

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Lawsuit Challenges Exposure of Religious Faith

Knut Holdhus
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Lawsuit by a Family Federation member highlights the risks of exposing religious affiliation amid growing public hostility

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[Feature Interview]

"Exposing Someone's Faith Is an Invasion of Privacy"

Ruling in Lawsuit Against Eito Suzuki on 8th October

by Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)



Militantly campaigning against the [Family Federation](#). Activist journalist Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka

A ruling will be handed down on 8th October by the Tokyo District Court in a lawsuit brought by A, a male member of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU, formerly the [Unification Church](#)), who claims that journalist Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト) violated his privacy by exposing his religious faith, photograph, and real name to the public. A is seeking ¥10 million in damages and the deletion of the relevant article posted on Suzuki's X (formerly Twitter) account.

Ahead of the ruling, A spoke about the background to the lawsuit and how he feels about the matter today.

Interviewer: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)

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What led you to file a lawsuit against Eito Suzuki for violating your privacy?

At the time, I was living in a particular community where I had been the representative of a volunteer organization since around 2015. We regularly organized activities such as neighborhood cleanups and visits to historical sites, and local children also participated during the summer holidays.

I am not a member of the local community myself, but when a parent and child I knew in the area asked me for advice about starting a children's cafeteria, I helped them get it started and cooperated with the activities.

However, after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), Suzuki began labeling the [Family Federation](#) and its members as antisocial, and my activities in the community also became a target of criticism.



A reporter from Shukan Bunshun even came directly to my home to interview me after receiving information from Suzuki. Both my family and I were terrified, wondering how they had found out where I lived. However, in the Shukan Bunshun article, my name was given only by its initials.



Then, around 2023, at a lecture attended by more than 300 people, Suzuki displayed a photograph showing former Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Hakubun Shimomura (下村博文) visiting the children's cafeteria. I was also visible in the photograph. In doing so, Suzuki revealed that I was a member of the [Unification Church](#), as well as my full name and the name of the volunteer organization I headed.

- Suzuki has described the volunteer organization as a "disguised volunteer organization" used for missionary purposes, claiming that it concealed its "true identity" as a religious organization. He says he exposed your personal information because it was necessary to warn people about it.

I was simply engaged in activities for the benefit of the local community. If you say that we were "hiding our identity," it sounds as though we were operating under false names. But I was carrying out these activities openly under my real name.

Volunteering was something that gave my life meaning. It was neither intended for missionary purposes nor a cover for hiding the organization's identity.

Suzuki also made posts on X referring to my activities at the children's cafeteria. Although he used only my initials in the text, some of the images he uploaded included captions in katakana spelling out my name.



Some of my fellow volunteers were understanding of my faith. But there were also people who took Suzuki's posts at face value and reacted negatively, saying things like, "Is this a church organization?"

I have also become estranged from people with whom I worked at the children's cafeteria. I probably will never be able to go there again.

- The first oral hearing was held in September 2024, and the trial concluded in July this year.

During my opening statement, I became so emotional that I unexpectedly began to cry. I appealed to the presiding judge: "Are members of the [Unification Church](#) not allowed to volunteer?"

However, Suzuki subsequently wrote an article suggesting that my tears had merely been an act, and that I had been conferring calmly with my attorney even while riding in the elevator. None of this was true, and I found it extremely offensive.

The defense has also pointed out that, on a business-oriented social-media platform on which I had registered long before the assassination, I had included my name and the fact that I was an employee of

the [religious organization](#) in my profile. They argue that I had "absolutely no intention of hiding" my faith.

But the manner in which information is made public, and the circumstances in which it is disclosed, are entirely different matters.

There is a significant difference between voluntarily making your personal information public yourself and having a third party expose your real name, religious faith, and other personal attributes to an unspecified number of people at a time when criticism of the religious organization is intensifying.

Precisely because we are living in the current climate, I believe that when it comes to people who are particularly important to me, if I am going to tell them about my faith, I want to do so directly and with care.

- What do you hope society will take away from this lawsuit?

I know several fellow believers who have experienced something similar: they have been labeled "[Unification Church](#) members" and, based on the assumption that they might be using community activities for missionary work while hiding their identity, have been pushed out of those activities.

It is truly unreasonable. Why should activities that were appreciated by the local community have to be destroyed?

The Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience, and when the [dissolution order was decided](#), the Tokyo High Court also recognized that the human rights of believers are protected.

Yet the current situation is that discrimination is being justified by a prevailing social atmosphere that says, "The [Family Federation](#) is a bad organization."

I want Japan to be a country where, regardless of what religion people believe in, not only their faith and privacy are protected, but also their right to participate and contribute actively in society.

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Voltaire's Warning For Japan And South Korea

October 5, 2026 • The News Desk

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What Voltaire's defense of persecuted minorities 250 years ago can teach about religious freedom today

Peter Zoehrer's 1st October 2026 Substack essay, "The Pen Against the Infamy: Voltaire's Fight Against



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[Fanaticism, Persecution and the Abuse of Power](#)", is ostensibly a reflection on the eighteenth-century French philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778). Yet its central argument has direct relevance to the treatment of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) in Japan and South Korea. Zoehrer, Austrian journalist and campaigner for human rights, asks what happens when a persecuted religious community becomes the object of intense public suspicion, political pressure and judicial action – and what role writers, journalists and human-rights advocates can play in ensuring that accusations do not become substitutes for evidence.



