

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Will Japan Resume Kidnapping and Torture?

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April 16, 2026



The notorious apartment block where Sarutahiko (pseudonym), co-representative of the private association "Ama no Yachimata no Kai" (Heavenly Eightfold Crossroads Association), was allegedly confined



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Strong concern that membership lists may be misused by authorities in league with lawyers in favor of coercive faith-breaking as former victim warns of return of dehumanizing practice previously used against religious minority

Tokyo, 14th April 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

[Part 6 of a Series] In Search of a Spiritual Anchor - One Month After the Dissolution of the Family Federation

Concerns Over the Reemergence of Confinement-Based Faith-Breaking

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai](#)

[Nippo](#)

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"It is not impossible that, taking advantage of this confusion, [abductions, confinement](#), and [forced renunciation of faith](#) [See editor's note 1 below] driven by faith-breakers (deprogrammers) could occur again."

On 4th March, when the Tokyo High Court [upheld the dissolution order](#) of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), Toru Goto (後藤徹), head of the [National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion](#), posted the above warning on X (formerly Twitter).



The reality of faith-breaking: Toru Goto, a member of the [Family Federation](#), in 2008, barely able to move after being held in forcible detention by his own family in league with professional faith-breakers for more than 12 years

Goto himself was confined by family members opposed to the [Family Federation](#) for [12 years and 5 months](#) and was pressured to renounce his faith. According to the [religious organization](#), there have been approximately [4,300 cases](#) in which believers were confined in places such as [apartments](#) by their families - acting under the guidance of so-called "faith-breakers" (professional deconversion specialists) - who claimed that "protective persuasion" was the only way to break the [religious organization's](#) alleged "[mind control](#)" [See editor's note 2 below]. Believers were [forced into prolonged detention](#) until they abandoned their faith.

See also [Paper Reveals Hidden Story Behind Dissolution](#)

As [liquidators'](#) representatives enter church facilities nationwide and their use is prohibited, there is also strong concern that "membership lists might be misused". Among believers voicing anxiety on social media, some fear that "[abductions and confinement](#) may increase again". Some individuals who were previously victimized have even chosen to avoid meeting their families for the time being.

Writer Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏) also addressed this issue on X on 5th March, pointing out the "possibility that [coercive faith-breaking](#) [See editor's note 1 below] against believers could once again spread." He noted that those subjected to confinement face

a risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) regardless of whether they ultimately leave the faith or not, and called for "monitoring" to prevent recurrence, adding that "raising awareness across society can also have a deterrent effect."



Fumihiro Kato, author

Amid growing anxiety over how the [high court decision](#) may affect religious faith, some argue conversely that "now that dissolution has occurred, this is precisely the time to tell parents the truth."

Sarutahiko (pseudonym), co-representative of the private organization "Ama no Yachimata no Kai" (天の八衢の会 - Heavenly Eightfold Crossroads Association) [See editor's note 3 below], which works toward reconciliation between parents who carried out [coercive faith-breaking](#) [See editor's note 1 below] and believers who were [abducted and confined](#) - and who himself was a victim - pointed out:

"Now that we cannot even enter church facilities, some non-believers are expressing sympathy. This is a time when people may be more willing to listen to our perspective."

Sarutahiko's mother, Noriko (pseudonym), was one of those who carried out "protective persuasion" after being alarmed by a [pastor acting as a faith-breaker](#). She now works as a counselor for repairing parent-child relationships within the [organization](#). At the time, however, the [pastor](#) repeatedly told her,

"Your son joined (the [religious organization](#)) because your parenting failed."

She recalls feeling as though she was being rushed into action. Although she had doubts, she assumed,

"Someone in the position of a [pastor](#) would not say something wrong."

She looks back,

"I fell into a state of suspended thinking and, without fully understanding, followed instructions and confined my son."

Regarding parents who carried out confinement, Noriko says: "They often don't realize they were [deceived](#), so unless someone tells them, they won't understand." She has conveyed to Sarutahiko that "many of these parents are elderly, have nowhere to turn, regret what they did, and cannot talk to anyone about it." Noriko expresses hope that "they will share their experiences."

She also stated,

"The [pastors](#) did something outrageous. The past cannot be changed, but at the very least, they should help repair parent-child relationships."

While she deeply feels that reconciliation is not easy, she added,

"If believers show gratitude toward their parents, it may change the parents' hearts. I hope they will broaden their concerns beyond just the [church](#) and its teachings."

As for expectations toward the [religious organization](#), Sarutahiko emphasized:

"If it simultaneously protects believers' faith and works nationwide to restore parent-child relationships, its reputation can be restored at an early stage."

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[Editor's note 1: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.



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

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese

members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

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

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

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

[Editor's note 2: In Japan, the "mind-control" myth has been a powerful tool used to stigmatize and suppress new religious movements (NRMs), particularly since the 1980s. The concept suggests that NRMs manipulate or "brainwash" their followers, depriving them of free will and rational thought. This narrative gained traction after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, when public fear of dangerous cults intensified. Although Aum was an extreme and violent exception, the incident cast suspicion on all NRMs, allowing critics, media, and the government to label diverse groups as manipulative or psychologically coercive.

