

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Experts Flag Flawed Case - Japanese Media Silent

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Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama (center), the lead representative of the organizers, speaks at the press conference. On the right is Pastor Haruhisa Nakagawa of the Christian Church of the Lord's Sheep; on the left is nonfiction writer Masumi Fukuda. Photographed on the afternoon of August 6, 2025 in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, Japan



Even though experts challenge dissolution order pointing out obvious holes in the authorities' flawed case, the mainstream media stays silent, possibly fearing state reaction

Tokyo, 8th August 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

"Public Calls for Dissolution Are Based on Emotional Arguments"

Experts Respond to the Dissolution Order for the Family Federation, Holding a Press Conference That "Silenced" the Media

by the religious freedom desk of [Sekai Nippo](#)

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"The seven of us are not believers."

This was the position of the Association of Experts Seeking a Fair and Impartial Trial, whose members - including international lawyer Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹), professor of the former Musashino Women's University Seishiro Sugihara (杉原誠四郎), and nonfiction author Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ) - held a press conference on 6th August questioning the fairness of the legal process leading to the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification \(FFWPU\)](#), formerly the [Unification Church](#)).

The Tokyo venue drew reporters from 11 media outlets including NHK, Mainichi Shimbun, Nippon TV, and Kyodo News. However, when the Q and A began, only Seiron magazine and this newspaper raised questions. What did these experts - who seemed to have "silenced" the rest of the media - have to say?



International Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama



Masaki Nakamasa, political scientist and professor at Kanazawa University



Masumi Fukuda, here Jan. 20, 2024



Dr. Seishiro Sugihara

Nakayama, the lead organizer and legal counsel for the [religious organization](#), pointed out:

"(The Tokyo District Court) claimed that 'harm at an intolerable level' continued even after the [religious organization](#)'s 2009 compliance declaration [See editor's note 1 below]. But it gave no definition or standard for what 'intolerable level' means."

He urged the media to report that over 300 neutral international experts have voiced "grief and anger" over the matter.

Masaki Nakamasa (仲正昌樹), professor at Kanazawa University and a former member, noted a wide gap between the [religious organization](#)'s actual practices and its public image, citing specific examples:

"It's said that the [Unification Church](#) threatens people with 'You'll go to hell' to get donations. But that doctrine doesn't exist, and I was never told such a thing."

He also dismissed "[mind control](#)" outright,

"It's fiction. If such a technique really existed, people would use it to get ahead in society."

Fukuda recalled that when she began reporting on the [religious organization](#) after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三),

"I felt that 'anti-cult' forces and the media had teamed up to produce grossly biased coverage."

She stressed that testimonies from former believers who left after [abduction and confinement](#) for forcible [faith-breaking](#) [See editor's note 2 below] were being spotlighted exclusively:

"Public opinion in favor of dissolution is being built entirely on emotional arguments, without showing the reality of the [religious organization](#)."

What she fears most is that even the government and judiciary side with public sentiment. She lamented,

"This is the collapse of democracy."

Sugihara criticized the reliance on past court cases as grounds for dissolution:

"If you can dig back as far as you like, then any religious group could qualify for dissolution."

From within the religious community, concerns also emerged. Pastor Haruhisa Nakagawa (中川晴久) of the Christian Church of the Lord's Sheep (Yokohama), who supports religious believers victimized by abduction and confinement, stated:

"Research shows that nearly 300 Christian pastors were involved in abduction and confinement. This is truly shameful. On behalf of the Christian Church, I want to apologize to those victimized."

Reverend Shindo Mizuta (水田真道), head priest of Kongoji Temple (Myoshinji branch of the Rinzai Buddhist sect, Numazu City, Shizuoka), said he initially supported dissolution. However,

after meeting with members of the [religious organization](#) at his temple, he came to see dissolution as a threat to religious freedom. Addressing fellow clergy, he appealed:



"Put aside preconceptions and things we cling on to and look with clear, unclouded eyes. For us religious leaders, this is not someone else's problem."

Islamic commentator Humayun A. Mughal spoke of the pain religious people feel when their [place of worship is taken away](#):

"In Japan, religion is a matter of one's own conscience. I ask judges to follow their conscience when delivering a verdict."

