

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Media's Role in Lynching Family Fed = Frenzy, Silence, and Consequences

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Selective outrage? Media double standards under scrutiny as reporting frenzy is seen as driving dissolution debate and social exclusion of believers from large religious minority

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[Part 4 of a Series] In Search of a Spiritual Anchor - One Month After the Dissolution of the Family Federation

Denouncing the Religious Organization Through the "Second-Generation Narrative"

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)



Henoko District, Nago City, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan

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On 16th March, a tragic accident occurred off the coast of Henoko in Nago City, Okinawa Prefecture, when a protest vessel operated by an anti-base group capsized, resulting in the deaths of high school students on a study tour. Despite the fact that neither the victims nor their parents were aware that they would be boarding a protest vessel, major media outlets have remained silent. Meanwhile, in the shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), the relationship between the defendant Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也) and the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) was widely reported, causing a media frenzy. What accounts for this difference?

Writer Fumihiko Kato (加藤文宏) commented on X (formerly Twitter),

"Reporting began portraying the victim, former Prime Minister Abe, and the LDP as being at fault, with some outlets reporting on it several times a day for over two months. [...] In contrast, in the Henoko incident, certain circles have remained silent while shrewdly maneuvering, taking advantage of the media's deferential coverage."



Fumihiro Kato, here delivering a lecture Dec. 14, 2024 in Ichikawa City, Chiba Prefecture, Japan

Kato criticized the difference in media attitudes between the two incidents. On 26th March, speaking at a [press conference](#) co-hosted by the "Second Generation Association for Protecting the Human Rights of Believers" and the "Association of Experts Seeking Fair and Impartial Trials," he pointed out that a "narrative" quickly formed portraying Yamagami, who killed Abe, as a "tragic second-generation victim of religion".

He argued that exposure to such reporting stirred intense hatred among the public toward the "cozy relationship" between the [religious organization](#) and politics, which in turn led to "[discrimination](#) and [exclusion](#)" against the [organization](#). However, he reflected that "what felt like the mood of society was in fact nothing more than the [fervor of a very small segment](#) of the population." Kato condemned the situation, stating,

"It must be said that it was 'abnormal' for media coverage to create the trigger that led to the [dissolution order](#)."

The association of experts includes about 200 prominent figures from politics, law, academia, media, and religion in Japan and abroad, with over 1,000 supporters. At the [press conference](#), alongside Kato, speakers included international lawyer Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹 - representative organizer), attorney Shinichi Tokunaga (徳永信一), Professor Masaki Nakamasa (仲正昌樹) of Kanazawa University, literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎), and nonfiction writer Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ). They announced a [statement](#) opposing the [dissolution order](#). The statement included,

"A dissolution order is not merely an act of law enforcement; it constitutes a fundamental rejection of the social credibility of a [religious organization](#). For approximately 100,000 believers, life will be deprived of its dignity as their faith is the very core of their identity."

The decisions of both courts (the [Tokyo District Court](#) and the [Tokyo High Court](#)) have been forced through under the supreme directive of 'dissolution from the outset'. If a [Supreme Court decision](#) follows along these lines, we strongly fear that it could become a fatal trigger that shatters the very foundations of a state governed by the rule of law and a free society."



Professor Masaki Nakamasa, here on March 26, 2026

Professor Nakamasa expressed astonishment that, despite the fundamental principle of modern law being to refrain from evaluating doctrine and to maintain neutrality, "the [Tokyo High Court](#) conducted its own interpretation of the [Family Federation's](#) doctrine and used it to justify the [dissolution order](#)."

He pointed out that even in the Soka Gakkai Itamandala case (1981) [See editor's note 1 below] and the Aum Shinrikyo [See editor's note 2 below] Tokyo subway sarin attack (1995), courts did not interfere with doctrine. He warned that "for the state to independently interpret a religious organization's doctrine without hearing from the parties involved, and to make decisions that have serious consequences for believers' futures based on that interpretation, is akin to the logic of pre-modern European inquisitions," and expressed concern that the [closure](#) of the [Family Federation's](#) facilities recalls the destruction of facilities belonging to Ōmoto [See editor's note 3 below], which was ordered dissolved before the war.

Nakayama stated,

"I thought of Iwao Hakamada, who suffered for 58 years before being acquitted in a wrongful conviction case. The [Family Federation](#) will be made to suffer even more - can that really be justified?"

