

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's Provisional Seizure of Family Federation Land

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Tokyo headquarters of the [Family Federation](#) of Japan



Family Federation denounces provisional seizure of land as unfair as Tokyo District Court approves request from hostile lawyers' network

Tokyo, 31st July 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

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Sign at the entrance of the headquarters of the [Family Federation](#) of Japan in Shibuya, Tokyo

Based on a request from former followers, the Tokyo District Court has issued a decision approving a provisional seizure (temporary court freeze) of the land in Shibuya Ward, Tokyo, where the headquarters of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) is located.

In response, the [religious organization](#)'s Public Relations and External Affairs Office commented on the official X account (formerly Twitter) on 30th July, stating:

"An entirely unnecessary and wasteful procedure has been carried out. There are absolutely no plans to dispose of the land in

question."

The National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales announced on 30th July that ten former followers currently undergoing civil mediation with the [religious organization](#) filed the request in June of this year. On 18th July, the Tokyo District Court approved the provisional seizure of the [Family Federation](#) headquarters' land.

This marks the first application of a special law enacted in December 2023 [See editor's note 1 below].

While the [religious organization](#) can continue operating from its headquarters as before, in principle, it will no longer be able to sell or transfer the land.



The official X account also posted:

"This one-sided (unilateral) [See editor's note 2 below] provisional seizure is contrary to good faith, dishonest, and deeply regrettable."

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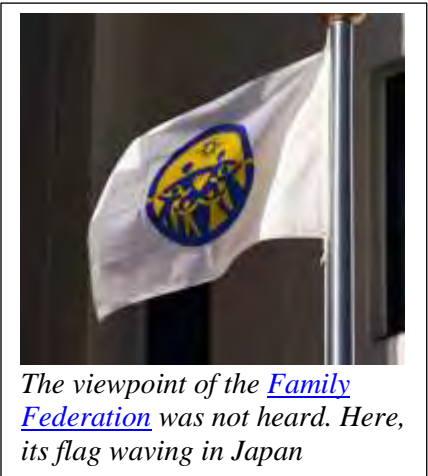
[Editor's note 1: The "special law enacted in December 2023" refers to a legal change that significantly increased government oversight of religious organizations like the former [Unification Church](#) (now the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)). Key features include:

Religious organizations are required to report their assets - including real estate holdings - to the government at least once every three months.

The religious organizations must notify the government in advance before selling or transferring real estate.

The law provides assistance to former members seeking compensation for "damages" caused by donation practices.

Authorities can order a religious organization to halt certain activities; failure to comply may result in fines (up to ¥1 million) or imprisonment (up to 1 year).



The Tokyo District Court's decision on 18th July 2025 to approve a provisional seizure of the [Family Federation](#)'s Tokyo headquarters land was the first time this law was applied in practice. While the [religious organization](#) can continue to operate from the site, the law effectively prevents any sale or transfer of the land, since that would trigger the legal requirements or violate the new restrictions.

This law is often referred to in reports as the special or "asset-tracking" law and was enacted on 13th December 2023. Its application in July 2025 sets a legal precedent by allowing the court to temporarily freeze the [Family Federation](#)'s property under these provisions.]

[Editor's note 2: "One-sided" here means the [Family Federation](#) sees the court's decision as favoring the plaintiffs and ignoring the [religious organization](#)'s side of the story. The statement that the provisional seizure is "one-sided" means that the [Family Federation](#) believes the seizure was done without fair consultation, without their agreement or input, and solely at the request of the opposing party, the former followers. In other words, the [religious organization](#) feels the process was unfair or lacked due consideration of their position. They were not properly heard or involved before the court made the decision. The court granted the seizure based only on the claims of the former members.

In legal terms, a provisional seizure (仮差し押さえ) is often granted by a court before a full trial, usually based on a request from one party. It temporarily freezes property (like land or assets) to prevent it from being sold or transferred while a legal dispute is ongoing.

Even though the [Family Federation](#) denounces the court's decision as biased or unjust, in practice, and as spelt out in the law of December 2023 [See above editor's note 1], Japanese courts can grant provisional seizures without prior notice to the opposing party, precisely to prevent asset transfers.]

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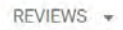
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Corsico – Soka Gakkai Italian Buddhist Institute, the Italian branch of the Soka Gakkai International Nichiren Buddhist organisation. Photo (2015): Andra Albini. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp. Cropped

Bitter Winter, the leading international online magazine for human rights and religious freedom, reported the case on 25th July in an article headlined “[Italian Anti-Cult Association Sentenced to Pay Euro 35,000 for Defaming Soka Gakkai](#)”. The article was written by Dr. Massimo Introvigne, Italian sociologist of religion and editor-in-chief of *Bitter Winter*.

