

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Essence Of Japan's Religious Liberty Crisis

Knut Holdhus
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Dr. Massimo Introvigne, here on 6th April 2023

The Religious Liberty Crisis in Japan after the Assassination of Shinzo Abe - 2022 to 2024

A speech by Dr. Massimo Introvigne, founder of CESNUR, an independent network of scholars, and editor-in-chief of [Bitter Winter](#), a magazine on religious liberty and human rights. The speech was given 12th April 2024, the second day of an international online 3-day conference on "Peace and Public Leadership: Addressing the Challenges of Our Times", organized by HJ International Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership, New York, USA.

I would like to start by asking you to do a mental experiment and go back to the morning of 8th July 2022. For us who are in the field of defending religious liberty and studying religious movements, it was a morning like many others. When we woke up, we would know that as on any other day, believers would suffer for their faith in several parts of the world.



Assassinated on 8th July 2022. Here, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe some months earlier, in March 2022

Several would go to jail in China or Russia or Iran or North Korea. Some may be tortured or killed. And perhaps devotees of religious minorities would once again be attacked by mobs in Pakistan or Nigeria.

But what we surely did not know, nor could imagine, was that one of the worst religious liberty crises, and certainly the worst in a democratic country in our century was about to erupt in a most unlikely place - Japan.

We all love and admire Japan for its rich culture, religious traditions and effective democracy. And also in the past, Japan has proved its capacity not to succumb to emotions when in 1995 the rogue leaders of the new religious movement Aum Shinrikyo perpetrated a terrorist attack in the Tokyo subway and committed other crimes. They were identified and punished.

But a push that general laws would be enacted punishing new religious movements in general were rejected by politicians and by most Japanese media.

The [Unification Church](#) - I will use this name for short, even if I know it's now called the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - has run into problems since the 1980s. The real root of those problems was the [Unification Church's](#) anti-communist political activists and its very effective political activity which also had electoral consequences.



From a 1969-campaign aimed at Japanese students, organized by International Federation for Victory over Communism (IFVOC), an anti-communist organization associated with the [Unification Church](#)

For this reason, in 1987, lawyers, mostly belonging to the Socialist or the Communist Party, established an anti-[Unification Church](#) organization called National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales.

"Spiritual sales" was a nickname created by those lawyers to denounce the activities not of the [Unification Church](#) as a church, but of a private company called Happy World whose members were devotees of the [Unification Church](#).



The immediate aftermath of the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in the vicinity of Kintetsu Yamato-Saidaiji station northern entrance on 8th July 2022

And they were selling seals, small pagodas and other artifacts for very high prices, claiming they would bring good luck or grant advantages to one's relatives in the afterlife. And since they were members of the [Unification Church](#), they donated part of their profits to the [Unification Church](#).

And the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales used those practices to mount an attack against the [Unification Church](#) in general. But again, the Japanese society proved its capability to resist.

The National Network of Lawyers called several times for the dissolution of the [Unification Church](#) and even sued the government on the issue. But the lawyers' requests were always turned down, and by the morning of 8th July 2022, this was largely a problem of the past.

A new law on sales of spiritual items and donations had been passed. The [Unification Church](#) had announced its intention of complying with it. The company Happy World no longer existed.

And the number of complaints received by the consumer authorities against the [Unification Church](#) for new incidents had decreased from hundreds per year in the 20th Century to less than ten in the 21st Century and almost to zero by 2022.

So in July 2022, there was no [Unification Church](#) problem in Japan. There were no so-called spiritual sales problems in Japan. Those problems had existed in the past and had largely been solved.

However, all changed on 8th July 2022, when a man called Tetsuya Yamagami assassinated the former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

And soon, in murky circumstances, the information was leaked that the motivation of the killer was to punish Shinzo Abe for having been friendly to the [Unification Church](#). That happened because his mother, the mother of the assassin, had gone bankrupt 20 years earlier, in 2002, while the killer acted in 2022.