After the press conference, attorney Tokunaga offered criticism in an interview with this paper:

"If the [Supreme Court](#) upholds the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#), it will become

precedent, and any organization could be arbitrarily dissolved. Japan would become a laughingstock in the eyes of the world."

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[Editor's note 1: The 1981 Soka Gakkai Itamandala dispute was a key moment in the growing conflict between the Buddhist organizations Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū.

At the center was the Gohonzon, a sacred mandala in Nichiren Buddhism, a Japanese branch of Mahayana Buddhism. The Gohonzon mandala is a calligraphic scroll inscribed by Nichiren (1222-1282). It centers on the phrase Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the title of the Lotus Sutra, surrounded by names of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and protective deities. Rather than an image, it is a symbolic representation of enlightenment and the interconnected nature of reality. Practitioners chant to the Gohonzon as a focus for devotion and self-transformation, aiming to awaken inherent Buddha-nature and harmonize their lives with the universal law expressed in the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren Shōshū insisted that only its high priest could authorize or reproduce valid Gohonzon, emphasizing strict clerical authority. Soka Gakkai, however, argued that spiritual power comes from faith and practice, not exclusive priestly control.

Around 1981, disputes intensified over who had the authority to issue Gohonzon and interpret doctrine. Tensions also involved leadership conflicts, especially around Daisaku Ikeda (池田 大作 - 1928-2023), the third president of the Soka Gakkai movement.

In essence, the dispute was less about the mandala itself and more about authority and independence - whether a lay movement could function without priestly control. It set the stage for the final split between the two groups in 1991.]

[Editor's note 2: Aum Shinrikyo, a Buddhist new religious movement founded in 1984 by Shoko Asahara, preaching apocalyptic prophecies. It was dissolved in 1996 due to its leaders' criminal acts, including the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack in 1995 and the Matsumoto sarin incident in 1994.]



Nao Deguchi in 1916

[Editor's note 3: The Ōmoto (Oomoto) religious movement - Omotokyo (大本教). It is a Japanese new religious movement that originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was founded by Nao Deguchi (1836 - 1918), a peasant woman who claimed to have received divine revelations, and her successor Onisaburo Deguchi (1871 - 1948), who played a significant role in shaping the religion's teachings and structure.

Omotokyo emphasizes universal salvation, spiritual purification, and the ultimate unity of all religions. The religion stresses the importance of living in harmony with divine will and nature.

The Ōmoto Incident (大本事件 Ōmoto jiken) refers to two major crackdowns by the prewar Japanese government against Omotokyo. There were two incidents. The first Ōmoto Incident (1921) was triggered by government suspicion that Ōmoto teachings were socially disruptive. Authorities raided Ōmoto facilities, arrested leaders, and charged them with lèse-majesté (insulting the emperor) for certain religious texts. This was part

of a broader pattern of suppressing new religions seen as politically or ideologically threatening.

The second Ōmoto Incident (1935) was far more severe, and is usually what people mean by "the Ōmoto Incident". The military and police launched a large-scale crackdown. Temples and buildings were destroyed (including with explosives). Leaders and many followers were arrested. The state accused the group of subversion, criticizing the emperor system, and spreading dangerous ideas. Essentially, it was an attempt to eliminate Ōmoto as a movement.

It is considered one of the most extreme examples of state suppression of religion in prewar Japan. It's often referenced today in discussions about religious freedom, state control, and the role of new religious movements in Japan.

Today, Omotokyo remains a small but active religious group in Japan. It has also inspired the foundation of Aikido, the martial art developed by Morihei Ueshiba, who was a follower of Omotokyo.

Omotokyo holds a significant place in the history of Japanese religion, not only as a spiritual movement but also as a symbol of resistance to religious persecution during Japan's militaristic period.]

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Believers' Social Exclusion, Loss Of Civil Rights

April 9, 2026 • Knut Holdhus



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

Active believers report social exclusion and economic anxiety as impact of dissolution order extends to employment, welfare, and civil rights

Tokyo, 7th April 2026 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article.*

[Part 3 of a Series] In Search of a Spiritual Anchor – One Month After the Dissolution of the Family Federation

87% in Shock After Losing Their Church

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

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Swayed by media campaign and refused to meet active members, severed all ties with Family Federation, and changed the law overnight by including civil cases: Fumio Kishida, prime minister of Japan 2021-2024. Here, at press conference 14th August 2024. Photo: 首相官邸 (PMO) / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int. Cropped

"Immediately after the incident [the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on 8th July 2022], none of the voices of us active believers were heard at all. Only former believers were called to the Diet, met with the prime minister at the time, and were surrounded by reporters. The voices of tens of thousands of active believers have not been heard in the

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slightest.”