The "mind-control" myth serves multiple social and political functions. It simplifies complex questions of belief, making it easier to portray converts as victims rather than as individuals exercising spiritual agency. This framing justifies legal and social intervention, including the coercive "[deprogramming](#)" of believers - sometimes involving confinement or psychological pressure to force renunciation of faith. Lawyers, ex-member groups, and certain media outlets have used the idea of mind control to construct NRMs as threats to family stability and national order, reinforcing social conformity and Japan's preference for established, non-controversial religions such as Buddhism and Shinto.

In recent years, the myth resurfaced following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose attacker cited resentment toward the [Unification Church](#). A public outrage largely created by media reignited scrutiny of NRMs, and politicians and journalists revived "mind-control" rhetoric to explain the [Church's](#) fundraising and recruitment practices. Critics argue that this framing discourages genuine religious tolerance and critical examination of Japan's restrictive religious climate. Overall, the "mind-control" myth functions less as a scientific or psychological concept and more as a moral panic - a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority faiths and to reaffirm mainstream social norms about religion, obedience, and the boundaries of acceptable belief.]

[Editor's note 3: The Japanese expression Yachimata (八衢) refers to a crossroads or intersection where multiple paths converge. It is often used in a metaphorical sense to symbolize choices, encounters, or the meeting of different fates.

In mythology and classical literature, 八衢 (Yachimata) can also evoke a mystical or sacred space where important decisions or transformations occur. It appears in the name of the deity Ame no Yachihoko (天の八衢), associated with crossroads and divine encounters in Japanese folklore.

As for the above-mentioned association Ame no Yachimata no Kai (天の八衢の会), the term symbolizes a place for reconciliation, dialogue, and resolution - a meeting point where estranged families can reconnect.]

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Unification Church) in Naha City.

At around 2:00 p.m. on 4th March, when the Tokyo High Court upheld the order to dissolve the religious corporation, three attorneys acting as representatives of the liquidator visited the church in Naha. The court decision had been issued at 11:00 a.m. Although one of the attorneys came from

Tokyo, it takes more than three hours to reach Okinawa by plane. Mr. Nagata, who dealt with them, said he believed “the attorneys must have arrived in Okinawa the day before.” He felt that a liquidation team had already been organized in anticipation of dissolution, even for distant Okinawa.

More than a month has passed since the High Court decision. After submitting cash, bankbooks, and keys managed by the church to the attorneys acting as representatives, staff members have remained on standby at home. Mr. Nagata lamented,

“We can no longer use the church facilities, and it’s extremely difficult for us.”

The attorneys are not working inside the church facilities but instead from their own law offices. Only staff handling accounting are allowed to enter the facilities. In other words, even if believers were to use the facilities, it would not interfere with the liquidation work itself.

When one staff member asked the representatives when the facilities could be used again, they were told, “Given various public opinions, it will likely be difficult for several months.” Mr. Nagata felt that the representatives were “concerned about the eyes of opponents and wary of being seen as too lenient toward the Family Federation.” He emphasized that he “cannot accept their judgment at all.” He made a heartfelt appeal:

“At the very least, please allow us to use the church facilities just for Sunday worship.”

They are also deeply worried about the possible disposal of the facilities. Because there is no transparency in the liquidation process, staff members cannot grasp what will happen to the buildings and land from now on, heightening their anxiety.

Originally, the church had planned to rebuild the facilities and had already begun demolition work. However, with the start of liquidation procedures, reconstruction has been temporarily halted. Believers fear that the land might be put up for sale before the Supreme Court issues its decision.

Mr. Masaru Shimada (pseudonym, in his 40s), another staff member, said with a heavy heart:

“This land was purchased with donations collected by believers seeking a place for their faith. It holds decades of memories for them. If it were to be sold, it would cause unbearable emotional distress.”

If



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

the land is sold before the Supreme Court’s decision, it would not be returned even if the ruling were later overturned. For this reason, staff members are calling for greater transparency in the liquidation process.

Within the one month since liquidation began, a payment dispute with a real estate company has also occurred. According to prior explanations, payments for contracted properties were to continue under the instructions of the attorneys acting as representatives, but payments for one property had stopped. Angered by the unauthorized delinquency, the real estate company reportedly declared a unilateral termination of the contract.

Despite the issue not being the fault of the church, it has damaged their reputation and made future contracts more difficult. Mr. Tadashi Nitta (pseudonym, in his 40s), another staff member, frowned and said,

“We are filled with frustration at the thought that we must bear the consequences, such as unwanted contract cancellations and damage to our reputation in the community.”

Nevertheless, while feeling the situation is unreasonable, the religious organization has chosen to cooperate with the liquidators, making it difficult to voice demands regarding the liquidation work. Staff members said they are being careful “not to interfere with the

the [liquidation](#) work. Staff members said they are being careful not to interfere with the [liquidation](#) process".

The church in Naha City has about 600 believers. Mr. Nitta emphasized that the church facilities are not merely places for worship. Many believers who have lost a place to learn their doctrine and practice their faith are “deeply hurt”, he said. He added,

“I would like the attorneys acting as [liquidators](#) to see firsthand how seriously believers value their faith. Perhaps then something might change.”

Currently, some believers are offering their homes as places for study, but long-term use is difficult.

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Featured image above: Former staff members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) being interviewed in Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture. Photo: Arisa Takezawa (竹澤安李紗)

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