Former House of Councillors member Satoshi Hamada (浜田聡) also sent a video message:

"In the ordinary Diet session, I [pointed out](#) the possibility that the Ministry of Education's court documents may have been [fabricated](#). There was no denial of [fabrication](#) in the government's reply. I hope the ministry will respond sincerely."

In its statement, the association emphasized that they are not expressing agreement with or understanding of the doctrines or activities of the [religious organization](#). Instead, they outlined three concerns about the Tokyo District Court's 25th March [dissolution order](#):



1. Using past civil cases - where donation activity began an average of over 30 years ago - as grounds for dissolution.

2. Recognizing "continuity of harm" based only on abstract evidence like settlements, despite there being zero illegal donations in the past 11 years.

3. Ignoring suspicions of alteration or [fabrication](#) in government-submitted evidence.

They are calling on the Tokyo High Court for a [fair and impartial trial](#).

However, the press conference questioning the [dissolution order](#) seems to have been met by the mainstream media with the "freedom not to report". A heavy atmosphere of suppressing dissent hangs over the discourse, and the call for "[fairness and impartiality](#)" is something the media itself should also heed.

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[Editor's note 1: The 2009 compliance declaration of the [Unification Church](#) of Japan (now the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)) was a formal commitment by the [organization](#) to reform its practices in response to longstanding public criticism and legal challenges.

The [Unification Church](#) in Japan had faced numerous allegations related to recruitment tactics and donation solicitation, termed "spiritual sales" (靈感商法) by a hostile network of activist lawyers who had declared the [religious organization](#) an enemy. These issues led to multiple lawsuits orchestrated by the activist lawyers and significant media backlash. This prompted the [organization](#) to take measures to restore its reputation and demonstrate compliance with legal and ethical standards.

The [religious organization](#) pledged to stop possibly unethical donation practices, including what the hostile network of lawyers claimed amounted to "pressuring members into making large financial contributions under spiritual pretexts."

This was in response to accusations from the same activist lawyers that followers "were being manipulated into giving away substantial amounts of money or property."

The [Unification Church](#) stated it would enhance internal oversight to ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards. Measures included better training for leaders and stricter guidelines for evangelization and solicitation of donations.

After this compliance declaration, there was a significant decrease in the number of lawsuits against the [Unification Church](#) - since 2015 called the [Family Federation](#). The [religious organization](#) has used this as evidence that it has improved its practices and should not be subject to [dissolution](#).]

[Editor's note 2: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") 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.

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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media outlets – TV Chosun, Shin-A Ilbo, News1, Maeil Ilbo, Daehan Ilbo, Segye Ilbo, Namdo Ilbo – each offering unique insight into the motivations, messages, and aspirations of the event. Together, they paint a picture of religious leaders who are not only committed to protecting the sanctity of faith, but also invested in the spiritual, cultural, and moral well-being of humanity.



The TV Chosun logo. [Public domain image](#)

Reporter Kim Gwan of TV Chosun wrote an overview of the conference, with an emphasis on the diversity of religious representation and the inclusive vision behind the gathering. The article notes that the conference included

leaders from Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Orthodox Christianity, reinforcing its interreligious and cooperative character.

The TV Chosun report details the sequence of events, beginning with Archbishop George Stallings' opening prayer and including keynote addresses from figures like Dr. Ahn Shin, President of the *Korean Association for the Study of Religion*, and Rev. Ki-hoon Kim, Chair of *World Clergy Leadership Conference* (WCLC). Taj Hamad's opening address echoes the theme of unity, urging all religious leaders to act with "one heart and one voice".



George Augustus Stallings Jr., Founder and Archbishop of Imani Temple. Photo: Screenshot from video by [Segye Ilbo](#)

Notably, the article reports that the conference will continue twice monthly until December, with the goal of facilitating ongoing dialogue around religious freedom and universal ethics. This sustained commitment to dialogue reflects the understanding that peacebuilding and moral leadership are not one-time efforts but require continual engagement and renewal.