Nozomi Kojima (小島希晶 – 30), representative of the “Second-Generation Association to Protect the Human Rights of Believers”, became tearful and choked up during a [press conference](#) on 26th March.

In the wake of the shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), Kojima says active believers have been cut off by politicians and [excluded from society](#), which led to a [sense of crisis](#). In response, Kojima founded the association and has been speaking out on behalf of active believers through symposiums and platforms such as YouTube. Although maintaining a smile until now, it seems that about three and a half years of suffering and grief finally overflowed.

It is expected that 1,933 staff members of the [religious organization](#) and 2,441 of their dependents – a total of 4,374 people – will lose their means of livelihood due to the [dissolution order](#), raising concerns about their living conditions. At the [press conference](#), second-generation staff members reported on their current situations.

Makoto Imanaka (今中誠真 – 30), a staff member, said:

“I am considering changing jobs going forward, but I worry that simply writing the [organization's](#) name on my CV (résumé) may limit my employment opportunities. I hope for a society where people are not [discriminated](#) against because of their faith but are seen fairly as individuals.”

He added that, at present,

“Those supporting all of my emotional anxieties are knowledgeable individuals and members of the [church](#).”

A married couple of second-generation believers who both work for the [religious organization](#) also took the stage. The woman said:

“We were just about to register our marriage, but now we are in a situation where we are anxious about whether we can maintain our household and finances going forward, given issues like housing and employment.”

She emphasized that the [dissolution](#) has affected their life plans.

The association conducted from 8th to 16th March a survey on the actual impact on believers after the [dissolution](#), collecting responses from a total of 2,240 people ranging in age from their teens to their 80s. **The results highlighted not only fear of having an essential part of who they are being rejected by society but also experiences of discriminatory treatment in employment and child-rearing.**



Makoto Imanaka (今中誠真), here in February 2024. Screenshot from video by Seisyun TV.



The human dimension when members' fundamental identity is rejected by the state in league with hostile lawyers. Dissolution and liquidation mean the Japanese state steals properties members built with their own hands and years of investment to realize their dream. Here, the sanctuary of the [Family Federation's](#) Koriyama Church. Photo: Yasuhiko Nagano (長野康彦)

Some respondents reported that delays in receiving paperwork for early retirement (before the [Tokyo High Court decision](#)) prevented them from completing procedures for health insurance and unemployment benefits, leaving them unable to go to the hospital or maintain their livelihood. There were also reports of people being dismissed from jobs due to being second-generation believers.

When asked about the impact of the start of liquidation procedures, all respondents answered that they could no longer attend worship services at their church. Of these, 87% said they were “shocked”, and about 60% reported experiencing psychological distress due to the [loss of worship](#).

35 individuals reported that they had either considered [suicide](#) or attempted suicide due to psychological suffering.

In free-response comments, some described being driven to mental distress, saying:

“Having my rights taken away by state power made me feel as if I was being told I should not live. I lost hope in this country and in life and felt there was no point in continuing to live.”

Although they had joined the faith seeking “salvation”, they now find themselves in a situation where the state has taken away their spiritual foundation.

About 30% of respondents said they were either unable to carry out or were anxious about being able to conduct important [church](#) rituals such as Seonghwa ceremonies (funerals) and [Blessing ceremonies](#) (weddings).

One respondent reported:

“There was a person who passed away on 4th March, and just three hours after the ruling, a liquidator suddenly came and told us to leave immediately. We couldn't take any of the ritual items needed for the Seonghwa (funeral), so the

ceremony could not be performed."

There were cases where, on the very day the dissolution was decided, funeral rites for deceased believers could not be held.

Kojima concluded the [press conference](#) with these remarks:

"We want to continue moving forward while gradually improving the areas where we are lacking. Even if the [buildings disappear](#), the believers themselves will not disappear, and [faith itself will not disappear](#). We want to keep searching for how we can be accepted by the people of Japan and be told, 'It's okay for you to be here in Japan!'"

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Featured image above: Nozomi Kojima (小嶋希晶 – 30), representing the "Second-Generation Association to Protect the Human Rights of Believers", here speaking at a press conference on 26th March 2025 in Shibuya, Tokyo. Photo: Yasuhiro Uno (宇野泰弘).

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