

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Kishida's Self-Defeating Populist Decisions

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Prime Minister Fumio Kishida 16th April 2023

Kishida administration's overnight populist decisions behind closed doors



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Investigating the Request for an Order to Dissolve the Family Federation - Politics and Media out of Control

Part 1: Sudden Change in the Government and Ruling Party - Overturning a Cabinet Decision Overnight Behind Closed Doors.

by the Religion and Politics Reporting Team of the Editorial Department of Sekai Nippo

Last October, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology filed a request with the Tokyo District Court for an order to dissolve the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)). It was revealed in the answer to the question submitted by Senator Satoshi Hamada (浜田聡参) on 31st January 2024 that Prime Minister Fumio Kishida changed the interpretation of the Religious Corporation Law, which is the basis for the request, without holding a cabinet meeting. We will investigate the out-of-the-ordinary political move, such as Kishida's decision to simplify the procedure for requesting a dissolution order, which is equivalent to a "death sentence" for a religious corporation.

The Religious Affairs Division of Agency for Cultural Affairs is part of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and oversees religious corporations. It responded to the request for a dissolution order for the former [Unification Church](#), stating that 'it is not applicable' because the [church](#) leaders have not committed a criminal offense. This was also confirmed in the cabinet meeting on 14th October 2022.

In response to a written question from Senator Satoshi Hamada (浜田聡) regarding Prime Minister Kishida's parliamentary answer that he changed the interpretation of the law to include civil cases as well, the government admitted that it had not gone through a cabinet meeting. This is indeed backroom politics.

Seishiro Sugihara (杉原誠四郎), a former professor at Musashino Women's University (武蔵野女子大) [in Tokyo], who is knowledgeable about the issues of religion and politics, points out,

"If the government changed its interpretation through consultations with relevant ministries and agencies without going through a Cabinet meeting, its response would be difficult."



He is critical,

"At least it has become clear that the interpretation was changed without a Cabinet decision, which in itself is a big problem."

The accusation of issuing a "death sentence" to a religious corporation and criticism of disregarding the human rights of tens of thousands of believers are unavoidable.

The Religious Corporations Act stipulates that a religious corporation that has committed an act that is clearly recognized as "violating laws and regulations and significantly harming public welfare" can be ordered to be dissolved by a court, based on requests from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, among others. However, the government's response on 14th October 2022 pointed out that there is no criminal violation, which is a requirement for requesting a dissolution order against the former [Unification Church](#).

Even when Senator Hiroyuki Konishi (小西洋之) of the Constitutional Democratic Party, who pressed Prime Minister Kishida to request a dissolution order, asked in a question paper why he (Kishida) had not made a request, he avoided making a clear statement on the grounds that it is a "matter related to a pending case".



The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), at the urging of opposition parties, the media, and left-wing intellectuals, conducted an investigation into whether its members of the Diet had any connections with

the [religious group](#) and related organizations. In August 2022, the LDP admitted that there had been relationships and announced a policy of "having no relationship whatsoever with the former [Unification Church](#) and related organizations, and not having any relationship with organizations that have been identified as socially problematic." By removing from ministerial positions those members who admitted to having a relationship, the LDP tried to deflect criticism.

Furthermore, the lack of neutrality is evident from the fact that Taro Kono (河野太郎), the Minister in charge of Consumer Affairs, arbitrarily, and in order to denounce the [religious organization](#), appointed several individuals to the Consumer Affairs Agency's "Study Group on Measures against Bad Business Practices such as Spiritual Sales".

Fumio Kishida's reckless nature also surfaced in the issue of unreported income from the Liberal Democratic Party faction party tickets (slush funds), which became a problem from the end of last year. As soon as this issue came to light, Kishida suddenly announced on 7th December 2023 that he would resign as the chairman of the Kishida faction.

Amid suspicions of slush fund involvement of both the Kishida faction and himself, Kishida served as the head of the party's political reform headquarters and declared the dissolution of the Abe and Nikai factions, in a "sneak attack" move against them. Those factions were in dire straits due to the slush funds issue. He put forth a reform proposal that included a ban on faction-hosted parties.

The fact that he overrode the objections of Vice-President of LDP Taro Aso (麻生太郎) and Secretary-General Toshimitsu Motegi (茂木敏充), who both had voiced their opposition to abolishing factions, caused a rift in the cooperative relationship between the three, which has been referred to as the "three-headed leadership".

As evident from the handling of the former [Unification Church](#) and the secret funds issue, Prime Minister Kishida has a widespread reputation within the party as a populist.



Daishiro Yamagawa in Oct. 2021

In October 2022, Economic Revitalization Minister Daishiro Yamagawa (山際大志郎) from the Aso faction, was said to have ties with the [religious organization](#) and was forced to resign.

