cases and collected 1.1 billion yen. Similarly, Massimo Introvigne's research, published in *Bitter Winter*, indicates that roughly half of the cases brought against the Church during that period were "dismissed in their entirety."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For full detail, see the April 3, 2025 issue of *Bitter Winter*. Massimo Introvigne explained that "to justify a decision of dissolution the court had to answer nine questions positively." His four-part series of articles examines the Court's affirmative response to each of the nine questions. This essay focuses on the central issue of civil claims against the Church related to fundraising activities and the effectiveness of the 2009 Compliance Declaration.

<sup>44</sup> Data provided below is taken from the 2025 series of articles by Massimo Introvigne, published in *Bitter Winter*.

<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that cases generally involved multiple individual plaintiffs. Introvigne's findings indicate approximately 5 plaintiffs per case.

<sup>46</sup> This record must be appreciated in the context of the strongly negative "cult" bias in Japanese civil courts. This bias was acknowledged by leading Anti-Cult Network lawyer Yoshiro Ito. Investigative reporter Masumi Fukuda quotes Ito as stating, "In civil lawsuits, there is a kind of unwritten rule, that 'if you are a cult, you lose'."

A central feature, entirely disregarded by the Tokyo Court, regards how these 32 cases were initiated. Over 70% of the plaintiffs in the 32 cases the Church lost were ex-members whose faith had been broken by kidnappers. These cases would likely not have been instigated in the absence of the now-illegal practice of faith-breaking. The Court proceedings ignored this consideration.

### ***Settlements***

Facing a paucity of guilty verdicts in civil cases, the court then stretched its criteria for dissolution even further to consider mediated settlements, both in court and out of court.<sup>47</sup> The court identified 100 settlements (involving 448 plaintiffs) mediated in the context of a lawsuit, and out-of-court settlements agreed to with 971 plaintiffs.

Of course, a settlement is entirely different than a verdict. By definition, a settlement is not an admission of guilt or even a concession. Rather, a settlement is a mutual agreement to avoid protracted litigation.

Furthermore, the court admitted that 100% of the out-of-court settlements referred to “were concluded between May 22, 2022 and August 31, 2023.” In other words, these suits were all concluded, and presumably many were initiated, during the severely hostile post-assignment climate during which the Church had virtually no choice other than to settle.

### **Was the 2009 Compliance Declaration Effective?**

The sole basis for the dissolution of the Family Federation relates to its fundraising methods, charged as being “anti-social” and illegal. As previously explained, sixteen years earlier, the Church sought to constrain the excessive fundraising practices of its leaders and members by issuing a series of directives collectively referred to as the “2009 Compliance Declaration.” These guidelines included the threat of expulsion for violation and introduced a nation-wide monitoring framework based upon “key performance indicators.” In his April 8, 2024, article in *Bitter Winter* Massimo Introvigne refers to this court statement: “The court acknowledges that these directives were comprehensive and adequate.”

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<sup>47</sup> The legal hazard resulting from this precedent can be expected to have profound consequences. Religious organizations in Japan will now understand that legal settlement with plaintiffs, whether in or out of court, can have adverse consequences in a dissolution proceeding.

It would seem illogical for the court in 2025 to dissolve the church if it had already eradicated the problem that was the basis for dissolution. Question Eight of the dissolution proceedings addressed this issue. Did members conform to the requirements of the 2009 Compliance Declaration? The objective answer to this question would be the record of civil court verdicts and settlements relating to church fundraising practices in the sixteen-year period since the 2009 Declaration.

The court found that out of the 32 civil verdicts, only two verdicts, involving just three plaintiffs, related to events after the 2009 Declaration. There have been no verdicts based on events over the last 11 years (since 2014). Furthermore, the court found that “a similar downward trend is also seen in the number of settlements based on the filing of lawsuits.” According to the court, of the 448 settlements, only 8 were based on donations made after the 2009 Declaration, less than one per year.

