

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japan's Religious Intolerance Breeds Violence

Knut Holdhus
July 24, 2026



Tomoe Asamori (pseudonym), a member of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), says she was pushed down a staircase by her brother. Photographed on the morning of July 1, 2026 in Tokyo



After the dissolution in Japan, believers report growing hostility and intolerance

Tokyo, 23rd July 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Part 1 of the Series Dissolution Threatens the Human Rights of Believers

Family Violence and Life-Threatening Danger

Woman Pushed Down Stairs by Enraged Brother

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

See part 2 of the series: [Police Trust Shattered After Forced Confinement](#)



The Supreme Court of Japan

More than one month has passed since the dissolution of the religious corporation [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) became final following the [Supreme Court's dismissal](#) of its [special appeal](#). In its decision dated 22nd June, the Supreme Court stated that the psychological impact on the [religious organization](#)'s believers was "necessary and unavoidable".

But did the Court give sufficient consideration to the effects that the negative stigma attached to the [organization](#) could have on its members?

Two female believers suffered serious injuries, including fractures, after being assaulted by family members who opposed their faith. The human rights of believers are now under threat.

"I Thought I Was Going to Be Killed"

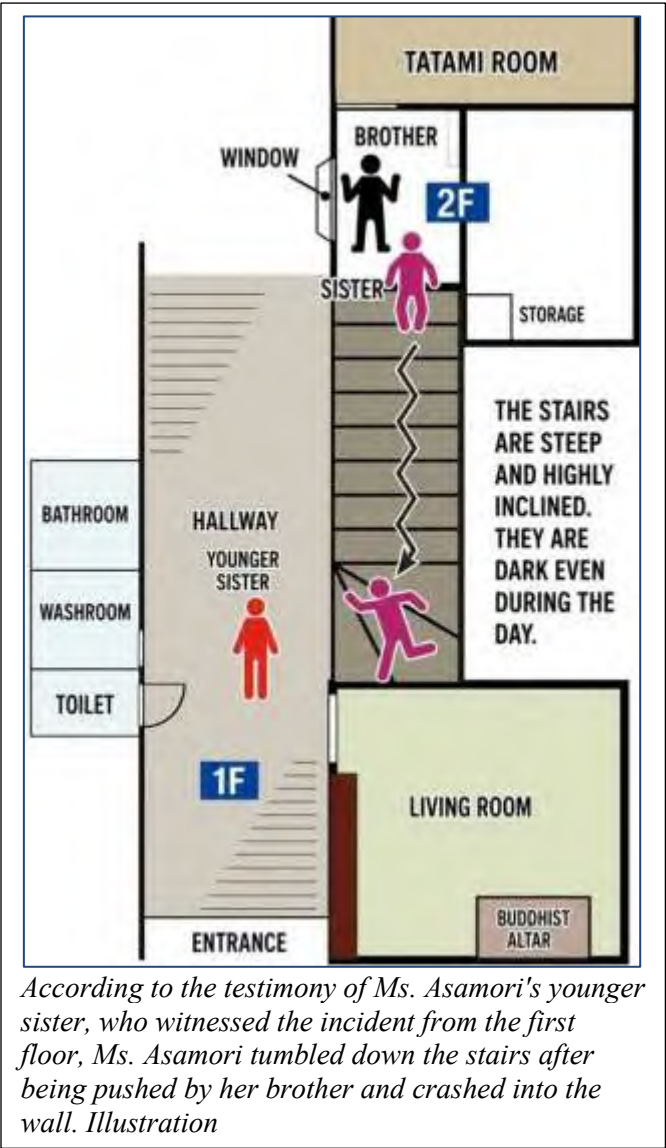
Ms. Tomoe Asamori (pseudonym), a woman in her fifties living in Tokyo who is a member of the [Family Federation](#), became involved in an argument with her older brother over her religious beliefs at her parents' home in late March of this year, shortly after the [Tokyo High Court's decision](#) initiated the [liquidation process](#) for the [religious corporation](#).

As the argument showed no sign of ending, she decided to leave and began walking downstairs from the second floor. At that moment, her brother shoved her from behind.

Ms. Asamori joined the [religious organization](#) in her twenties. In the past, she had twice been subjected to [abduction and confinement](#) by her parents and relatives in attempts to [force her to abandon her faith](#).