However, even in the current cabinet, connections have come to light. The Minister of Education, Masahito Moriyama (盛山正仁) from the Kishida faction, who requested the dissolution order, was revealed to have received support from the former [Unification Church](#) in the October 2021 general election and is fiercely questioned by the opposition. Kishida defends Moriyama by saying, "He has now severed all ties with the former [Unification Church](#)."

Still, Kishida himself is known to have had a past meeting with the head of a related organization. He is however afraid of a domino effect of resignations and is trying to get through by pretending not to have been aware of past connections. This makes it impossible to maintain consistency with lawmakers who were removed from the cabinet because they had a relationship in the past to the [Unification Church](#).

Originally, it was the Prime Minister and the Liberal Democratic Party themselves who raised the issue of "no illegality" in their election cooperation [with the [Unification Church](#)]. They will pay a high price for being swayed by public opinion just to prolong their political lives.



Masahito Moriyama, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2023)

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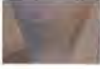
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Tokyo headquarters of the [Family Federation of Japan](#). Photo. Asanagi / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

September 2023 announcement by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) that the [Family Federation](#) of Japan would be fined for not answering properly to questions from the ministry, the [Family Federation](#) held a press conference the day after, 8th September, at the national headquarters in Shibuya, Tokyo.

The press conference was attended by major Japanese news outlets like the Asahi Shimbun, NHK, Kyodo News, the Yomiuri Shimbun, Jiji Press, and many others.

Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto representing the [Family Federation](#) of Japan, opened the conference. He explained the Family Federation's stance and how it will respond, stating,

"The exercise of the right to ask questions was carried out by the Government, by changing the interpretation of the law overnight. It does not comply with the guidelines for the exercise of the implementation of the right of questioning written in the Religious Institutions Act, article 78,2. We consider this to be illegal.

Therefore, we consider that we are justified in not answering such illegally made questions, whether in part or in full. A fine for refusing to answer is not admissible. We intend to contest the fine in court and fight the case all the way in order to seek a dismissal."

Activist leftwing lawyers, particularly opposed to the [Family Federation's](#) severe critique of totalitarian communism, have for decades waged a hate campaign against the faith society.

Investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda, present at the press conference, describes the hate campaign,

"The Network would not hesitate to use all means to destroy the former [Unification Church](#). They are willing to tell all sort of stories, including lies, to achieve what they believe is a righteous purpose. They often throw the words 'anti-social' and 'cult' at the former [Unification Church](#), but



Masumi Fukuda in April 2023. Photo: [FOREF](#)

considering their involvement in the abduction and confinement of believers, one may wonder whether they are not more deserving of these labels themselves." (*'Sayuri Ogawa': When 'Apostates' Slander the Unification Church. 5. Why the Story Is Not Believable, Bitter Winter* 6th March 2023)

The Japanese media has often uncritically echoed claims made by the activist lawyers, especially after the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe 8th July last year. The activist lawyers succeeded in blaming the Family Federation for the act of terror soon after it happened.

Fukuda writes about the current situation,

"Last October, bowing to pressure from the media and public opinion, Prime Minister Kishida reversed his previous cautious stance and announced his intention to exercise the right to ask questions to the

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intention to exercise the right to ask questions to the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) [a move that under Japanese law is preliminary to seeking the dissolution of a religious organization].

In response, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) exercised its first right to ask questions on November 22. And in December, approximately 200,000 online signatures were submitted to the Division of Religious Affairs of the Agency for Cultural Affairs in the MEXT, demanding that an order to dissolve the [Family Federation](#) should be sought and obtained as soon as possible." (*The Plot to Destroy the Unification Church in Japan. 1. Why the Church Should Not Be Dissolved, Bitter Winter* 23rd June 2023

Two registered religious movements have previously been dissolved, both after their leaders had committed criminal acts. The activist lawyers campaigning against the [Family Federation](#), have long claimed that it has committed acts deemed to be "detrimental to the public welfare, in violation of laws and regulations." Such claims are part of the lawyers' strategy to get the [Family Federation](#) dissolved.

Attorney Fukumoto explained at the press conference 8th September that leaders of the [Family Federation](#) had never committed such criminal acts. He stated,

"The conclusion is that 'violation of the law, extremely prejudicial to the public welfare' is interpreted as referring to acts that fall under criminal cases. On the flip side, this means that civil law torts do not enter the case. In fact, the interpretation that it is limited to criminal cases is an interpretation that the Government itself has repeatedly confirmed and expressed since the decision of the Tokyo Supreme Court was issued.



Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto at press conference 8th Sep. 2023.
Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU Japan](#).