During court proceedings MEXT was allowed to submit “victim statements,” which both sides admit are of dubious value. MEXT assembled 300 statements. Only 19 of these statements were based upon post-declaration fundraising.

Regarding out-of-court settlements, the court found 179 “victims” filed complaints relating to fundraising activities in the 16-year post declaration period. Seventy-five percent of those related to events within one year of the declaration (filed in 2011). Since 2019, the number of settlements has been in single digits (between 3 to 7 per year).

The Tokyo Court could only conclude that the number of “actual damage claims in recent years has decreased considerably.” Indeed, claims had essentially disappeared. Based upon criteria it had selected, the Church’s efforts to eradicate the problem of “anti-social” fundraising had been successful.

It is important to appreciate this point. Virtually all civil cases referenced in court proceedings against the Family Federation of Japan relate to events that occurred prior to the 2009 “Compliance Declaration,” thirteen years prior to the Abe assassination. Civil complaints against “spiritual sales” have been essentially zero since 2017.

Writing in 2023, author Tatsuki Nakayama reported that 2021 data from the Consumer Affairs Agency shows only 1.9% of the damage consultations it pursued involving “spiritual sales” were related to the

Family Federation. The fact that Attorneys Yamaguchi, Kito and Abe and the Lawyers from Across Japan for the Victims of the Unification Church (essentially the same organization as NNLAASS) do not concern themselves with 98% (in 2021) of complaints filed related to “spiritual sales” would appear to confirm the narrowly focused political and ideological purpose behind their efforts.

**Complaints Related to “Spiritual Sales”  
Collected by Japanese Ministry of Consumer Affairs**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Related to FFWPU</u>	
2016	1483	77	5.2% of total
2017	1425	57	4.0%
2018	1559	61	3.9%
2019	1312	57	4.3%
2020	1177	33	2.8%
2021	1441	27	1.9%

Source: Supplemental Statement Submitted to 136<sup>th</sup> Session of  
UN Human Rights Committee (October 13, 2022)

**Decision by the Tokyo District Court**

We know, however, that dissolution has been ordered, despite these documented court findings. Firstly, the Court determined the Church’s KPI monitoring system to be inadequate. Primary evidence for this conclusion was that no member had been expelled from the Family Federation. Secondly, without evidence, it concluded that corrective measures the church had taken were not “fundamental.” The court speculated that, in the absence of addressing issues fundamental to the church, incidents of objectionable fundraising might return to a “considerable” level at some point in the future.

The court’s speculative basis for dissolution of the Family Federation relates to “fundamentals” that remain unchanged. Indeed, the Church has not changed its religious beliefs. The fact that founders Rev. Moon and his wife, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon are South Korean, is unchanged. The church still advocates numerous doctrines that do not align with secular social norms: no sex outside of marriage, support for the creation of heterosexual God-centered families, large and enthusiastic public wedding ceremonies, interracial/intercultural marriage, evangelical efforts to

expand membership, and belief in individual responsibility to contribute to the building of God's kingdom of peace on earth. The fundamental creed of the church as taught by Rev. Moon is also unchanged: "LFSO" – that is, "living for the sake of others."

There were two additional, underlying reasons why the documented eradication of objectionable fundraising over the past 15 years was not sufficient to block dissolution. These come out explicitly in the Court's consideration of Questions Eight and Nine.

NNLASS, MEXT, and the Tokyo District Court are all convinced that the anti-social behavior of the Family Federation of Japan is due to brainwashing or mind control. Thus, in Question Eight, the court found that, since corrective measures the Church has taken are not "fundamental," the brainwashing continues. (Note: Introvigne reports that Tokyo Court did not use the terms "brainwashing" or "mind control," as these terms and concepts have been legally discredited. Rather it stated that all Church believers are in "a situation where the decision-making process is directly or indirectly suppressed.") This conclusion was reached without MEXT undertaking a single interview with any of the tens of thousands of active Family Federation members or families.