Her father has since passed away, and her mother now lives in a nursing facility because of dementia. Her older brother has been living alone in the family home for the past several years.

At the time she was confined years earlier, her brother had not taken as active a role in the coercive faith-breaking efforts as their parents had. However, he helped by driving the car and attended study sessions organized by [deprogrammers](#) (faith-breakers) [See editor's note below] - specialists who seek to persuade members to leave religious groups.



"You Still Haven't Quit?"

In late March, after visiting the family grave together with her younger sister, Ms. Asamori stopped by her parents' home.

Their mother had undergone surgery in early March while living in the care facility, but Ms. Asamori had been unable to reach her brother. Even when she went directly to the house, he appeared to pretend that no one was home.

Several years earlier, the keyhole of the front door had apparently been sealed with some kind of adhesive, making the spare key Ms. Asamori possessed unusable.

Left with no alternative, she entered through the back veranda, went upstairs where her brother was, and opened the door to his room. Recalling what happened, Ms. Asamori said:

"My brother came stomping over and stood right in front of me. 'You're still in the [church](#)?' he shouted. 'I thought you'd quit.' Although he'd never heard me say I'd left, he seemed to have convinced himself that I had. But he just kept shouting, 'I know the truth!' and 'Get out!'"

She also tried to tell him about their mother's surgery and her recovery afterward.

"But all he would say was, 'So what? It has nothing to do with me,' and 'I don't want anything more to do with this.' He kept repeating those words."

Wearing the hood of his jacket over his head, her brother grabbed Ms. Asamori's right arm and tried to force her downstairs while holding onto it.

Fearing it was dangerous, she pulled her arm free and began descending the stairs on her own.

At that moment, her brother shoved her from behind. She fell, sliding down the staircase in a seated position before crashing violently into the wall beside the stairs.

Even then, his anger did not subside. After coming downstairs, he also struck Ms. Asamori's younger sister, who had been waiting on the first floor, in the face.

Ms. Asamori struggled to her feet and intervened between them. Her brother then retreated upstairs.

Her younger sister wanted to leave the house immediately, but Ms. Asamori insisted that she had not yet offered incense before her late father's Buddhist altar. Enduring the pain, she first prayed at the family altar before finally leaving the house.

Broken Tailbone, Bleeding Head Injury, and a Month of Pain

"I Could Have Died"

Ms. Asamori later visited a bonesetter's clinic, where she learned that the impact of the fall had fractured her tailbone.

She had also struck her head against the wall, causing bleeding from the back of her head. Fortunately, examinations found no abnormalities of her skull or brain.

The pain was so severe that walking was difficult, and she was told it would be at least a month before she could reasonably undergo another examination. Looking back, Ms. Asamori sighed.

"If I had landed differently, I might have died or been left permanently disabled."

She also wonders what would have happened if she had visited the house alone. Had she lost consciousness after falling down the stairs, how would her brother have reacted? Would he have called an ambulance? Or would he simply have left her there?

She does not know the answer, and the thought still fills her with fear.

Speaking about her brother, Ms. Asamori said:

"At heart, he's a kind person, but he's the type who forces his own worldview onto others."

When she visited the family home, magazines, books, and photocopied articles criticizing the [Unification Church](#) were piled densely around her late father's Buddhist altar.

Because the assailant is a family member, Ms. Asamori has not yet decided whether to file a criminal complaint over being pushed down the stairs.

However, she repeatedly emphasized:

"Just because someone opposes my faith does not give them any justification for pushing me down a staircase."

See part 2 of the series: [Police Trust Shattered After Forced Confinement](#)



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

[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.

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.]

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The Anatomy Of Japan’s Hostile Media Campaign

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Media

Japanese journalist and fact-checker reveals the anatomy of activist-generated news coverage fueling political action that led to the dissolution of the Family federation in Japan

On 23rd June, [Bitter Winter](#), the human rights and religious liberty magazine, published an [article by Dr. Massimo Introvigne](#), Italian sociologist of religion. He analyzes research carried out by Japanese journalist and fact-checker Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏) on what he calls the “carefully reinforced” dominant media narrative against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), formerly called the [Unification Church](#), in the aftermath of the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in July 2022.

The basis for [Introvigne's comments](#) is an interview with Kato conducted by literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎).

