

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Family Federation in Uneme Festival despite government ban

Knut Holdhus
August 29, 2025



Members of the Kōriyama Family Church participating in the Uneme Festival, August 9, 2025, Kōriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture, Japan



Festival organizers welcome Family Federation entry as 40 members take part in Fukushima dance parade for first time, promoting "The Family Is a School of Love"

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Mixed Reactions Amid Dissolution Request

Family Federation Participates in Festival in Kōriyama, Fukushima

by Yasuhiko Nagano (長野 康彦) from the Fukushima Bureau of [Sekai Nippo](#)



Members of the Kōriyama Family Church participating in the Uneme Festival, August 9, 2025, Kōriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture, Japan

In early August, the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU, formerly the [Unification Church](#)) took part for the first time in the long-running "Uneme Festival" in Kōriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture, now in its 61st year. Their participation drew attention since it came while court proceedings were underway regarding the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's request for a dissolution order against the [organization](#).

The festival's main event, the Odori Nagashi (dance parade),

featured about 4,300 participants over two days, with 72 groups representing local citizens, organizations, and companies. On August 9, the [Family Federation](#)'s Kōriyama Family Church joined with 40 members, carrying placards and a banner reading "[The Family is a School of Love](#)," while performing an original dance.

The Uneme Festival Executive Committee - organized by the Kōriyama Chamber of Commerce and Industry - approved the group's application, reasoning that:

A final court decision on the [dissolution order](#) had not yet been reached.

The [religious organization](#) had not been designated as an antisocial force.

Therefore, the committee judged there was "no reason to refuse participation".



Members of the Kōriyama Family Church participating in the Uneme Festival, August 9, 2025, Kōriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture, Japan

Speaking to this paper, Junya Hirokawa (廣川淳也), Director of Education for the Kōriyama Family Church, explained:

"We participated out of a desire to show our church as it really is and to help liven up Kōriyama. There were no complaints. The only opposition came from a single post on X by attorney Masaki Kito (紀藤正樹)."

Attorney Masaki Kito, known as a leading critic of the [Family Federation](#), posted on his X account (formerly Twitter) on 22nd August:

"The 'Kōriyama Family Church' participated in Kōriyama's Uneme Festival parade. In Kagoshima, participation in the Ohara Festival was denied, but the [Unification Church](#) promoted itself under the alternative name 'Association to Protect Freedom of Religion,' using slogans like '[The Family Is a School of Love](#).' I am concerned about future harms."

In response, Hirokawa said:

"We clearly participated under the name 'Kōriyama Family Church.' There is no way that promoting '[The Family is a School of Love](#)' could cause harm. We are grateful for the executive committee's handling of the matter."

Regarding the dissolution request against the [religious organization](#), responses have varied across regions. In October of last year, the executive committee of a city-run festival in Kagoshima rejected the [organization](#)'s participation. In contrast, Toyama Prefecture in July [granted them use](#) of a prefecture-managed park for a worship service. In March, the Tokyo District Court [ordered the dissolution](#) of the [religious organization](#), which filed an [immediate appeal](#) with the Tokyo High Court.

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Disappointing Overturned Defamation Decision

• August 28, 2025
• Knut Holdhus



Lower court’s defamation decision overturned by judges siding with anti-cult journalist using abusive language against victim of dehumanizing faith-breaking confinement lasting more than 12 years



Tokyo, 27th August 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

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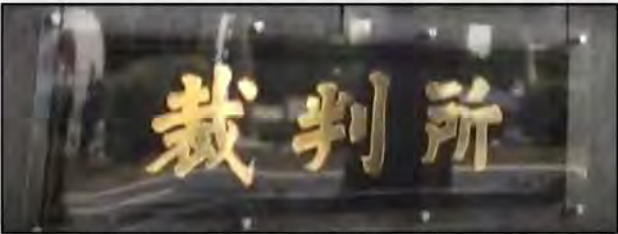
On 26th August, the Tokyo High Court delivered a ruling in the appeal trial over alleged defamation by journalist Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト), who had made remarks referring to “hikikomori” (social recluse) [\[See editor's note 1 below\]](#).

Toru Goto (後藤徹), representative of the [National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced De-Conversion](#), had sought 11 million yen in damages, claiming Suzuki’s comments were defamatory. [\[See editor's note 2 below\]](#)

Presiding Judge Munehiro Sasaki (佐々木 宗啓) dismissed the [lower court's decision](#), which had partially recognized defamation and ordered Suzuki to pay 110,000 yen in damages, and instead



Militantly campaigning against the Family Federation: Activist journalist Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka. Photo: Mikkabie / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int.](#) Cropped



Sign outside the building housing Tokyo District Court and Tokyo High Court. Photo: Screenshot from [FFWPU](#) video.

rejected the plaintiff’s claims in full, ruling that Suzuki’s remarks did not constitute defamation.

Following the judgment, Goto expressed strong dissatisfaction, saying:

“This is a very regrettable result. I cannot accept it.”

He also referred to the ongoing [appellate proceedings](#) regarding the government’s request to dissolve the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), and voiced concern:

“I fear that this outcome will encourage the distorted idea that it is acceptable to [lock up believers](#) in order to make them leave the [religious organization](#).” [\[See editor's note 3 below\]](#)

Goto indicated his intention to appeal to the Supreme Court.

See also the book, the amazing story of Toru Goto being locked up for 12 years and 5 months: [Apartment Prison: Faith-Breaking in Modern Japan](#)

Featured image above: Toru Goto. Screenshot (2025) from video by the [Family Federation](#).

[Editor's note 1: The Japanese term “**hikikomori**” (引きこもり) refers to people who completely withdraw from social life, often isolating themselves at home for extended periods – sometimes years. It describes both the phenomenon and the individuals affected by it.

Hikikomori typically avoid school, work, and social interactions, often due to anxiety, social pressure, or mental health struggles such as depression. The term is sometimes used in a derogatory way but is also recognized as a serious social issue in Japan and other countries.]

[Editor's note 2: According to the complaint, Suzuki criticized Goto on the news website *Yaya Nikkan Cult Shimbun*, where Suzuki is the main writer, as “a male believer who stayed in his flat and became a NEET [Not in Education, Employment, or Training] after recuperation, becoming just a ‘recluse’.”

On Nippon TV’s *Information Live Miyaneya*, he repeatedly criticized Goto, such as commenting that he was a “recluse” (引きこもり – hikikomori). Furthermore, Suzuki also defamed Toru Goto at a symposium held in July this year. When Suzuki was asked about the fact that he referred to Goto as a “recluse” (hikikomori), Suzuki replied, “I don’t care.” He also posted on X (formerly Twitter) that Goto was a puppet forced to play the “role of a victim”.]

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[Editor's note 3: 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. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp.](#) Cropped

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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