As he writes, the court ruled on 16th June 2025, that the Italian Association of Cult Victims (AIVS), a leading anti-cult organization, and its two key figures, must pay €35,247 in damages for defaming the Italian branch of Soka Gakkai. This ruling is not just a legal resolution of a specific conflict; it is a **meaningful precedent for all minority religious groups facing discrimination under the guise of “cult-busting.”**

At the heart of this case lies a profound and often overlooked issue: **the power of language to marginalize, stigmatize, and criminalize peaceful belief systems.** The court specifically found that the **repeated use of the term seta – the Italian equivalent of “cult,” with strong pejorative implications – to describe Soka Gakkai was not only inappropriate but inherently defamatory.**



From the opening of the judicial year 1st May 2021 at the European Court of Human Rights. Photo: Echr-pop / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped

This follows the 2022 *European Court of Human Rights* decision in *Tonchev v. Bulgaria*, which determined that similar terminology carries a defamatory weight incompatible with the protection of religious rights under the *European Convention on Human Rights*.

The implications of this are profound. It challenges the deeply ingrained practices of anti-cult organizations across Europe that frequently weaponize emotionally charged language to delegitimize religious minorities. It also signals that courts are increasingly willing to recognize that **such rhetoric is not simply free speech but harmful defamation when it undermines public trust and sows prejudice against legitimate religious organizations.**

The ruling also exposes the fragility of the factual claims made by AIVS. Among their most inflammatory accusations was the claim that Soka Gakkai secured its *Intesa* – a formal agreement with the Italian government granting legal recognition and access to public funds – through bribery involving former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. The court found this allegation to be not only baseless but factually impossible, as the legislative process began before Renzi’s premiership and was supported across political lines, including by those hostile to his administration. This kind of unfounded claim is emblematic of the tactics used by some anti-cult actors who rely on innuendo and conspiracy rather than verifiable facts.



Matteo Renzi, Prime Minister of Italy 2014-2016. Photo: Maryb60 / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp. Cropped

In addition, AIVS accused Soka Gakkai of financial opacity, particularly in how it used state-allocated funds from taxpayer designations. Here, too, the court found the claims entirely false, noting that Soka Gakkai’s financial reports are exemplary, even when compared to other religious groups with similar arrangements. Such transparency undermines any rational basis for AIVS’s allegations and highlights the

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destructive intent behind their campaign.



Gohonzon of Nichiren, the hanging calligraphic paper mandala worshipped by Nichiren Buddhists. Here, the Rinmetsu Doji Gohonzon (臨滅度時本尊; "Entering the Wheel of Nirvana scroll"). Claimed to be the Gohonzon that was with Nichiren at his bedside when he died. Stored at Myohonji (妙本寺) temple, Kamakura, Japan. Myohonji is affiliated with the Nichiren Shu branch of Nichiren Buddhism. Author: Nichiren (122-1282). Photo: Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain](#) image

Perhaps most troubling was AIVS's dissemination of explicitly offensive material, including a YouTube video advocating the burning of the Gohonzon [See [editor's note below](#)], Soka Gakkai's central object of devotion, on the grounds that it "brings bad luck". This crosses any reasonable line of criticism or religious commentary and enters the realm of religious hatred and incitement. That such actions were committed in public spaces underscores the importance of legal recourse for minority faiths under threat.

The Florence court's decision should be applauded as a defense of pluralism, dignity, and coexistence. In a time when religious minorities remain vulnerable to social and legal exclusion, this case affirms that they too are entitled to legal protections against defamation, slander, and hate. For Soka Gakkai – and by extension, all communities seeking recognition without persecution – this ruling is more than compensation; it is validation. And for Europe, it is a step closer to upholding its ideals of freedom, tolerance, and justice.

for all.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Dr. Massimo Introvigne, here speaking in Geneva, Switzerland on 16th June 2025. Photo: Edited screenshot from video recording by UPF.

[Editor's note: The Gohonzon embodies the fundamental law of the universe – Nam-myoho-enge-kyo – and symbolizes the innate Buddha nature present in all people. Practitioners chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo and recite sections of the Lotus Sutra while facing the Gohonzon, believing that this practice awakens their inherent enlightenment and empowers them to confront and transform life's difficulties.]

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