Peter Zoehrer. Photo: FOREF

See also [States Weaponizing the Law in War on Faiths](#)

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The arrest of Calas – The ground floor of Maison Calas, rue de Fillatiers in Toulouse. The evening of the discovery of the body of Marc-Antoine Calas. Capitoul David de Baudrigue (tricorn) publicly accuses Jean Calas of the disguised murder of his own son. Painting by Casimir Destrem in 1879. Image from Musée du Vieux Toulouse. Public domain image.

Zoehrer begins with Voltaire's campaign against religious persecution and judicial injustice, particularly the case of Jean Calas, a Protestant merchant executed in Toulouse in 1762 after being accused of murdering his son to prevent his conversion to Catholicism. Importantly, Voltaire did not initially assume Calas was innocent. He investigated the case, examined its inconsistencies and only then became convinced that a grave miscarriage of justice had occurred. He subsequently gathered evidence, mobilized contacts, published his *Treatise on Tolerance* and continued campaigning until the judgment was overturned and Calas's reputation restored.

For contemporary debates over the [Family Federation](#), this method is particularly significant. In his [Substack article](#), Peter Zoehrer emphasizes that **investigation must precede indignation**. Human-rights advocacy is weakened when allegations, rumors or politically convenient narratives are repeated without scrutiny. A documented case, he argues, is ultimately more persuasive than an angry slogan, while credibility accumulated over years can be destroyed by a single claim that cannot withstand examination. This principle is especially pertinent where the [Family Federation](#) has faced extensive allegations concerning fundraising, political relationships and its institutional activities. The appropriate question is not whether the [religious organization](#) is popular or unpopular, but whether particular allegations against particular individuals or entities can be established through evidence and due process.

The article's great explicit contribution was to force the issue of



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the [article](#)'s most explicit contemporary reference is Japan. Zoehrer notes that Japan's Supreme Court **finalized the dissolution** of the [Family Federation](#)'s religious corporation in June 2026 following years of political and media scrutiny after the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. He acknowledges that allegations concerning fundraising practices should be carefully examined, but identifies the broader question raised by the case: **how should a democracy distinguish between sanctioning proven misconduct and imposing consequences upon an entire religious institution and its community?** That question has implications beyond the Japanese case itself, particularly because dissolution affects an entire religious organization rather than simply punishing individuals found responsible for specific wrongdoing.

Zoehrer then articulates a distinction highly relevant to both Japan and South Korea: the difference between **conduct and identity**. Labels such as "cult", "sect", "extremist" or "dangerous religion" can, he warns, become substitutes for proving individual wrongdoing. The danger arises when suspicion of particular conduct becomes suspicion of belonging itself – when membership in a persecuted religious community begins to function as evidence of wrongdoing.

His formulation is particularly relevant to the South Korean situation surrounding [Hak Ja Han](#) and the [Family Federation](#), where criminal allegations concerning particular transactions and political relationships have unfolded against a much wider backdrop of persecution of the [religious organization](#).

This also explains why Zoehrer insists that **religious liberty must be tested precisely where the religion is persecuted**. One does not need to accept the theology of the [Family Federation](#) – or of any controversial minority religion – to insist that allegations against its members be assessed through individualized evidence and due process rather than collective suspicion. This principle provides a useful framework for considering both Japan's institutional dissolution proceedings and South Korea's criminal and political investigations without requiring an endorsement of the [Family Federation](#)'s beliefs or of every claim made in its defense.



Hounded and persecuted like a criminal by weaponizing criminal law against her? here, [Hak Ja Han](#) (83), Holy Mother Han, in Gapyeong, South Korea 20th July 2025. Screenshot from video recording by [FFWPU](#)

Another important theme is the relationship between media coverage and state action. Zoehrer argues that journalism has a responsibility to investigate misconduct while avoiding collective condemnation of believers. **Crimes have perpetrators; allegations require evidence; guilt should attach to those who committed wrongful acts rather than automatically to thousands of people who share a religion or worldview.** In controversies involving the [Family Federation](#), where highly charged media narratives can influence public attitudes and the political environment in which government and judicial decisions are made, this distinction becomes particularly consequential.

Ultimately, Zoehrer returns to the power of the written word. Voltaire had neither modern human-rights organizations nor international conventions nor social media; he had investigation, correspondence, publishing networks and a pen. His method was to identify an individual injustice, establish the facts, give the victim a name, bring the story before a wider public and continue writing. For those documenting the experiences of [Family Federation](#) members in Japan and South Korea, Zoehrer's argument therefore offers a broader lesson: **the defense of religious freedom does not require defending every action of a religious organization. It requires insisting that persecuted believers remain entitled to evidence-based scrutiny, individualized responsibility and the same**

based scrutiny, individualized responsibility and the same protections of law and conscience afforded to everyone else.

See also [States Weaponizing the Law in War on Faiths](#)

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Portrait of Voltaire (1694-1778) in 1718 by Nicolas de Largillière (1656-1746). Photo: Musée Carnavalet. [Public domain](#) image.

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