

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japan To Seize Remains of Dead Unificationists

Knut Holdhus
July 29, 2025



A man visiting Oze Cemetery, where his parents rest - May, Katashina Village, Gunma Prefecture, Japan



8 big cemeteries affected: Members of large religious minority fear they will lose access to the graves of dear family members due to the Japanese authorities' inhuman persecution

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[Breaking News]

"Leave It to the Liquidator"

Agency for Cultural Affairs and the Ministry of Health Respond to [Sekai Nippo](#) Regarding Treatment of [Family Federation](#) Cemeteries, Angering Bereaved Families

Over the Abdication of Responsibility

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

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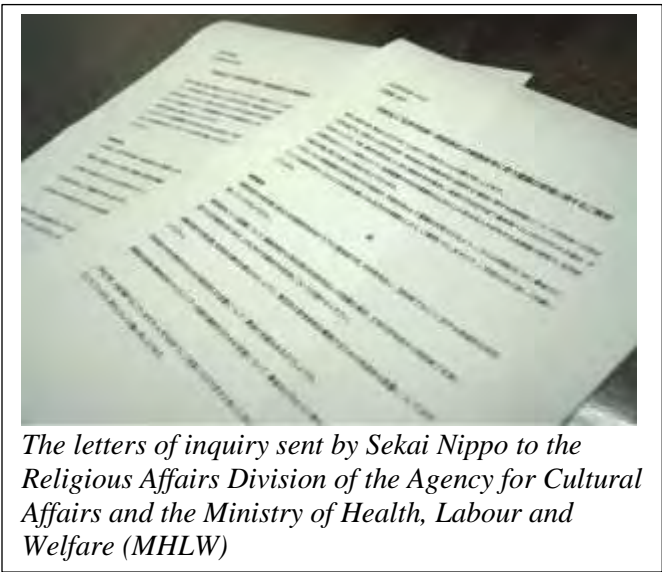
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Recently, Sekai Nippo sent inquiries to the Religious Affairs Division of the Agency for Cultural Affairs and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) regarding the treatment of cemeteries owned by the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), in the event that the [religious organization](#) is officially dissolved. While responses were received, both agencies merely stated that "matters related to liquidation will be decided by the liquidator," offering no concrete policy. Their stance of completely shifting responsibility to the liquidator has fueled growing anger and anxiety among bereaved families of members.

While the Tokyo High Court is currently reviewing an [appeal](#) regarding the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (MEXT) [order to dissolve](#) the [Family Federation](#), once the

court finalizes the dissolution, liquidation procedures will commence.



The [religious organization](#) manages eight cemeteries nationwide. Sekai Nippo recently submitted a letter of inquiry to the Religious Affairs Division of the Agency for Cultural Affairs with questions regarding what would happen to these cemeteries if the [Family Federation](#) is dissolved. Among the five questions asked were:

In the event of delayed liquidation, how would authorities handle problems arising from a lack of management or termination of land use contracts by landowners?

What measures would be taken to protect the rights of cemetery users even if liquidation stalls?

Would there be support such as setting up consultation desks to ease the concerns of cemetery users?

Similarly, a five-question letter was sent to the MHLW, asking questions such as:

Who will be responsible for managing cemeteries owned by the [religious organization](#) post-dissolution?

Will there be any legal guarantees allowing cemetery users to continue using the plots safely?

Though both ministries responded by the deadline, they did not address each question directly. Both only cited the Religious Corporations Act, stating that "matters related to liquidation are to be decided by the liquidator," effectively deflecting responsibility. There appears to be virtually no plan in place for the handling of cemeteries after dissolution.



International attorney Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹) commented on the ministries' responses, saying,

"There is no legal precedent, and the relevant statutes are vague, so the ministries likely can't provide anything more concrete."

He also expressed concern that after the dissolution, since religious activities would be prohibited, even honoring one's ancestors could be deemed a "religious act", depending on the liquidator's interpretation.

