

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Alarm over Japan's Banning Minority Faiths

Knut Holdhus  
September 4, 2025



Jan Figel, former Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and former EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion



**Authority on freedom of religion warns that Japan's treatment of large religious minority Family Federation will have serious consequences for other minority faiths**

Tokyo, 3rd September 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

[Part 2 of interview with Jan Figel, Former EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion]

**Shaken Trust in Democratic Nations**  
**Concerns Over the Dissolution of the Family Federation**

by Yosuke Yamazaki (山崎 洋介), the Washington office of the [Sekai Nippo](#)

Continued from part 1: [Former EU Envoy: Arbitrary Dissolution Order](#)



Likely to be impacted by dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#): The Jehovah's Witnesses. Here, members outside the British Museum May 30, 2017

- If the dissolution of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (the Family Federation, formerly the [Unification Church](#)) is finalized, what kind of effects might that have on the treatment of other religious minorities and on human rights more broadly?

If this is finalized, it will not only negatively affect Japan itself, its image, and its credibility as a democratic nation, but it could also pose a threat to communities such as small or new religions like Jehovah's Witnesses.

Japan must learn from how oppression around the world has triggered internal conflicts, and from the harms caused by governments enforcing ideological control. The state should

recognize that it does not exist only for the majority or certain groups, but for all its people.

- You have pointed out that freedom of religion is a "litmus test" for all human rights.



This "freedom of inner life" of human beings is guaranteed by Article 18 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) and Article 18 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).



Attorney Patricia Duval speaking at the United Nations Office in Geneva, Switzerland 16th June 2025



Nazila Ghanea, one of the UN Special Rapporteurs [See editor's note below] who received the alarming report from Patricia Duval. Ghanea has already sent formal UN request to Japan, but has so far received no reply. Nazila Ghanea is UN Rapporteur on Religious Freedom since February 2023

Freedom of religion must be understood together with freedom of thought and freedom of conscience. This is why not only believers, but also the non-religious and atheists, have the right to have their personal convictions, beliefs, and conscience respected.

If this inner freedom is not respected, then "freedoms of external expression" - such as speech, opinion, press, assembly, and association - will also be restricted or threatened.

It begins within the individual, and then can be outwardly expressed, for example, through religious practice. People naturally wish to form communities with like-minded individuals - at the family level, and even beyond.

Inner freedom is absolute, and the state, authorities, and institutions must respect it fully. By contrast, freedom of external expression can be limited, but only in ways that are legal, legitimate, and proportionate.

- You opposed the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) from an early stage. Has international opposition to the dissolution grown?

I personally sent letters to Japan's prime minister and foreign minister, but I received no reply, neither formal nor informal. However, opposition has certainly been growing. Japan has long been respected as a moderate democratic nation, but its image is now suffering damage. I have also heard that both governments and civil society around the world are voicing concern, surprise, and protest over the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#).

Japan must not repeat in the 21st century the failures of many countries in the 20th century - especially in Europe - where persecution of ethnic and religious minorities took place. The true test of a democracy's credibility lies not in how it treats the majority, but how it treats minorities.

- What can the United Nations do on this issue?

Patricia Duval, a leading expert in legal matters at the intersection of religion, belief, and state regulation, submitted on 30th June a shocking report to Special Rapporteurs [See editor's note below]

Through the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief at the Human Rights Council, Nazila Ghanea, the UN should be able to lead dialogue with Japan.

Ms. Ghanea officially requested a visit to Japan in order to investigate possible violations of religious freedom affecting minority religions, but the Japanese government has not accepted. Japan should accept dialogue with the UN through her and engage actively.

- Considering the influence the United States has on Japan, what can the Trump administration do?

The United States, as the country with the greatest political and moral influence, bears the greatest responsibility on this issue. I expect the U.S. government to deal with the matter fairly and seriously, and to build a framework for high-level dialogue with Japan. The dignity of all people in all communities is far more important than money or business. President Trump and his administration can have a major influence and bring about positive change.

See part 1: [Former EU Envoy: Arbitrary Dissolution Order](#)

**[Editor's note:** A Special Rapporteur (or Independent Expert) is an independent human rights expert appointed by the United Nations (UN) to provide reports or advice on human rights issues from either a thematic or country-specific perspective. These experts are selected by the UN Human Rights Council and operate independently of any government, playing a crucial role in monitoring the actions of sovereign nations and democratically elected governments.

