FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Believers Vow to Endure 20 Years If Needed

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"We have to turn this around even if it takes 10 or 20 years": Japanese second-generation leader speaks out

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"We'll Turn This Around Over 10 or 20 Years"

Second-Generation Group Leader Speaks at Osaka Talk Event

by the editorial department of Sekai Nippo

Nozomi Kojima, representative of "The Second-Generation Association for Protecting the Human Rights of Believers", speaking at press conference March 26 2025 in Shibuya, Tokyo

Nozomi Kojima (小嶌希晶), representative of the "Second-Generation Association for Protecting the Human Rights of Believers", a group consisting primarily of second-generation members of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU, formerly the Unification Church), attended a talk event organized by believers in Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture, on 9th August. Even after the decision to dissolve the religious organization, Kojima has continued her activities of communicating the voices of current members. She said,

"I hope this gathering will serve as an opportunity for us to encourage churches to hold events more actively, including events jointly involving different churches."

Kojima recalled her feelings on 4th March, when the Tokyo High Court decided to uphold the dissolution order against the organization. Describing her state of mind at the time, she said,

"As a believer, I was deeply saddened and felt that I no longer wanted to do anything."

Nevertheless, she explained that she had continued her activities because "many people encouraged me by telling me that this would also have an impact on people belonging to other religions, and that we have to turn this around, even if it takes 10 or 20 years."

Addressing approximately 350 believers gathered at the venue, Kojima said,

"Amid continuing anxiety and difficulties, I felt hopeful that so many people could come together across the boundaries between churches and spend this time together."

Attorney Shinichi Tokunaga

Attorney Shinichi Tokunaga (徳永信一) also participated in the talk event. Referring to the High Court's ruling and the arguments advanced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and others, Tokunaga observed,

"They probably believed that the only way to rescue believers who were being subjected to 'mind control' [See editor's note below] was to dissolve the religious organization, and that dissolving it would solve the problem."

He then emphasized the importance of believers continuing to gather and act to protect their church even after its dissolution:

"Even if the Family Federation is dissolved, it is important for believers to come together and work to protect their church. The warm relationships in which everyone supports one another, and the way in which people practice their faith, have not changed at all."

He continued:

"If we can show the people of Japan what the actual practice of our faith is like, we can overcome the difficult circumstances we are facing now."

[Editor's note: In Japan, the "mind-control" myth has been a powerful tool used to stigmatize and suppress new religious movements (NRMs), particularly since the 1980s. The concept suggests that NRMs manipulate or "brainwash" their followers, depriving them of free will and rational thought. This narrative gained traction after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, when public fear of dangerous cults intensified. Although Aum was an extreme and violent exception, the incident cast suspicion on all NRMs, allowing critics, media, and the government to label diverse groups as manipulative or psychologically coercive.

The "mind-control" myth serves multiple social and political functions. It simplifies complex questions of belief, making it easier to portray converts as victims rather than as individuals exercising spiritual agency. This framing justifies legal and social intervention, including the coercive "deprogramming" of believers - sometimes involving confinement or psychological pressure to force renunciation of faith. Lawyers, ex-member groups, and certain media outlets have used the idea of mind control to construct NRMs as threats to family stability and national order, reinforcing social conformity and Japan's preference for established, non-controversial religions such as Buddhism and Shinto.

In recent years, the myth resurfaced following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose attacker cited resentment toward the Unification Church. Public outrage reignited scrutiny of NRMs, and politicians and journalists revived "mind-control" rhetoric to explain the Church's fundraising and recruitment practices. Critics argue that this framing discourages genuine religious tolerance and critical examination of Japan's restrictive religious climate. Overall, the "mind-control" myth functions less as a scientific or psychological concept and more as a moral panic - a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority faiths and to reaffirm mainstream social norms about religion, obedience, and the boundaries of acceptable belief.]

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Japan's religious double standard under scrutiny as Buddhist priest warns of dangerous precedent for all faiths set by today's dissolution of the Family Federation

Continued from Buddhist Priest Warns Japan 'Cult' Ban Risks All

Religion and politics: is there a double standard?

Buddhist priest Shindō Mizuta (水田真道). Photo: Bitter Winter

Logo of Bitter Winter, the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights.

As pointed out by Dr. Massimo Introvigne in his Bitter Winter article 21st July, the question of political connections also concerns Buddhist priest *Shindō Mizuta (水田真道)*.

