

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Protests To Impact of Japanese Government's FFWPU Dissolution Order

Knut Holdhus
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Demonstrators in the protest march advocating for freedom of religion - July 27, 2025, Kita Ward, Osaka City



Family Federation backers rally for religious freedom in Osaka decrying the dissolution order that may have a much wider impact and be used against other faiths

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"Dissolution Order for the Family Federation Is Unjust"

1,000 March in Protest in Osaka

by the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

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Pastor Ryuichi Sunagawa, here on May 13, 2025

Approximately 1,000 followers of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) held a protest march in Osaka City on 27th July, calling for the protection of religious freedom. As they marched for about 40 minutes, participants appealed to bystanders along the route, saying,

"Just as you all have things you value, we also have a faith that is important to us!"

The protesters claimed that the dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#) is unjust.

Prior to the march, a rally was held where Pastor Ryuichi Sunagawa (砂川竜一) of Tsukishiro Christian Church (Nanjo City, Okinawa Prefecture) gave a speech. He apologized for the involvement of Christian churches in cases where members of the [Family Federation](#) were allegedly [kidnapped and confined](#) with the aim of [forcing them to renounce their faith](#) (breaking their faith) [See editor's note below]. Regarding the assassination of former

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), he stated,

"The perpetrator is Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), and the [Family Federation](#) has no connection to the crime."

Pastor Sunagawa argued that if the [Family Federation](#), which has committed no criminal acts, is forcibly dissolved, then Christian churches could be next under public scrutiny - and eventually, it could even affect Buddhism and the Soka Gakkai. He insisted that this is why the [Family Federation](#) must not be dissolved.

After the march, Pastor Sunagawa shared his thoughts, saying that being able to participate in the march with a positive spirit, as befits a religious person, gave him energy.

See also [2nd-Gen Believers Challenge Closed Hearings](#)

[Editor's note: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming", forced renunciation of faith) 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.



Demonstrators raising their voices at a rally held prior to the protest march - July 27, 2025, Kita Ward, Osaka

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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Many second-generation believers also took part in the protest march - July 27, 2025, Kita Ward, Osaka

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Scholar Sounds Alarm: State Raiding The Sacred

• July 27, 2025
• Knut Holdhus

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In a special contribution to the South Korean daily the [Segye Ilbo](#) on 22nd July 2025, Professor Kim Min-ji (김민지), President of the *Korean Association for Peace and Religion* and professor at Sun




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Professor Kim Min-ji (김민지), President of the Korean Association for Peace and Religion and professor at Sun Moon University. Photo: Sun Moon University

Kim argues that recent investigations by prosecutors – particularly high-profile raids targeting religious institutions and leaders – risk undermining democratic norms and potentially dragging the nation back into an era of politically motivated scapegoating.

At the heart of Kim’s critique is the assertion that investigations targeting the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*

(formerly known as the *Unification Church*), *Yoido Full Gospel Church*, *Far East Broadcasting Company*, and prominent Christian figures like Kim Jang-hwan (김장환)

[See editor’s note 1 below] and Lee Young-hoon (이영훈 – Senior Pastor of *Yoido Full Gospel Church* since 2008) [See editor’s note 2 below]

reflect an alarming trend. She warns that state power is being exercised in a way that disregards both the symbolic sanctity of religious spaces and the fundamental rights of religious communities. According to Kim Min-ji, these developments may not stem solely from a pursuit of justice but could be influenced by political incentives to demonstrate results or manipulate public sentiment.

A Caution Against Politicized Justice

Kim Min-ji makes it clear that she does not oppose lawful investigations. On the contrary, she affirms that no one – religious institutions included – should be above the law. What she finds troubling, however, is the apparent imbalance in the authorities’ approach: the decision to conduct large-scale, high-visibility raids on religious groups appears to be based more on their symbolic and public value than on clearly substantiated criminal evidence. This, she argues, creates a perception that religion is being unfairly targeted because it lacks the institutional power or media influence that political or business entities often possess.



The **Shincheonji Peace Palace** near the town of Cheongpyeong in Gyeonggi-do. Photo taken 2nd March 2020, at the start of the Corona epidemic, when the Shincheonji Church of Jesus faced intense scrutiny and persecution – rooted more in stigma than purely public health concerns. It happened after a woman, later dubbed “Patient 31”, attended two services in Daegu at Shincheonji’s regional branch. She unknowingly became a **super-spreader**, infecting dozens of worshippers in tightly packed masses. To the left in the picture is a large MBC outside broadcast vehicle. Photo: Jhcbs1019 / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 4.0 Int.](#) Cropped

The comparison to the *Shincheonji Church of Jesus* [See editor’s note 3 below] during the COVID-19 pandemic is particularly poignant. That incident, Kim recalls, demonstrated how quickly public opinion can be swayed into demonizing a minority religious group, resulting in disproportionate legal responses and long-term reputational harm. She views the current situation as a dangerous echo of that precedent, one that could lead to further erosion of civil liberties and deepen divisions in South Korean society.

