

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: New York Conference Slams Tokyo Court's Dissolution Ruling

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Shunsuke Uotani, Secretary-General of UPF Japan (second from left), speaks at an international conference on religious freedom, held at a hotel in New York City on August 2, 2025. Photo: Yosuke Yamazaki



Tokyo 2025 dissolution order against Family Federation criticized at international conference in New York on freedom of religion globally

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Closed-Door Hearings and Ambiguous Legal Basis Criticized

International Religious Freedom Conference in New York Raises Concerns over the Dissolution Order Against the Family Federation

by Yosuke Yamazaki (山崎洋介)



Shunsuke Uotani addressing the conference in The New Yorker Hotel August 2, 2025

On August, 2 the second day of an international conference on religious freedom hosted by the HJ International Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership (formerly the Unification Theological Seminary), scholars, human rights advocates, and journalists gathered at a hotel in New York City to exchange views. The conference also addressed the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), which was [ordered to disband](#) by the Tokyo District Court in March.

The theme of the conference was "Addressing the Root Causes of Temporary Threats to Religious Freedom". In the session focusing on the Family Federation, Shunsuke Uotani (魚谷俊輔), Secretary-General of UPF Japan - a group affiliated with the [Federation](#) - remarked that since the Aum Shinrikyo incident in the 1990s, scholars who previously gave favorable evaluations of the [Federation](#) came under fire, leading to a lack of academic research on the [Family Federation](#) from a neutral standpoint. He emphasized:

"The trauma caused by the Aum incident on the study of new religions in Japan is extremely severe and, one could say, has not yet healed."

Hirohisa Koide (小出浩久), a physician and [Family Federation](#) believer, testified about being confined by his parents and relatives, and pressured to renounce his faith by deprogrammers and Christian pastors. He described how he feigned renunciation to escape but said:



*Dr. Hirohisa Koide, here speaking 16th June 2025 in Geneva*

"That was the beginning of deep suffering."

He claimed he was then coerced for about a year into speaking against the [religious organization](#) in the media and was forced to sign legal documents suing the [Family Federation](#).

Participating online, international human rights lawyer Patricia Duval criticized the Tokyo District Court's [ruling](#), which deemed the [religious organization](#)'s recruitment and fundraising practices harmful to "public welfare" based on vague concepts like "social appropriateness." She also raised concerns about the closed nature of the proceedings, suggesting that it could lead to fabricated testimony and a lack of procedural transparency.

In another session examining the historical and social background of threats to religious freedom, Massimo Introvigne, an Italian sociologist of religion, argued that there are five models of anti-cult movements: the "U.S. model," "China model," "Russia model," "France model," and "Japan - Korea model." Regarding Japan and Korea, he pointed out:



*Dr. Massimo Introvigne addressing the conference in The New Yorker Hotel August 2, 2025*

"Strangely, leftists such as socialists and communists are cooperating with Protestants, who are supposed to be theoretically anti-communist."

The conference will continue until 3rd August. Discussions will include the role of governments and international organizations, with participants such as Jan Figel, former Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and the EU's first Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, and Richard Swett, former U.S. Ambassador to Denmark.

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Facsimile of headline on page 274 of Monthly Hanada's September 2025 issue. In English, the headline reads: The Former Unification Church – the Irregularities of the Dissolution Order. The text below the headlines gives the names of the writers and a photographer.



Also denouncing the **dissolution order** issued by Tokyo District Court: a young member of the **Family Federation** at a rally outside the court 30th July 2025. Photo: **FFWPU**

Speaking with legal scholar Seishiro Sugihara, professor at the former Musashino Women's University, Fukumoto makes the case that the **ruling** is not only procedurally and legally unsound but signals a dangerous erosion of the principles of evidence-based justice and the rule of law in Japan.

At the heart of Fukumoto's argument is a clear and forceful claim: **the court's decision rests not on verified facts or lawful findings, but on speculation, presumption, and selective interpretation of evidence.** This, he argues, renders the **judgment** not merely flawed, but an affront to the basic tenets of legal fairness.

Speculation in Place of Proof

Fukumoto's primary concern is that the court **abandoned its obligation to base judgments on concrete evidence.** Even if one accepts, as Sugihara does, that civil torts (unlawful acts according to civil law) could potentially justify a religious corporation's dissolution under Japanese law, the question remains: Did the alleged conduct of the **Family Federation** meet those legal requirements? According to Fukumoto, the answer is clearly no.

He notes that in response to the allegations brought by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the **Family Federation** submitted detailed rebuttals and evidence – including contradictions in witness statements and documentation that allegedly exposed errors and fabrications in the Ministry's report. These responses, he claims, were strong enough to cast significant doubt on the reliability of the Ministry's case.



Also protesting the **dissolution order**: A rally at the Hibiya Park Open-Air Concert Hall in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo on 30th July 2025. Photo: **FFWPU**

Yet, rather than engage with this counterevidence, the *Tokyo District Court* effectively side-stepped it, declining to rely on the very witness testimony it should have evaluated most rigorously. Fukumoto interprets this as a deliberate move to **avoid dealing with the weaknesses in the state's case**: if the witnesses were discredited, the **foundation for the allegations would collapse.** By ignoring them, the court avoided this confrontation entirely.

The Dangerous Use of Settlements as “Proof”

What **particularly shocks Fukumoto** is the court's reliance on settlement records – both in-court and out-of-court – as a surrogate for proof of harm or unlawful conduct. In his view, this is a **gross distortion of legal logic.** Settlements, by their nature, **do not establish fault or liability;** they are compromises made to avoid lengthy legal battles and often do not reflect admissions of wrongdoing by either party.

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Also denouncing the [dissolution order](#): A group of young protesters at a demonstration in front of the Diet, the national parliament of Japan, on 4th May 2025. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Nevertheless, the court treated the mere existence of settlements – and especially the **monetary sums involved** – as de facto evidence of harm. This, Fukumoto argues, is an extraordinary and dangerous leap of reasoning. If such a standard were applied broadly, **any organization that settles disputes could be retroactively branded as engaging in unlawful behavior** – a clear perversion of justice.

#### A “Death Sentence” Without a Trial

The culmination of this critique is Fukumoto’s argument that the [dissolution order](#) is tantamount to a “legal death sentence” for the [religious organization](#). Such an extreme action, he argues, demands the highest standards of evidentiary scrutiny – far beyond what the court exhibited. Indeed, he notes that even in routine civil lawsuits, a judge cannot simply issue a ruling based on the plaintiff’s complaint alone. That the court would do so in a case with such profound implications is, in the words of Fukumoto, “**absurd**” and “**reckless**”.

#### Conclusion: A Threat to Legal Norms

Fukumoto’s analysis warns that if this [ruling](#) sets a precedent, the consequences could be dire – not just for religious organizations, but for **any group facing politically or socially motivated scrutiny**. His concern is not narrowly about the [Family Federation](#), but about the **erosion of legal standards and due process** in Japan. Ultimately, he suggests, if speculation is allowed to stand in for evidence, **the rule of law itself is imperiled**.

*Text: Knut Holdhus, editor, written based on an English translation of the original Japanese text.*

**Featured image** above: The front cover page of the September 2025 issue of Monthly Hanada, beside Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto (screenshot) and Professor Emeritus Seishiro Sugihara (Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)).

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