The logo of the Shin-A Ilbo

Shin-A Ilbo's reporter Jeong Won-young focuses on the collective declaration issued during the *Press Conference of World Religious Leaders*, offering

a detailed look at the language and intentions behind this important document. The declaration identifies three foundational principles:

1. Absolute guarantee of religious freedom
2. Spiritual solidarity beyond specific doctrines
3. Commitment to universal values such as truth, love, justice, and peace

These principles reflect the religious leaders' shared belief that faith-based values are integral to social harmony and human dignity. The declaration also directly critiques global trends of repression, stating that law must not "become a tool that infringes on human spiritual freedom."



Dr. Ahn Shin, President of the *Korean Association for the Study of Religion*. Screenshot from video by [Segye Ilbo](#)

The *Shin-A Ilbo* report adds philosophical depth by quoting Dr. Ahn Shin's analysis of religious discrimination. He identifies ignorance, intentional bias, and systemic misunderstandings as root causes, and calls for religion to serve as a space for "personal dialogue" and a foundation of civil society where differences are respected rather than condemned.

In a comprehensive report by Lee Bok-jin in [Segye Ilbo](#), the conference is framed as a profound response to global challenges surrounding

religious discrimination and moral erosion. According to the article, the event served as a call to action for religious leaders to reclaim their rightful roles as moral compasses in a world increasingly at odds with truth and conscience.



The logo of the Segye Ilbo

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Taj Hamad, World President of the *Universal Peace Federation* (UPF), lamented the silencing of religious voices and the marginalization of spiritual values. He warned that when “religion is silenced, the conscience of society is silenced,” highlighting a deeper concern that societal ethics deteriorate when spiritual freedoms are ignored. The report also captures Hamad’s assertion that religious leaders must unite around truth, conscience, and spirituality, transcending doctrinal differences to uphold shared human values.



Taj Hamad, World President of Universal Peace Federation (UPF). Screenshot from video by [Segye Ilbo](#)

The [Segye Ilbo](#) article strongly supports the idea that religious freedom is not merely a legal issue but a foundational pillar of civilization. The piece underscores that suppression of spiritual expression threatens the moral and cultural identity of communities worldwide, emphasizing that law should serve peace and coexistence – not be wielded as an instrument of control.

남도일보

The logo of the Namdo Ilbo

Namdo Ilbo highlights the emotional and spiritual dimension of the conference. In addition to listing major speakers and dignitaries, reporter Yoon

Tae-min in his article gives weight to the personal testimonies shared by participants, particularly Archbishop Sulanch Lewis, Co-Chair of the *American Clergy Leadership Conference* (Aclc) Women’s Division. Her declaration that “God will wipe away every tear, and where there is love, there is no fear,” encapsulates the core spiritual aspiration of the conference: to build a world free from fear and hatred.

Yoon Tae-min’s article also emphasizes the broader context – that religious freedom is not just a theological concern but a prerequisite for the flourishing of human society. The report commends the conference’s intent to create a global forum of dialogue, noting that over 4,000 religious leaders are expected to participate in the ongoing monthly sessions through the end of the year.

A Unified Moral Vision in a Fragmented World



Some of the participants at the World Religious Leaders Conference in Seoul 5th to 8th August 2025. Screenshot from video by [Segye Ilbo](#)

The different reports construct a powerful narrative: the *2025 World Religious Leaders Conference* is not a symbolic gesture but a coordinated, values-driven movement that affirms the centrality of religion in addressing global crises. In an era marked by rising extremism, political polarization, and cultural fragmentation, the event’s participants urged societies to return to foundational values rooted in faith, human dignity, and spiritual freedom.

A conference of this scale inevitably raises numerous issues, and while each media outlet may present its own perspective, a consistent message emerges: religious freedom is not optional – it is essential. It is not a luxury, but a necessity.

Moreover, according to several media reports, this conference champions the idea that peace is not simply the absence of conflict, but the active presence of conscience, cooperation, and shared spiritual heritage. The fact that such a diverse group of leaders was willing to commit not only to statements but to ongoing dialogue through the end of 2025 speaks volumes about the seriousness of their mission.

In conclusion, the *2025 World Religious Leaders Conference* in Seoul marks a hopeful and constructive turning point – one where dialogue replaces division, and where the sacred is not confined by boundaries, but shared as humanity’s collective inheritance.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor, written based on English translation of South Korean media reports.

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