Second, in answering Question Nine, the court essentially argued that "the collateral damage to the believers' freedom of religion carries less weight than the need to protect the broader "public welfare" of all Japanese by dissolving the Church."<sup>48</sup> This rationale is entirely out of line with the internationally accepted understanding of religious freedom. The outcome of the legal process is that the preference of the majority, conditioned by hostile media and the anti-Unificationist lawyer network, is that an unpopular religion, whose members are perceived as being brainwashed and therefore anti-social in character, should be dissolved to protect "public welfare."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Massimo Introvigne in *Bitter Winter*, April 9, 2025.

<sup>49</sup> See Toshikazu Masubuchi in February 28, 2024 article in *Bitter Winter*.

## 6) The Truth About What Has Happened

Before the Abe assassination, there were no public outcries or societal problems with the Family Federation of Japan:

- Neither the Family Federation of Japan nor any member of its leadership has ever been charged or convicted of committing a criminal act.<sup>50</sup>
- The “anti-social” behavior relating to fundraising practices was comprehensively addressed through the church’s 2009 Compliance Declaration and has essentially been eliminated. Not a single lawsuit has been filed relating to new donations by believers since 2017.
- Fundraising events relating to civil cases and private settlements occurred more than fifteen years ago.
- On five prior occasions>NNLASS (or its predecessor organizations) have sought the dissolution of the Family Federation.<sup>51</sup> These were in:
  - 1994 (request for dissolution order)
  - 1998 (request for dissolution order)
  - 2003 (petition to Agency for Cultural Affairs/MEXT)
  - 2008 (petition to the Agency of Cultural Affairs/MEXT), and
  - 2012 (suit against the MEXT, dismissed in Tokyo District Court in 2017).

All these previous attempts failed. Since the court’s 2017 dismissal there has not been a single lawsuit filed against the FFWPU of Japan over new donations.

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<sup>50</sup> In both two post-WWII cases of dissolution (Aum Shinrikyo and Myokakuji Temple) leadership had been convicted and sentenced for murder and fraud. No FFWPU leaders have been charged or convicted for any criminal act. There are six religious corporations in Japan whose believers have been found guilty of committing assault and murder. All are still in existence. For extensive details, historical precedent and comparative cases, see attorney Tatsuki Nakayama’s “Dear Prime Minister” article referenced above.

<sup>51</sup> See Masumi Fukuda’s four-part series from July 2023 in *Monthly Hanada*, reprinted in *Bitter Winter* from July 2023, and Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama in *The Journal of CESNUR*, Volume 7, Issue 6, November—December 2023, pages 70—92.



However, a dissolution order was decided in March 2025. The impetus for this is best understood as the outcome of a 50-year ideological battle between NNLASS and the Unification Church/Family Federation of Japan.

- On one side is the religiously devoted, patriotic, pro-family, anti-communist, socially conservative Family Federation of Japan. For many decades the Family Federation had been informally and episodically allied with Japan's leading political party, the Liberal Democratic Party.
- On the other side is the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS), a group of left-wing lawyers whose earlier organizational forms of anti-Unification activism dates back to the 1970's.

For NNLASS and left-leaning media, that both hold long-standing and deep antipathy towards the Family Federation, the acute public emotions generated by the tragic assassination of Shinzo Abe presented a perfect opportunity to at long last secure the dissolution of the Family Federation of Japan. The prejudicial national media campaign, initiated by the NNLASS press conference four days after the assassination, was a pivotal moment in public discourse regarding the Family Federation. An anti-Unification media frenzy generated public pressure such that former Prime Minister Kishida made an unprecedented decision to allow the dissolution proceeding to commence despite lack of any criminal violation. Buoyed by supportive media and the “herd mentality” of Japanese public opinion, NNLASS and MEXT then worked closely together to secure a previously unattainable legal outcome.

## 7) Epilogue

- The basic conclusion of the Tokyo District Court, apparent in its answers to Question Eight and Nine, which justified its decision, is that Unificationism is not a true religion but a cult, its members are brainwashed or under mind control<sup>52</sup> and its practices continue to be “anti-social.” Therefore, in the interest of “public welfare” the government should dissolve the organization rather than defend its constitutional right to exist.