This is significant and we can discuss it later. Rather than blaming the killer in Japan, the National Network was able to launch a huge campaign against the [Unification Church](#), which basically led to three consequences.

- ① An action for dissolving the [Unification Church](#), which the government started by changing its own interpretation of the law, which had always maintained that only groups committing crimes could be dissolved. While the [Unification Church](#) had only lost some civil cases.
- ② A law affecting all religions was passed, severely limiting the possibility of soliciting donations and offering to donors the possibility of recovering their gifts even after many years, claiming they had been brainwashed.
- ③ Regulations were passed about children, limiting the possibility for parents to socializing their children in controversial religions, with provisions targeting not only the [Unification Church](#), but also the Jehovah's Witnesses, and other groups.

In conclusion, what started as a campaign against the [Unification Church](#) has now escalated to a campaign which puts religious liberty in Japan in danger in general, as some of the provisions target all kinds of conservative religions.

I have defined before what is happening in Japan as the worst religious liberty crisis in the world in democratic countries.

I made this statement several months ago, and I should say today that the situation is not getting better. Every day it is getting even worse.

Thank you!

"The Essence of Japan's Religious Liberty Crisis" - this is a slightly edited version of Dr. Massimo Introvigne's speech 12th April 2024.

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Kishida Swayed By Communist Dictatorial Policy

March 23, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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Fumio Kishida (right) with four top members of Japanese Communist Party (JCP), Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ License: CC BY 4.0 Int.

Politician claims Kishida has copied dictatorial policy of the communists as he violates the freedom of religious minority

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report titled "The [Unification Church](#) Case in Japan: A Politician Speaks Up." It was written by a member of the *Liberal Democratic Party* (LDP), Toshikazu Masubuchi, who served as speaker of *Tochigi Prefectural Assembly* 1991-2011.

On 29th February 2024, [Bitter Winter](#) published the 3rd of its 3 articles. It was headlined "[Political Motivations Behind the Request of a Dissolution Order](#)".

There, Masubuchi explains that if Fumio Kishida had responded to calls from left-wingers to cut ties with the [Family Federation](#), in a similar way that former Prime Minister Nakasone did in 1987, the *Liberal Democratic Party* would have avoided many of the problems it faced after the Abe assassination in July 2022.



[On part 1 in Bitter Winter series, part 2a, part 2b, part 3b](#)



Toshikazu Masubuchi.
Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

Masubuchi points out that the media may manifestly advocate for human rights and champion justice, but at the same time they readily overlook the human rights of those who deviate from their narratives. The media exhibit no hesitation in branding the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU, formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)) as an "anti-social" organization. The majority of the **media uses such a defamatory term despite**

it originally being reserved for certain groups identified by the National Police Agency, such as "yakuza and pseudo-yakuza" and "political extortion groups".



The Japanese headquarters of Chosen Souren (General Association of North Korean Residents in Japan) in Chiyoda, Tokyo, Japan. Photo: GcG / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

In addition, organizations like the *Japanese Communist Party* (JCP), "Chosen Souren" (*General Association of North Korean Residents in Japan*), violent extreme left-wing groups, and *Aum Shinrikyo* have been pointed out by the police as "groups to be monitored" under the *Subversive Activities Prevention Act*, whereas the [Family Federation](#) **has not received such a designation**. Nonetheless, the media report on the [Family Federation](#) seemingly assuming that it is an "anti-social group", demonstrating a lack of introspection.

The LDP politician draws attention to the fact that in the groups of lawyers aggressively hounding the [Family Federation](#) and demanding its dissolution, there are individuals who vehemently opposed the "*Subversive Activities Prevention Act*" being applied to *Aum Shinrikyo*. It appears they were **intent on preventing a precedent being established** for applying the Act. Essentially, they **sought to safeguard the Communist Party, which is labeled a "group to be monitored"** under the Act.