Prime Minister Kishida still followed this interpretation at the Budget Committee of the House of Representatives on 18th October [2022], the day after he instructed the Ministry (MEXT) to exercise its right to ask questions, and clearly stated that civil case acts do not enter the case. Since the shooting incident, the Government has repeatedly stated that since there is no criminal case against the former [Unification Church](#), there is no grounds for dissolution and the right to ask questions cannot be exercised.

Since on 18th October still he repeated the same statement saying that civil case acts do not enter the case, then the opposition parties voiced severe criticism, saying, 'Then we can't exercise our right to ask questions and we can't order the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#).'

Fukumoto points that Prime Minister suddenly made a complete U-turn,



"In response to this criticism, the Prime Minister changed his previous interpretation of the law at the Budget Committee of the House of Councillors on 19th



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida 16th April 2023.
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October, stating that if the law is clearly defined as 'organised, malicious and continuous' and falls under the requirements of the Religious Institutions Law, it may also include civil law tort actions."

The attorney representing the [Family Federation](#) made it clear that only courts may make such a change of interpretation of the law,

"However, the authority to interpret the law rests with the courts, and not with the head of the executive government. This changed interpretation of the law is merely a new interpretation of the law, which the executive government claims unilaterally."

Attorney Fukumoto presented an overview of the time after the assassination of Abe,

"8th July, shooting of former Prime Minister Abe.

On 12th September, at an opposition party hearing, the Agency of Cultural Affairs (in charge) declared that the requirements for requesting a dissolution order from the court were not met.

On 20th September, the same Agency of Cultural Affairs officially replied that it would be difficult for the court to issue a dissolution order while the church leaders and others had not been criminally punished. (Explanation: exactly what I have explained,)

14th October, the Cabinet's written answer to a written question: "With regard to the former [Unification Church](#), based on the relevant interpretation (the higher decision in the case of the request for a dissolution order for Aum Shinrikyo), we have decided that it does not fall under items (81) 1 and 2 of the same paragraph, and therefore the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the competent authority, has so far not requested a dissolution order against the former [Unification Church](#). The government has not made a request for a dissolution order against the former Unification Church."

On 15th October, Nagaoka, Minister for MEXT, told a press conference, "Based on precedents, we are cautious. At the moment, it is difficult to order a dissolution request."



Keiko Nagaoka, government minister for education, culture, sports, science and technology (MEXT). Photo (May 2023): U.S. Department of State. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

On 17th October, Prime Minister Kishida instructed Nagaoka, Minister of MEXT to exercise her right to ask questions.

On 18th October, Prime Minister Kishida declared in the Diet that the term 'in violation of laws and regulations' does not include torts under the Civil Code.

Overnight, the interpretation changed.

On 19th October, Prime Minister Kishida stated in the Diet that the statute 'in violation of the law' could include civil law torts."

Fukumoto pointed out,

“Here, the right to ask questions cannot be exercised if there are no important material reasons for dissolution, which amounts to dissolution if there is no doubt.

In exercising the first right to ask questions, the Minister for MEXT even said at a press conference, ‘I would like to consider requesting a dissolution order as soon as possible.’ Is such a thing permissible in a country governed by the rule of law?”

During his presentation, attorney Fukumoto emphasized that previously when religious movements have been dissolved by the Japanese authorities, it was because of fraudulent acts committed by leaders of those movements.

He explained why there are no reasons for dissolution,



Sign at the entrance of the Family Federation's national HQ in Tokyo. Photo: Asanagi. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

“However, in the civil trials in which the [Family Federation](#) was the defendant, there has not been a single case in which a representative officer of the faith society, currently President Tanaka, or a senior officer of the faith society gave the order and used the personnel, material and organisation of the faith society to carry it out. [...]

Naturally, the Agency of Cultural Affairs was from the very beginning aware of its decision to exercise the right to ask questions. It must have been aware of it, because it must have checked all the precedents that it knew at that time. There was not a single corresponding case, and yet they exercised the right to ask questions. That was a completely illegal act. [...]

The [Family Federation](#) could have refused to answer any of the questions in the exercise of its right to ask illegal questions. However, in view of the boiling media coverage and public opinion, we had the option of refusing to answer all the questions, but we avoided this and answered as many as possible in relation to questions on illegal activities. This was also because we judged that it would be effective in explaining the actual situation of the Family Federation to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and in clearing up misunderstandings.

However, despite these efforts, we are very disappointed that the MEXT now has decided to seek a sanction in the form of a fine against the Family Federation.”

More about the questions from the government: [Impossible Questions Reveal Kishida Bias](#)

Featured image above: From the press conference 8th September, at the [Family Federation](#) national headquarters in Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU Japan](#).

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