- However, without exception, those who make the effort to spend time with the members and families of the Family Federation quickly learn that the organization is not “anti-social.” They are warm, friendly, open-hearted people. Since their church was founded, Unificationists in Japan have labored to contribute to Japanese society by promoting God-centered, family oriented social values. Members do not consider themselves to be “victims.” Such a characterization they consider to be slanderous and disrespectful.

“One thing I have observed in my interactions with its members is that they are incredibly earnest, sacrificing themselves for the sake of society and the world. It is evident that they are fundamentally different from left-wing activists who believe in fiction and lead people to unhappiness.”

Toshikazu Masubuchi in “A Politician Speaks Up, Part 2: Spies and Fake News,” *Bitter Winter*, February 28, 2024.

“It has been less than a year since I got involved with this case, but no matter who I meet in the Family Federation, I have never seen a so-called bad person. Consequently, it does not make sense that it continues to be called an antisocial organization in the media.”

Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama in *The Journal of CESNUR*, Volume 7, Issue 6. November-December 2023, page 76.

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<sup>52</sup> Knowing that its decision will be scrutinized by religious rights advocates, the language of the court’s decision is very careful not to use the contested terms of “cult” and “brainwashing.” However, the court’s inferences are clear when one reads its findings under Question Eight and Question Nine.

- Criticism by NNLASS that church leadership is hostile to further settlements and insensitive to the suffering of “victims”<sup>53</sup> has an obvious explanation. The church is repeatedly being legally manipulated and its assets pillaged to the tune of many hundreds of millions of dollars. As NNLASS lawyers have frankly admitted, “in the current environment, if you are a cult, you lose.”

- Who are the real “anti-social” organizations? It is the faith-breakers (“deprogrammers”) and leftist lawyers’ network. It is they who have benefited from the kidnapping, forced confinement and programmatic “defection business” that lasted for four decades, involving some 4,300 victims and generating in excess of \$US 1 billion in donation reimbursement plus approximately \$65 million in fees<sup>54</sup> paid to professional faith breakers. These “manufactured victims” comprise the overwhelming majority of NNLASS “spiritual sales” plaintiffs, MEXT victim statement providers, and Tokyo Court interviewees. They are the tainted fruit of the faith breakers and anti-Unificationist lawyers.

- And, who are the real victims? President Tanaka reports that the Family Federation of Japan has some 100,000 members. Their families, daily lives, careers, social networks, even personal identity have been fractured and brutalized by what has happened since July 8, 2022. MEXT refused to meet with them. Their petitions and letters have been ignored. They are scapegoats, outcasts in their own country, not having human rights.

- The government of Japan is now explicitly out of compliance with the UN ICCPR, which it signed in 1978. As argued by noted attorney Patricia Duval, Japan has resisted repeated warnings by the United Nations that it is violating its commitment to the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The Tokyo Court has formally answered “Yes” to the question of whether damaging “public welfare” and infringing on “social norms” are criteria when considering dissolution. This crosses a UN threshold of violating religious freedom that Japan has previously signed onto and been in compliance with.

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<sup>53</sup> This was a primary claim by made by the anti-Unificationist lawyers’ team at the March 28, 2025 FCCJ press conference.

<sup>54</sup> Author’s estimate based upon \$15,000 fee per kidnapping times 4,300 victims. Fees in the US ranged from \$5,000 to \$20,000. Fees in Japan ranged from \$15,000 to \$30,000. These prices were exceeded in cases of prolonged confinement.

- Finally, former Prime Minister Abe was a beloved political figure prior to his assassination. Tragically, his legacy has been pulled into the maelstrom forces of “groupthink” that have overtaken Japanese public opinion. How has the Japanese public allowed such unfairness to happen? Does the public want such a verdict to be left in place as the legacy of such an important national leader? Isn't this just another costly and unnecessary tragedy for Japan?

