

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japan Only has Freedom to Believe, Not to Practice Religion

Knut Holdhus
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Only free to believe, not to practice. Illustration Grok xAI



[Sekai Nippo](#)

The dissolution order preserves private faith and freedom to believe while undermining the communal and public dimensions of religious freedom

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[Editorial]

Japanese-Style Religious Persecution

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

Persecution refers to the act of suppressing or excluding people through the use of power. Religious persecution is perhaps its most typical form. Not only church facilities but also the lives and property of believers may be violated by the state. In prewar Japan as well, persecution occurred under the Peace Preservation Law. In the case of the Ōmoto movement [See editor's note below], facilities were destroyed and many senior believers were imprisoned.



Accused of making false claims:
MEXT



2018 English version of Religious Corporations Act of Japan

Although there has been no such overt repression since the war, it should be understood that its essential nature has not changed. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has repeatedly emphasized that under the Religious Corporations Act, freedom of religion would continue to be guaranteed for the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) even after its dissolution. However, the falsehood of that claim is obvious.

Freedom of religion includes not only inward

belief but also gatherings and social activities. Since the [dissolution decision](#), [Family Federation](#) facilities have not been permitted for use, and in many cases even the use of public facilities has become difficult.

Believers have complained that "our places of worship have been taken away, and we no longer have places for prayer or community." Others report that "the change in circumstances has made me lose my appetite" and that they "cannot sleep."

Yet the reality that freedom of religion is being seriously infringed is scarcely reported at all. There is probably an underlying sentiment that, because the [religious organization](#) was subjected to a dissolution order, this is simply the punishment it deserves.

In the Japanese view of religion, emphasis is placed on inward faith, while the social and political activities of religious organizations are subjected to strict scrutiny. This is because such activities are seen as challenges to the established order and, ultimately, to the system itself. As it is said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Gospel of Matthew). Perhaps the application of the existing "rule of law" should itself be called into question.



Nao Deguchi in 1916

[Editor's note: 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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Charitable Rice Campaign For Vulnerable Groups

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Charitable gifts become food aid in South Korea as Family Federation marks anniversary with rice donation drive aimed at citizens in need

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

a South Korean daily, reported on 19th

세계일보
The logo of the Segye Ilbo

June on a charitable initiative organized by the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, a religious movement also known in Korea as Unificationism. The article by reporter Jeong Seong-su focuses on a symbolic donation campaign held in connection with the organization’s 72nd anniversary celebrations. Rather

than emphasizing theology or religious activities, the report highlights the Family Federation’s efforts to develop as a contributor to local welfare and community support.

See also Federation Expands Community Service Efforts



Family Federation Korean President Song Yong-cheon (송용천) and his wife Lee Hae-sook (이해숙) delivering 300 kg of rice wreath donations received at the organization’s 72nd anniversary ceremony to the Cheorwon County Basic Food Bank in Gangwon Province. Photo: FFWPU

A key feature of the initiative is the use of “rice wreaths,” a uniquely Korean custom that has become common at public events, ceremonies, concerts, and celebrations. Instead of sending traditional flower wreaths – which are often displayed briefly and then discarded – supporters donate sacks of rice that are arranged in decorative displays. After the event, the rice can be distributed to charities, welfare organizations, or people in need. This practice allows celebratory gifts to serve a practical social purpose.

According to the article, the Family Federation collected rice donations from supporters, businesses, and affiliated organizations that participated in the anniversary celebrations. In total, 52 organizations and companies contributed rice in place of congratulatory flower wreaths. The rice was then redistributed to local welfare institutions serving vulnerable populations. Altogether, 1,020 kilograms of rice – just over one metric ton – were donated.

The rice was divided among four community organizations. Two food banks received 300 kilograms each: one in Cheorwon County, a rural area near the border with North Korea, and another in Seoul’s Yongsan district. A larger share, 400 kilograms, went to the Heukseok Comprehensive Social Welfare Center in Seoul’s Dongjak district, while a smaller donation of 20 kilograms was given to the Samtaegi Village Community in Seoul’s Seongbuk district.

The recipient organizations intend to use the rice in different ways depending on local needs. The food banks will distribute it to low-income households, elderly people living alone, and single-parent families. The welfare center plans to incorporate the rice into meal-support programs and lunchbox deliveries for economically disadvantaged senior citizens. Meanwhile, the Samtaegi Village Community will use the rice in its “New Village Restaurant”, a project that provides inexpensive meals to people facing financial hardship.



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The [article](#) presents the donation as part of a broader social-service effort undertaken by the [Family Federation](#). The [organization](#) recently established a [Social Contribution Corps](#), which coordinates charitable and volunteer activities. According to figures cited in the report, the group had already donated rice on two previous occasions earlier in 2026: 320 kilograms collected during a food-sharing event in April and 840 kilograms received through an [international marriage blessing ceremony](#) in May. When combined with the anniversary donation, the total amount of rice distributed through these initiatives has reached 2,180 kilograms.

The [report](#) also quotes a representative of the [Social Contribution Corps](#), who explains the philosophy behind the campaign. The representative argues that replacing temporary ceremonial displays with food assistance reflects the belief that “food is love” and represents a more meaningful way of celebrating important occasions. The statement emphasizes the idea of community solidarity and expresses the organization’s intention to continue expanding rice-donation programs at future events across the country.



Song Yong-cheon (송용천), President of the [Family Federation](#) in South Korea, delivering 300 kg of rice to the Yongsan-gu Food Bank Market Center in Seoul. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Overall, the [article](#) portrays the [Family Federation](#)’s anniversary not simply as an internal religious celebration but as an opportunity for public service. By highlighting the practical benefits of rice wreath donations and the assistance provided to food banks, welfare centers, and community meal programs, the [report](#) presents the organization as seeking to strengthen its image as a participant in local social welfare efforts. For readers unfamiliar with South Korea, the story also offers an example of how the country’s distinctive rice-wreath tradition can transform ceremonial gifts into charitable resources that support vulnerable members of society.

See also [Federation Expands Community Service Efforts](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: [Family Federation](#) representatives deliver 400 kg of rice to the Heukseok Comprehensive Social Welfare Center in Dongjak-gu, Seoul. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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