

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japan's Legal Discrepancies Hit Democracy

Knut Holdhus
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Hiroshi Ogasawara, founder of the Association to Protect Japanese Families, March 12, 2026



Predetermined Dissolution? Critics challenge Tokyo court's decision exposing inconsistencies in the Religious Corporations Act which make it easy for authorities to dissolve a religious organization

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The Democracy-Denying Dissolution of the Family Federation

Hiroshi Ogasawara, Representing the Association to Protect Japanese Families

by Hiroshi Ogasawara (小笠原裕)



Demonstration at Okayama Station, Okayama City in Japan against the religious persecution members of the [Family Federation](#) suffer in the country

On 4th March, the Tokyo High Court [dismissed](#) the [immediate appeal](#) against the [dissolution order](#) of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#). As a result, a liquidator was appointed, and the [Family Federation](#) transitioned into a liquidating corporation. Consequently, the religious activities of its believers have been severely suppressed.

A liquidating corporation cannot conduct any business other than liquidation. Since all [Family Federation](#) staff, including pastors, have become employees of the liquidating entity, they are no longer able to carry out religious activities - for example, officiating worship services or delivering sermons.

Believers are no longer allowed to enter [Family Federation](#) buildings. Guidelines established by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in October 2025 regarding the liquidation of designated religious corporations state that "to the extent that it does not interfere with liquidation procedures, and taking into account the degree of necessity, consideration should be given to the freedom of religion of existing believers, such as permitting them to use facilities." However, it is difficult to feel that such consideration is being shown by the liquidator.

Looking at this dissolution process, it is clear that there was a definite objective from the outset - namely, the complete destruction of the [Family Federation](#).

If there were problems, the administration should have issued corrective recommendations to the [corporation](#). Such provisions exist in the Companies Act and the General Incorporated Associations Act. However, there is no such provision in the Religious Corporations Act, allowing the authorities to immediately petition for dissolution. Since dissolving a religious corporation concerns freedom of thought, it should be the most restricted measure; yet it is easier to dissolve than companies, which represents a legal inconsistency.



Demonstration at Shibuya Mark City in Tokyo against the religious persecution members of the [Family Federation](#) suffer in Japan

The Ministry of Education exploited this inconsistency. The dissolution provisions of the Religious Corporations Act stipulate non-contentious case [See editor's note 1 below] procedures, which were also utilized to request the dissolution order. Considering that, simultaneously with the [High Court decision](#), [liquidators entered](#) nearly 300 churches nationwide, it is unavoidable to conclude that the dissolution policy had been predetermined, and that the state had carefully prepared for it.

While there are many issues with the [High Court's decision](#), I would like to highlight two points that further undermine democracy compared to the [Tokyo District Court's decision](#).

First, the [ruling](#) steps into doctrinal matters. Currently, the [religious organization](#) does not compel donations in any way. However, the High Court held that, because the [organization](#) operates based on doctrines that compel donations - such as past statements by its founder - it cannot be expected to exercise self-restraint regarding donations. If dissolution can be justified on the basis of doctrine, then freedom of both corporations and individuals could be suppressed based on ideology. This would effectively roll back modern democracy by more than a century.

Second, the [decision](#) states that the dissolution is necessary to prevent unlawful acts. The court's greatest difficulty was how to justify dissolving an organization that is currently causing no problems. Since its compliance declaration [See editor's note 2 below], the [religious organization](#) has improved dramatically, and the High Court could not prove a level of maliciousness warranting dissolution.

The Ministry submitted written statements from former believers as recent examples, but [fabrications](#)

were pointed out, such as the inclusion of statements from members of other religious groups, making them unusable as evidence. As a last resort, the court devised the reasoning that "the necessity of ordering the appellant's dissolution lies not in remedying past damages, but in preventing its believers from engaging again in inappropriate donation solicitation in the future."



A Japanese member of the [Family Federation](#) spreading the word on 15th March 2026, even though the [religious organization](#) had been dissolved by the authorities 11 days earlier

Dissolution of a religious corporation extinguishes a legal entity with rights and obligations; if compared to a natural person (自然人 = a human individual, in legal terminology), it is equivalent to the death penalty. Even if a person has a criminal record, would they be sentenced to death for past crimes if they are currently causing no problems? It must be said that this [High Court decision](#) is outrageous, as it fundamentally denies the principles of democracy.

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[Editor's note 1: A non-contentious case refers to a legal matter where there is no dispute between parties. These cases typically involve administrative, procedural, or uncontested legal actions, such as probate (handling a deceased person's estate), uncontested divorces, adoption, or registering a

trademark. Since there are no opposing parties or legal conflicts, these cases usually proceed smoothly through the legal system without litigation.]

[Editor's note 2: 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](#).]

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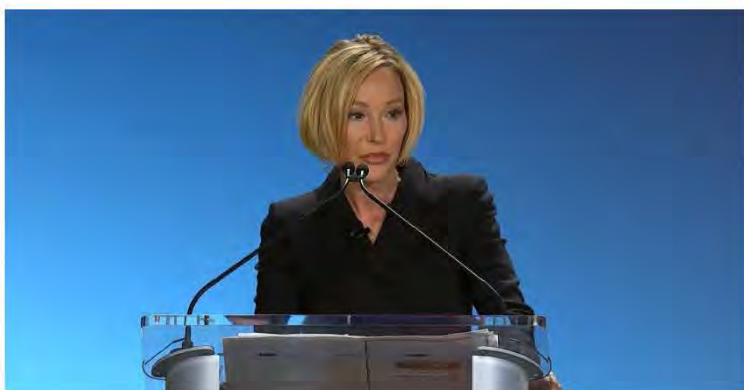
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Spiritual Advisor As Diplomatic Intermediary

March 22, 2026 • Knut Holdhus



Religious freedom and backchannel diplomacy: How a spiritual advisor helped broker surprise meeting linking faith and foreign policy



Kim Min-seok, Prime Minister of South Korea since 4th July 2025. Photo: [델리민주 \[더불어민주당\] / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

The South Korean [report](#) also connects White's earlier remarks to a more recent political development. She has reportedly played a role in facilitating a meeting between Kim Min-seok (김민석), the Prime Minister of South Korea, and President Trump. According to Kim's explanation, the meeting was not originally scheduled but occurred after he first met with White in her capacity as head of the White House Faith Office.