Would not a more reasonable conclusion be that Shinzo Abe was a man of proven judgement and integrity? Isn't it reasonable to rethink the narrative generated by the anti-Unificationist lawyers' network to consider: What does it say about the Family Federation that a man of the caliber of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe befriended the organization throughout his storied career?

# APPENDIX I

## Response by the International Religious Freedom Community

Whether established or newly emerging, religions generally understand humans to be spiritual beings who therefore ascribe meaning to, or even prioritize, a spiritual reality.<sup>1</sup> Conforming with that spiritual reality, believers may hold values and norms and may behave in ways that are not consistent with or are even at odds with secular values and norms.<sup>2</sup> As a result of their nonconformity, believers often face misunderstanding, bigotry and attack from secular authorities.<sup>3</sup>

To protect believers, freedom of religion exists as a pillar and essential right within modern democracies. Democratic governments that are dedicated to upholding individual liberties are constitutionally obligated to protect believers from mistreatment and attack from the social mainstream. Indeed, Japan has several such protections in place:

- Article 20 and Article 29, Section 3 of the Constitution of the State of Japan, and
- The United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Treaty which Japan ratified in 1979.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example, belief in the immanent presence of God, the influence of forces of good and evil in human affairs, the existence of a spiritual realm, the reality of life after death, the workings of karma and/or destiny, and a providential destiny in human history.

<sup>2</sup> Those who follow Bible teachings are guided by well-known instructions from Paul: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2, NIV)

<sup>3</sup> Research indicates that the public is generally not aware of the extent of hostility faced by religious believers. The Pew Research Center’s *Global Restrictions on Religion Report*, covering events through 2022, indicates that religious persecution (both governmental and societal) has reached record highs worldwide. The most persecuted religion is Christianity, facing restrictions in 166 countries. Religious groups face physical harassment in 145 countries. The Pew Reports shows that (except in China) there is a high correlation between government restriction on religion and social hostility towards religion.

<sup>4</sup> The reference to “public welfare” as a basis for limiting freedoms and rights as expressed in Articles 12 and 13 of the *Constitution of Japan* provides a basis for limiting religious freedom which is “guaranteed” in Article 20. Advocates for religious freedom argue this limitation is in obvious conflict with Japan’s obligations as a signatory of the U.N. ICCPR.

By characterizing the Family Federation as a “cult” (rather than a new religious movement) and its members as incapable of making personal decisions (i.e. “brainwashed”)>NNLASS, the left-leaning media, and the conclusions of the Tokyo District Court portray the Family Federation not as a religion worthy of constitutional protections, but rather as an “anti-social” organization to be disbanded/liquidated.

Fortunately, devoted advocates for religious freedom in Europe and the United States - institutions, scholars, political and religious leaders - are extremely sensitive to events that portend hostility towards religion. Their reaction to events in Japan commenced as soon as Japan’s leftist media and the anti-Unificationist lawyers network began scapegoating the Family Federation following the Abe assassination. Most prominent have been the United Nations, U.S. State Department, the International Religious Freedom Summit, and publications such as *Bitter Winter* and *The Washington Times*.

The basic message conveyed by these voices is that the treatment of the Family Federation since the Abe assassination contravenes both the country’s constitution and its commitments under the ICCPR. They point out that not only the Family Federation, but various other religious organizations face increasing religious intolerance in Japan, most notably Jehovah’s Witness.<sup>5</sup> Fundamentally, lack of protection of unpopular religious organizations from harassment and unequal legal protection places Japan sharply at odds with its revered standing as one of the world’s leading liberal democracies.

Over the past three years, the Government of Japan has conveyed an indifference to the multitude of direct and indirect efforts by these advocates for religious freedom. The persecution and dissolution process directed at the Family Federation has continued unabated. Most indicative of the Government’s intransigence has been its disingenuous communications with and lack of response to the UN Special Rapporteur request to visit Japan.