Special Rapporteurs do not receive financial compensation from the United Nations for their work. However, they receive support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and are often funded by charities and corporations. Annually, they convene in Geneva to discuss common issues, coordinate their efforts, and engage with various stakeholders, including states and civil society organizations.

These experts frequently conduct fact-finding missions to investigate human rights violation allegations in different countries. In addition to these missions, they regularly review complaints from alleged victims of human rights abuses. If a complaint is verified, they send an urgent letter or appeal to the concerned government. Even without a specific complaint, Special Rapporteurs can intervene on behalf of individuals or groups at their discretion.]

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# Writers, Clergy Urge Rethink Of Media Narrative

- September 3, 2025
- Knut Holdhus



Protests and symposia held across Japan to defend religious freedom urging media to listen to current members and rethink the biased portrayal by hostile lawyers and journalists



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

Tokyo, 1st September 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article.*

## Family Federation Nationwide Action Against Dissolution Request

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The symposium 30th August 2025 at the Hamamatsu Family Church, Chūō Ward, Hamamatsu City. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

by the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

See also [Former EU Envoy: Arbitrary Dissolution Order](#)

Followers of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) ([Family Federation](#), formerly the [Unification Church](#)), who oppose the government’s request for a [dissolution order](#) against the [religious organization](#), carried out nationwide actions on 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> August. These included protest marches, street speeches, and signature-collecting campaigns.

In Osaka City on 31<sup>st</sup> August, about 600 members marched through the city center for 40 minutes, calling for the protection of freedom of religion and fundamental human rights. Participants appealed to passersby, shouting,

“The voices of current members are not reflected at all in the media reports.”

At a rally held prior to the march, freelance writer Masaki Kubota (窪田順生) noted a shift in the media’s stance toward the [Family Federation](#) compared to two years ago, when coverage was entirely critical. He revealed that multiple media professionals had begun questioning whether the claims made by opposition lawyers and journalists were always correct. He stressed that “showing your humanity is the most important thing for your group” and emphasized the need to project a positive image to society.



**Masaki Kubota.** Photo (2023): [Sekai Nippo](#)



Fumihiro Katō (加藤文宏 – second from left) and Chief Priest Shindo Mizuta (水田真道 – third from left) speaking on stage 30th August 2025, Hamamatsu Family Church, Chūō Ward, Hamamatsu City. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda (豊田剛)

In Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture, on 30<sup>th</sup> August, a symposium on freedom of religion and human rights was held with about 108 attendees.

Writer Fumihiro Katō (加藤文宏) analyzed that most Japanese people are indifferent to religious freedom, regard the [religious organization](#) as “something incomprehensible”, and subject its members to insults and abuse. He argued that “a problem that doesn’t exist has been turned into a social issue.” Kato compared the stigma (discrimination and prejudice) against the [Family Federation](#) to the situation faced by Fukushima residents after the nuclear accident during the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. He advised that the way to counter such reputational damage is “to continue communicating objective facts and evidence to society and increase the number of allies.”

Reverend Shindo Mizuta (水田真道), chief priest of Kongōji Temple (Myōshinji branch of the Rinzai sect of Buddhism, Numazu City),

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explained:

"The essence of Buddhism is that suffering will lessen if you carefully unravel attachments ('clouds')."

He appealed that removing such clouds is the only way to change unjust currents.

On 31<sup>st</sup> August, a lecture was also held in Saitama City, drawing about 180 attendees.

Nonfiction writer Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ), author of *Fabrication* (Shinchosha), which was adapted into a film, took the stage. She pointed out the large gap between the [religious organization's](#) actual circumstances and its public image, saying,

"There is often a mismatch between media reports and what's happening on the ground."

Regarding the [dissolution order](#), she remarked,

"The [verdict](#) that was handed down was made based on emotional reasoning, and the judiciary lacked logic."



Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ) speaking in Saitama 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025. Photo: [FFWPU](#)



Paula White, Screenshot

In Tokyo, also on 31<sup>st</sup> August, the [Family Federation's](#) headquarters in Shōtō, Shibuya Ward, hosted an online "10,000-Person Worship Service" connecting churches nationwide. Pastor Paula White, senior advisor to the White House Faith Office, delivered an encouraging video message, stating:

"If 10,000 young believers rise up as peacemakers, you will change Japan and the nations of the world."

She expressed her hope for the realization of world peace through religion.

See also [Former EU Envoy: Arbitrary Dissolution Order](#)

**Featured image** above: Followers of the Family Federation protesting the lack of neutrality in government and media reporting 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025, Kita Ward, Osaka City. Photo: Rei Miyazawa (宮沢玲衣)

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