Preserving the Sanctity of Religion

Professor Kim also emphasizes the broader cultural and spiritual implications of these investigations. Religious sites are not merely physical locations – they are sacred to their communities, often

Moon University, raises urgent concerns about the increasing involvement of special prosecutors in South Korea’s religious sphere. Her article, titled “*The Special Prosecutor’s Overreach Must Not Become a Witch Hunt*”, is both a warning and a call for the preservation of constitutional values, especially the cherished principle of religious freedom.



Logo of the **Far East Broadcasting Company** (FEBC), a Christian media organization that produces and broadcasts evangelical radio programming around the world, with a primary focus on Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Africa and Eastern Europe. FEBC broadcasts in more than 100 languages across over 50 countries, including China, North Korea, Indonesia, Mongolia, Russia, Cambodia, and others. [Public domain image.](#)

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viewed as houses of [God](#) and spaces of reflection, prayer, and fellowship. Raiding such sites without compelling and transparent cause, she argues, not only humiliates individuals but disrespects entire faith communities and the values they represent.

She advocates for investigative restraint, suggesting that written requests, interviews, or voluntary cooperation should be the first course of action when dealing with religious institutions. Only when there is clear and credible evidence of wrongdoing, she maintains, should authorities consider more forceful measures like raids. Even then, those actions must be conducted with sensitivity, upholding the dignity of religious leaders and respecting the role their institutions play in society.

Democracy and the Separation of Powers

The article's deeper message is rooted in the foundational principles of democracy: the rule of law, freedom of conscience, and the separation of church and state. Kim warns that if political power is allowed to infringe upon religious autonomy, even in the name of law enforcement, the country risks slipping into authoritarian patterns.



Martin Emil Marty (1928-2025), highly respected American religious scholar, historian, and Lutheran minister, best known for his work on the history of Christianity and religion in public life in the United States. Photo (2009): Eric Guo / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 2.0 Gen](#). Cropped

She references theologian Martin Marty's insight that religion and politics must serve as mutual checks on one another – remaining in productive tension rather than falling into alignment or opposition.

In doing so, Kim draws attention to the dual dangers of religion being either co-opted by political forces or crushed under them. She acknowledges that religion must not become overly politicized or partisan. At the same time, she stresses that political power must not treat religion as an instrument to be manipulated or as an easy target for public appeasement.

A Plea for Balance and Respect

Ultimately, Professor Kim Min-ji's article is a heartfelt appeal for balance, dignity, and constitutional integrity. While she does not call for impunity or suggest that religious institutions are beyond scrutiny, she insists that investigations must be grounded in fairness, transparency, and restraint. She urges the special prosecutor's office – and by extension, the broader political and legal establishment – to reflect on whether their actions risk repeating the errors of the past, where the law was used not as a tool of justice but as a weapon of persecution.

By framing her argument around the ethical responsibilities of both religion and the state, Kim offers not only a critique of current events but a vision for a healthier democratic society. Her message resonates especially in a time of growing polarization and institutional distrust, reminding us that the strength of a democracy lies not just in its laws, but in how it treats its most vulnerable and symbolic communities.

See also [Raids Blur Line Between Justice and Politics](#)

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Text: Knut Holdhus

Featured image below: Old fire alarm bells in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 2009. Photo: Aubrey Dale / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 2.0 Gen](#)

[Editor's note 1: Kim Jang-hwan serves as the Chairman of the *Far East Broadcasting Company* (FEBC), a major Christian missionary broadcaster in South Korea. He is widely recognized as one of the country's most prominent evangelical leaders, with considerable influence within Protestant media and church networks. On 18th July 2025, special prosecutors conducting an investigation into alleged improper lobbying around the death of Marine corporal Chae carried out searches and seizures at the offices of FEBC, Kim's personal office, and other locations associated with him. Although Kim was not a formal suspect – instead designated a *reference person* – the raid was described as “deeply regrettable,” particularly by church organizations and unions, due to its symbolic intrusion into a religious institution.

His experience supports the central argument of this article's author: that religious leaders – particularly those without strong political or

that religious leaders – particularly those without strong political or corporate protections – are vulnerable to being swept up in high-visibility probes meant more for public effect than impartial justice. The raid on FEBC underlines her concern that investigative actions may be disproportionately directed at religious communities, risking reputational harm and violating core freedoms.]

[Editor's note 2: Lee Young-hoon is a prominent religious figure whose church and personal offices were searched on 18th July 2025, illustrating the writer's broader argument that investigative overreach has gravely affected religious communities. Even though Rev. Lee was not a suspect, the symbolic impact of the raid, he argues, caused reputational damage to both himself and millions of followers – exactly the kind of scenario Professor Kim urges prosecutors to avoid. His experience underscores her concern that religious spaces and leaders can become collateral in politically charged investigations intended for public effect.]

[Editor's note 3: Shincheonji, officially known as *Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony*, is a new religious movement founded in South Korea in 1984 by Lee Man-hee, who claims to be the promised pastor mentioned in the Bible's Book of Revelation. Shincheonji teaches that the Book of Revelation is being fulfilled through its church and that Lee Man-hee has received divine revelation to interpret it.]

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