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<sup>5</sup> In April 2024, four Special Rapporteurs associated with the U.N.’s Human Rights Council combined their voices to formally convey their alarm to the Government of Japan over guidelines released in December 2022 by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. The Special Rapporteurs regard these guidelines as hostile towards the religious education of children and report the guidelines have resulted in a radical increase (638% increase in 2023) in hate speech and hate crimes directed towards Jehovah’s Witnesses and other religious/belief minorities.

The following (partial) listing indicates the extent of activism by religious freedom advocates in response to recent persecution and hostile measures faced by the Family Federation and other unpopular and minority religious organizations in Japan.

### **Print & Online Journals**

*Bitter Winter*, *The Washington Times*, *Center for Studies on New Religions* (CESNUR), *Real Clear Politics*, *News Max* have published analysis and critiques of unprecedented actions occurring in Japan related to human and religious rights. Authors have included Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett and Ambassador Suzan Johnson Cook, Honorable New Gingrich, Congressman Dan Burton, Ambassador Sam Brownback, Human Rights Attorney Patricia Duval and Dr. Massimo Introvigne and journalist Masumi Fukuda.

### **International Conferences**

*International Religious Freedom Summits*, Washington DC (January 2023, January 2024, February 2025). Speakers condemned Japan's push for dissolution of Family Federation and persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses and warned of cascading erosions of religious rights in Asia and beyond. Speakers included Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, Former EU Special Envoy Jan Figel, Ambassador Suzan Johnson Cook, former Congressman Newt Gingrich, Attorney Patricia Duval, and Professor Cole Durham.

*Special International Religious Freedom Roundtable*, Tokyo (October 2023). Raised concerns about "anti-cult" resurgence in Japan focused on the Family Federation. Speakers included Dr. Holly Folk, Dr. Massimo Introvigne, and journalist Masumi Fukuda.

*Human Rights and Religious Freedom Impact Statement*, drafted and signed by dozens of scholars, religious freedom experts and faith leaders at the February 2025 IRF Summit in Washington DC. The statement included details of abuse experienced by the Family Federation, Jehovah's Witness and other religious minorities in Japan and specifies three recent legal measures that are inherently hostile to religious organizations in Japan

### **US State Department**

*2023 U.S. State Department Report on International Religious Freedom*. The report noted dissolution proceedings in Japan were a "marked deviation from the norm, as previous revocations had only been ordered following violations of criminal law, while this dissolution was ordered on the basis of violation of civil law."

*Former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain* issued a statement at a Daily Press Briefing of the U.S. Department of State in April 2023 warning that Japan's approach to the dissolution of the Family Federation could have severe implications "for our vital partnership and global perception of Japan's commitment to human rights."

*U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)* issued an update (November 2024) specifying concerns relating to the persecution of Jehovah's Witness in Japan and the December 2022 Guidelines.

### **United Nations**

*The Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience (CAP)*, a Paris-based NGO, submitted a statement to the UN Human Rights Council in October 2022 stating the Family Federation has been the victim of "a campaign of intolerance, discrimination, and persecution" in Japan since Prime Minister Abe's assassination.

In March 2024, *UN Special Rapporteur Nazila Ghanea* requested an invitation to visit Japan to discuss the December 2022 "Guidelines on Handling Child Abuse and Similar Cases Related to Religious Beliefs" issued by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. No invitation was extended.

On April 30, 2024, *four UN Special Rapporteurs* issued a U.N. Mandate to the Government of Japan criticizing the December 2022 Guidelines and the resulting increase in persecution of minority religions. The Government's response was received past the expiry date and was non-committal.

At the *58<sup>th</sup> UN Human Rights Council in Geneva* (September 2024) Human Rights Attorney, Patricia Duval presented an in-depth report at a side event detailing the "Witch Hunt to Eradicate the Unification Church in Japan", later published in the *Journal of CESNUR*.