Continued from part 1: [How Media Narrative Was Changed to Attack Faith](#)

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Japanese journalist and fact-checker Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏). Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

Fumihiro Kato also used network analysis to examine how different topics were connected in news coverage. Network analysis is a statistical technique that uses computer algorithms and visualizes how information is organized and words and ideas are linked across thousands of texts, revealing the central themes and structure of a media narrative.

See also [Police Trust Shattered After Forced Confinement](#)

The resulting diagrams showed political terms clustered at the center of the discussion. References to donations or so-called “spiritual sales” appeared much farther away from the core.

From this pattern, Kato concludes that criticism of the [Family Federation](#) increasingly became part of a broader political struggle. He argues that claims promoted by anti-[Federation](#) activists and the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* were echoed by opposition politicians during parliamentary debates, placing pressure on the government of Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄).

Dr. Massimo Introvigne, Italian sociologist of religion, founder of [CESNUR](#), specializing in new religious movements and religious liberty. A prolific author, he has advised governments and international bodies, and served as OSCE Representative on combating racism, xenophobia, and intolerance against Christians worldwide and comments on contemporary religious controversies. Here speaking at the UN Office at Geneva on 16th June 2025. Screenshot from video by UPF.



Turning Public Opinion Against A Minority

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In his [article](#), Introvigne points out that as a result, media reports focused less on investigating specific allegations against the [religious organization](#) than on portraying the government's response – or perceived lack of response – as politically unacceptable.

Kato also examined the emotional language used in television coverage. He notes that reports about the church's international [marriage Blessing ceremonies](#) frequently used emotionally charged expressions rather than neutral descriptions. One word in particular, *urawakai* (うら若い), meaning “young and innocent”, appeared with unusual frequency.

According to his research, this expression had almost never been used by Japanese media outside this context during the previous two decades. Kato believes its repeated use encouraged audiences to imagine vulnerable young women being manipulated, strengthening negative emotional reactions.



Masaki Kito, one of the hostile lawyers of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (全国霊感商法被害対策弁連) and Nationwide Unification Church Damage Countermeasures Legal Team (全国統一教会被害対策弁護団). Photo:



Militantly campaigning against the Family Federation: Activist journalist Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka. Photo: Mikkabie / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int.](#) Cropped

He is also critical of television programs such as *Miyane-ya* (a news and talk show on Nippon TV), which devoted extensive airtime to the controversy while relying heavily on outspoken critics of the [Family Federation](#), including journalist Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト) and attorney Masaki Kito (紀藤正樹). Kato argues that these commentators often interpreted events through the lens of scandal rather than balanced reporting.

Despite the enormous volume of media coverage, Kato questions how much genuine public interest actually existed.

Although *Miyane-ya* recorded audience ratings of around seven percent during its reporting, Kato estimates that only about two to three-and-a-half percent of households were actively paying attention once passive viewing was excluded.

Internet search data showed a similar pattern. Searches for “[Unification Church](#)” surged briefly after the assassination but declined sharply within days. By October 2022, public interest had largely faded. Search activity was also concentrated mainly around Tokyo and Nara rather than spread evenly across Japan.

Nevertheless, Kato argues that the media presented this limited attention as evidence of overwhelming nationwide concern.

He believes this perceived public pressure influenced the Kishida administration and the ruling LDP, which responded by cutting ties with the [Family Federation](#) and eventually supporting legal action seeking its dissolution.

When the *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* (MEXT) justified these actions by referring to widespread “anxiety and confusion” among the public, Kato argues that this reflected a media-created atmosphere more than objectively demonstrated social conditions.

Looking beyond the [Family Federation](#) itself, Kato offers a broader warning.

He describes **the entire process as a form of information warfare in which activist groups introduced a narrative, news organizations amplified it, and political leaders reacted to the resulting public pressure.**

He is particularly concerned that Japanese courts later relied partly on civil lawsuits dating back several decades when ordering the dissolution of the [religious organization](#). If courts allow public opinion shaped by media campaigns to substitute for current criminal wrongdoing, Kato believes this sets a troubling precedent.

In his view, the issue ultimately extends far beyond one religious movement. It raises fundamental questions about judicial independence, freedom of religion, and whether individuals or organizations can lose their legal protections because of a powerful public narrative rather than proven facts.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: infographic-style image of activist-generated media narrative becoming judgment.
Illustration ChatGPT, July 2026.

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