Building on that, regarding the [dissolution order](#) issued by the Tokyo District Court in March, Nakayama emphasized:



The "Central Japan Cemetery" spreads across a mountain area in Suzuka City, Mie Prefecture, Japan

"The believers' human rights were dismissed as being merely 'reflexive interests' [See editor's note below], but the concerns surrounding the cemetery issue come with no guarantees whatsoever, and it

would be hard to say that they are merely 'reflexive interests'."

Representatives from cemeteries affiliated with the religious organization also expressed strong criticism of the ministries' response.

Jiro Nakabayashi (中林次郎 - 60), secretary-general of the bereaved families' association at the "Central Japan Memorial Park" in Suzuka City, Mie Prefecture - where [Family Federation](#) believers are buried - said,

"Neither the government nor the ministries have given any thought to what happens after the dissolution. That's why all they say is 'leave it to the liquidator.' It's infuriating how they completely ignore the believers' circumstances, their lives, and their emotional needs."

He added,

"It's incredibly distressing that they won't even clearly say, 'The cemetery will be fine even after dissolution.' If the government is going to request a dissolution, they need to clearly define how each matter will be handled afterward."



Oze Cemetery, owned by the [Family Federation](#), in Katashina Village, Gunma Prefecture, Japan

A representative of the "Oze Cemetery" in Katashina Village, Gunma Prefecture, which is owned by the [Family Federation](#), said,

"These ministries are the ones who should understand this issue the most, yet their answers are irresponsibly vague. I want them to engage with this issue sincerely once again."

Among bereaved family members, voices of concern are growing, such as:

"Even if the [religious organization](#) is dissolved, I hope the cemeteries can remain as they are."

"Will we no longer be able to hold memorial services like we used to?"

According to the [Family Federation](#) headquarters, as of 20th June, a total of 428 petitions were submitted to the Tokyo High Court by believers and bereaved family members requesting that the [dissolution order](#) be rescinded, citing harm they would suffer if it proceeds. As of 18th July, over 110 additional petitions had been received and are expected to be submitted in due course.

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[Editor's note: "Reflexive Interest" (反射的利益 - hanshateki rieki) is a legal term implying that the rights are indirect, incidental, or not legally protected in a direct sense. In Japanese legal theory, "reflexive Interest" refers to a benefit that a person receives indirectly as a byproduct of laws or administrative actions, but which is not protected as a legally enforceable right.

Imagine the government builds a public park near your house. You benefit from it: nicer scenery, maybe property value goes up. But you can't demand the government keep the park or sue them if they decide to turn it into a parking lot. Your benefit was a "reflexive Interest" - incidental and unprotected.

Contrast that with a legally protected right - like your ownership of your house. That's enforceable in court.

The Tokyo District Court, when issuing a dissolution order, said that the believers' rights - their religious practices or access to certain services - were "reflexive interests". That is, they were not directly protected and therefore didn't weigh heavily in the decision to dissolve the [organization](#).

The [Family Federation](#), however, argues that in cases like cemetery issues, the emotional and practical consequences (e.g., burial rights, memorial access) are so serious and lacking in guarantees that they cannot just be dismissed as reflexive interests.

Labeling something as "reflexive Interests" is a legal strategy. It downplays the weight of someone's concerns. It removes legal standing (you can't sue over it). And it allows the government or courts to act more freely.]

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Protesters Warn Of Wider Impact Of Dissolution

• July 28, 2025
• Knut Holdhus



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

Tokyo, 28th July 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

“Dissolution Order for the Family Federation Is Unjust”



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Location of Osaka, on the main island of Honshu. Illustration: Maximilian Dörrbecker (Chumhwa) / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp

1,000 March in Protest in Osaka

by the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

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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,



Pastor Ryuichi Sunagawa, here on 13th May 2025. Photo: Yuya Kawase (川瀬裕也)

“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](#)

Featured image above: Demonstrators in the protest march advocating for freedom of religion – 27th July 2025, Kita Ward, Osaka City. Photo: Rei Miyazawa (宮沢玲衣)

[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. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp. Cropped

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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 – 27th July 2025, Kita Ward, Osaka. Photo: Rei Miyazawa (宮沢 玲衣)

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 – 27th July 2025, Kita Ward, Osaka. Photo: Rei Miyazawa (宮沢 玲衣)

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