The *59<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council* in Geneva (June 2025), included a side panel on the persecution of the Family Federation in Japan featuring a testimony by Dr. Hirohisa Koide regarding his kidnapping, faith breaking and escape.



## APPENDIX II

### **JAPAN: The state's crackdown on the Unification Church denounced in Geneva**

**By Attorney Patricia Duval**

FOREF (10.10.2024) – Good morning, everyone. The situation in Japan is alarming, and I will provide a brief overview of the key issues. My report, “The Witch Hunt to Eradicate the Unification Church in Japan,” may sound dramatic, but it reflects the severity of the current circumstances, with the repressive apparatus deployed by the Japanese authorities, especially in the wake of Prime Minister Abe’s assassination in 2022.

Ten years ago, we presented a Report to the UN on the “deprogramming” of Unification Church members, that is to say cases of abduction, confinement, and enforced de-conversion aimed at making individuals recant their faith.

In 2013, on behalf of the Victims Association, we documented numerous cases, which led the UN Human Rights Committee to recommend that Japan put an end to these practices. However, “deprogramming” has since continued in more covert forms, now coupled with widespread efforts to eliminate the Unification Church from Japan’s religious landscape.

Former members, coerced into leaving the Church, have been induced to file lawsuits seeking damages to prove their apostasy, resulting in a surge of cases orchestrated by an anti-Unification Church lawyers association. This association, motivated by financial incentives and ideological opposition—many of its members aligning with Communist and atheistic beliefs—has been instrumental in inciting de-converted members to sue the Church.

In 2022, following the assassination of Prime Minister Abe, this network of lawyers falsely attributed blame to the Unification Church. The assassin, the son of a Church member, blamed the Church for his personal misfortunes and used Abe’s occasional supportive gestures toward Unification Church peacebuilding activities as a pretext for his crime. Rather than focusing on the assassin, the media—driven by this lawyers’ network—launched a massive campaign against the Church, labeling it antisocial and malevolent. Under intense public pressure, the Government has since requested the dissolution of the Unification Church—a drastic and unprecedented step.

The Government's dissolution request is based on 32 tort cases, primarily involving de-converted members, alleging undue influence in soliciting donations. The Courts, influenced by these anti-Church lawyers, have ruled against the Church, accusing it of violating "social norms" through so-called mental manipulation. However, under international human rights law, particularly Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, religious beliefs—including those held by minority groups facing hostility—are protected, and States are obligated to remain neutral and maintain diversity, whatever social norms might be in religious matters. Japan has repeatedly ignored the UN Human Rights Committee's recommendations to cease using "public welfare" as a pretext for limiting freedom of religion and now seeks to dissolve the Unification Church based on this flawed justification.

Given these serious violations of human rights, we call on the UN and the international community to take immediate action.

*The author, Patricia Duval, an international human rights lawyer, presented this report on September 25, 2024, during a Special Briefing held on the sidelines of the 57th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Attorney Duval is a member of the Paris Bar in France. She has a degree in public law from La Sorbonne University and specializes in international human rights law. She has defended the rights of minorities of religion or belief in European and international fora such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union and the United Nations Human Rights Committee. She has also published a number of papers and articles which contain critical legal analysis of draft legislation and final laws on religion and religious minorities, and the role of the State in religious matters, such as "Anti-sect Movements and State Neutrality" (Journal for the Study of Beliefs and Worldviews, Dresden Technical University, 2012).*

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## THE AUTHOR

James Edgerly founded the *Higher Purpose Forum* in 2019. He was part owner and senior executive at four companies during his 35-year business career. Concurrently, James served in ministry, including 10 years as Senior Pastor of the Boston Family Church. James is a graduate of Columbia University and the MIT Sloan School of Management. In 1975, he served as a Unificationist missionary in Japan as a member of the "First Global Team." His wife of 43 years was a member of the Unification Church of Japan before coming to the U.S. as a performing artist.





[higherpurposeforum.org](https://higherpurposeforum.org)  
[info@Higherpurposeforum.org](mailto:info@Higherpurposeforum.org)