See also Zen Head: "FFWPU Case A Warning to All Religions"

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The Family Federation has been criticized for its historical connections with politicians of Japan's *Liberal Democratic Party*. In a video conversation with literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎), Mizuta does not deny that religious organizations and political actors can have relationships. Instead, he asks whether such relationships are being judged consistently.

He refers to an

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incident involving protest boats off the coast of Henoko in Nago City on the southern island of Okinawa, near a US military base. One of the boat captains was a pastor associated with the *United Church of Christ* in Japan, while another had previously been a candidate for the *Japanese Communist Party*.

For Mizuta, the question is therefore not whether religion and politics ever intersect. They plainly do. The question is whether such interaction is being treated as inherently problematic only when it involves a particular religious movement.

He worries that Buddhist priests themselves may sometimes repeat accusations against the Family Federation without sufficiently examining the principles underlying those accusations. In his view, religious leaders should be particularly careful about participating in collective condemnation.

What would dissolution mean for a Buddhist temple?

Perhaps the most powerful part of Mizuta's argument comes when he considers what would happen if the same kind of dissolution order were directed against Kongoji Temple, where he is chief priest.

A court-appointed liquidator could potentially take control of the temple's assets. These would not merely consist of abstract financial holdings. They could include the temple buildings, land, bank accounts, ritual clothing and ceremonial implements. Residents of the temple could potentially lose their homes.

This is particularly significant because Japanese temples are often simultaneously religious institutions and family residences. A dissolution could therefore affect not only the organization but also the priest and his family.

Mizuta explains that more than 80 percent of Kongoji's activities involve wakes and funerals conducted in the main hall. If the temple were prevented from operating normally, these religious services could no longer be performed. The priest could lose his position and become unable to carry out funerals for members of the surrounding community.

In other words, dissolution could effectively mean the destruction of the temple as a functioning religious institution.

The Kongoji Temple where Shindō Mizuta is chief priest, in Shizuoka, Japan. Photo: Bitter Winter

This thought experiment is central to Mizuta's warning. The question is not whether Kongoji is currently threatened with dissolution. It is whether a legal mechanism capable of producing such consequences for one religious community could eventually be applied to another.

A modern "Purple Robe Incident"?

Mizuta compares the present controversy with the *Purple Robe Incident* of the Edo period, when the shogunate in 1627 intervened in disputes concerning religious authority and the appointment and recognition of Buddhist priests. Zen master Takuan Sōhō (沢庵 宗彭 – 1573–1645) and others opposed the government's interference.

Mizuta sees the present situation as a possible modern equivalent – a "Purple Robe Incident" today. He therefore asks why more religious leaders are not speaking out when the state intervenes so extensively in the affairs of another religious organization.

Literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎). Photo: Bitter Winter

Ogawa shares this concern. He questions whether a dissolution process should have consequences extending into such fundamental religious activities as conducting funerals. He also argues that if historical conduct can be scrutinized selectively across long periods of time, authorities could theoretically find reasons to investigate almost any religious tradition.

Both men are also concerned about the role of the media. Ogawa describes what he calls **"information magic"**: the ability of repeated reporting to amplify certain narratives while making other perspectives almost invisible. In particular, he argues that the voices of people who identify themselves as victims can receive extensive attention, while believers who remain committed to their religious community may receive much less.

A warning that goes beyond the Family Federation

The significance of Mizuta's intervention therefore lies less in defending every action of the Family Federation than in raising a constitutional and religious-liberty question: **What limits should exist on state intervention in religious organizations?**

For supporters of the Family Federation, the dissolution order is naturally experienced as a direct attack on their own religious community. Mizuta asks the broader question of what happens when the same principle is normalized.

A Buddhist temple, a Christian denomination, a new religious movement or another faith community may differ radically in theology and organization. Yet all depend upon some degree of protection from arbitrary state interference if freedom of religion is to have substantive meaning.

Mizuta and Ogawa ultimately appeal to religious leaders to

look beyond denominational boundaries. Their argument is that solidarity should not depend on whether one approves of another religion. Precisely because religious communities differ, they need principles that protect them all.

From this perspective, the Family Federation case is not merely about the fate of one controversial religious organization. **It is also a test of how far the Japanese state may go in determining which religious communities are entitled to exist as functioning institutions – and, consequently, of what religious freedom will mean in Japan in the future.**

See also part 1: Buddhist Priest Warns Japan 'Cult' Ban Risks All

***Text**: Knut Holdhus, editor*

***Featured image** above: The dissolution order reaching temples. Illustration: ChatGPT, August 2026.*

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