Masubuchi emphasizes the huge paradox of resisting applying the Act to *Aum Shinrikyo*, responsible for numerous casualties, while **fanatically insisting on the Family Federation being**

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while **fanatically insisting on the Family Federation being dissolved, even though it has committed no criminal offenses.** The actions of those lawyers **prioritize their own political interests.**



The Central Committee Building of the Japanese Communist Party (JPC) in Shibuya, Tokyo May 2006. Photo: Lombroso / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image.](#) Cropped

Moreover, the **media harshly criticize politicians with ties to the purportedly "anti-social" Family Federation or its affiliates, alleging that such relations endorse their anti-social activities.** Nonetheless, Masubuchi commends those politicians solely for their **unwavering commitment to safeguarding**

Japan from left-leaning tendencies. As secular political experts, Masuchi and fellow politicians cannot endorse the religious beliefs of the [Family Federation](#). This is yet another instance of the left's typical misdirection.

The Tochigi politician writes that members of the [Family Federation](#) place their faith in [Sun Myung Moon](#) as the Messiah of the Second Coming, not in politicians who are ordinary persons. Masubuchi asks rhetorically if there is even one member who contributes to the [Family Federation](#) because some of its gatherings involve LDP politicians.

Furthermore, even if such contributors exist, it is unclear why that would be unlawful. **Those troubled by donations to the Family Federation are according to Masubuchi predominantly leftists.** He claims their **underlying message is, "Do not support anti-communist groups!" Labeling a donor as a "victim" is manipulative.** It is not the consumer, but the *Japanese Communist Party* that suffers.

However, members of the *Liberal Democratic Party* (LDP), possibly wary of media disinformation, consistently feigned not knowing when questioned if they had ties to the [Family Federation](#) and affiliated groups. The politicians are without doubt in a demanding situation as they must secure electoral victories in the next elections.

Nevertheless, on 31st August 2022, to everyone's surprise, even Prime Minister Kishida announced during a press briefing that he, as the head of the governing party, had given instructions to the party's secretary-general to **sever connections to the Family Federation.**

Subsequently, Kishida's large party amended its governance code, articulating a policy of **"completely cutting off connections with FFWPU and its affiliated organisations"**. According to Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno's statement in the Diet, the term "affiliated organisations" encompasses *International Federation for Victory Over Communism* (IFVOC).



Hirokazu Matsuno (松野博一), Chief Cabinet Secretary from Oct. 2021 till Dec. 2023. Photo: 内閣官房内閣広報室 / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int.](#) Cropped

Masubuchi is puzzled by what Prime Minister Kishida may be

contemplating,

“What is Prime Minister Kishida thinking when he decides to **sever ties with those who have fought at the risk of their lives to prevent Japan from leaning left** since before he entered university? Wasn't there peace in society afterward thanks to them?

Has Prime Minister Kishida ever fought for Japan with the same dedication as they have? It is unavoidable to conclude that Prime Minister **Kishida's actions go against the 'essence of conservatism'.**”

During a parliamentary questioning session in 1987, Yasuhiro Nakasone, who was Prime Minister at the time, firmly rebuffed *Communist Party* members' demand to cut ties with *International Federation for Victory Over Communism* (IFVOC), asserting,

“I consider it a **serious violation of freedom of thought and action**. 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.”



Yasuhiro Nakasone (1918-2019), Japanese Prime Minister 1982-1987. Photo: [首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#)

Toshikazu Masubuchi claims,



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida swayed by communist campaign. Here, 16th April 2023. Photo: [首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#)

“If Prime Minister Kishida had responded with such a reasonable argument, there would have been no problem, and the situation of demanding the dissolution of [FFWPU](#) would not have arisen. I **hoped that Prime Minister Kishida, once in office, could transform into a courageous politician like former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe – but it was a miscalculation.**”

Continued in [part 3b](#).

On [part 1](#) in [Bitter Winter](#)

series, [part 2a](#), [part 2b](#), [part 3b](#)

Featured image above: Fumio Kishida (right) with four top leaders of Japanese Communist Party (JCP), from left: Keiji Kokuta, Tomoko Tamura, Akira Koike, Kazuo Shii. Photo (30th March 2023): [首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

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