세계일보

The logo of the *Segye Ilbo*

An [article](#) published on 16th March by the South Korean newspaper *Segye Ilbo* sheds light on an unusual diplomatic moment involving Donald Trump, South Korean Prime Minister Kim Min-seok (김민석), and a key intermediary: Paula White. The [report](#) focuses not only on a "surprise meeting" between the two political leaders but also on the broader theme of

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religious freedom, which played a central role in the encounter.

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At the heart of the story is Paula White, a prominent American pastor and long-time spiritual advisor to Trump. She currently serves in a role connected to the White House's faith outreach efforts and has been known for her close personal relationship with the president, spanning nearly three decades. Because of this relationship, she is widely described as one of Trump's most trusted religious confidants – someone who can offer both personal and spiritual counsel.

According to the [article](#) by religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su, White was instrumental in arranging an unexpected, informal meeting between Prime Minister Kim and Trump during Kim's recent visit to the United States. The meeting reportedly took place immediately after Trump concluded another engagement in the Oval Office. White confirmed Trump's willingness to meet and quickly facilitated the encounter, which lasted about 20 minutes and was conducted without an interpreter. This detail is notable, as it suggests a level of direct communication and urgency that is not typical of carefully choreographed diplomatic meetings.



Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (정성수). Photo (2025): [Segye Ilbo](#)

The [South Korean paper](#) describes how Prime Minister Kim later explained why he sought out Paula White in the first place. He emphasized that her long-standing and close relationship with Trump made her a uniquely valuable bridge for establishing both direct and indirect connections with the former president. Kim also noted that White remains one of the few individuals who can maintain ongoing personal and spiritual dialogue with Trump, making her influence particularly significant.

However, the meeting was not solely about building personal rapport. Kim indicated that he also had a strategic objective: addressing what he described as misunderstandings in the United States regarding religious freedom in South Korea. In recent years, some conservative American political and religious groups have raised concerns about whether religious communities – especially conservative ones – face discrimination or suppression in Korea. Kim sought to counter these perceptions and reassure U.S. audiences that South Korea upholds the principle of separating religion and state while protecting religious rights.



Son Hyun-bo (손현보), pastor of the Segyero Church in Busan, South Korea. Photo: [순복음위드교회 \(Full Gospel WITH Church\) / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

This concern had already surfaced in earlier diplomatic discussions. During a January meeting, U.S. Vice President JD Vance reportedly mentioned that certain figures in the United States viewed a specific case involving Son Hyun-bo (손현보), pastor of the Segyero Church in the port city of Busan, as a potential violation of religious freedom. He urged careful handling of the situation to prevent tensions or misunderstandings between the two countries. In response, Kim reiterated that South Korea maintains a strict separation between church and state and clarified that ongoing investigations into religious organizations were based on alleged unlawful activities, not on religious beliefs themselves.

The [article](#) also highlights Paula White's public



Paula White addressing the IRF Summit in Washington DC 2nd February 2026. Screenshot from [video](#) by IRF.

stance on religious freedom, particularly her remarks at the "[International Religious Freedom Summit](#)" held in Washington, D.C. in early February. At this event, White delivered a keynote speech emphasizing the universal importance of protecting religious liberty as a fundamental human right. Her comments extended beyond general principles and included expressions of personal support for [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) – also called [Mother Han](#) – the leader of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), often referred to in South Korea as [Unificationism](#) (통일교).

White spoke warmly about her personal connection to [Mother Han](#), stating that she felt a deep sense of solidarity with her efforts to unite people of different faiths and defend religious freedom globally. The spiritual advisor

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also expressed concern for [Mother Han's](#) well-being, dignity, and rights, framing these concerns within a broader call for international vigilance in protecting religious liberties.

Importantly, White did not limit her message to a single country. She called on Japan, South Korea, and all nations to uphold religious freedom in a manner that is “complete, fair, and consistent”. This phrasing underscores a key theme of the [article](#): the idea that religious freedom should not be selectively applied or influenced by political considerations but rather treated as a universal and non-negotiable standard.

The [article](#) notes that White has made similar statements in the past, including at the previous year’s IRF Summit. Her repeated emphasis suggests that this is a core issue in her public advocacy and one that intersects with her political connections.

For a non-Korean audience, the significance of this story lies in the intersection of religion, diplomacy, and perception. It illustrates how informal networks – such as personal relationships between political leaders and religious figures – can play a meaningful role in international relations. It also highlights how concerns about religious freedom can influence diplomatic dialogue, even between close allies like the United States and South Korea.

Ultimately, the [article](#) portrays Paula White as a pivotal figure operating at the crossroads of faith and politics. Through her relationship with Trump and her advocacy on religious freedom, she has become an influential intermediary capable of shaping both high-level meetings and broader conversations about human rights on the global stage.

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