

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan Blatantly Robs Rights and Freedoms

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To the right: Tomihiko Tanaka, President of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, speaking at a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan on the afternoon of March 28 in Tokyo. To the left: Norishige Kondo



Family Federation leader slams dissolution order, claiming being robbed of assets represents being robbed of freedom of religion and human rights

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"Being Robbed of" Rights and Freedoms

Family Federation President Holds Press Conference at Foreign Correspondents' Club in Tokyo

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

Tomihiko Tanaka (田中富広), president of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), which was [ordered to be dissolved](#) by the Tokyo District Court, held a press conference on 27th March at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo.



Tanaka expressed his strong dissatisfaction with the court's ruling, stating, "It is extremely regrettable that our claims were not recognized." He reiterated his belief that there is no valid reason for the [dissolution](#) of the [Family Federation](#).

During the Q and A session, when asked whether the [organization](#) could continue its religious activities even without its corporate status, Tanaka responded,

"If it were only about freedom of thought, that might be true. However, freedom of religion also includes the right to preach and hold gatherings."

He emphasized that if the [dissolution](#) leads to the confiscation of the [organization](#)'s assets, "it would make it impossible for us to take action to protect our human rights."

He also pointed out that some local governments have declared a severance of ties with the [organization](#),

and stated,

"This situation goes beyond just religious freedom - believers are even being deprived of their right to live."

Regarding media coverage of the [organization](#), Tanaka argued that "some reports were distorted or maliciously presented", suggesting that biased information has spread throughout society.



Norishige Kondo, here speaking in Tokyo Sep. 10, 2023

Norishige Kondo (近藤徳茂), Deputy Director of the Legal Affairs Office at the [Family Federation](#) headquarters, who attended the press conference, explained that since the [religious organization](#)'s compliance declaration [See editor's note below] in 2009, the number of lawsuits has significantly decreased, a fact that was "clearly acknowledged" in the court's decision.

On the other hand, he criticized the ruling for including assumptions about "potential harm that may exist even if it is not visible," stating that it involved speculation in recognizing alleged illegal activities. He also expressed concern that the revocation of corporate status was carried out through a process with "sloppy standards", saying, "I feel a strong sense of unease about this."

[Editor's note: 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" (霊感商法) 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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the Dissolution Order Against the Family Federation

by Seishiro Sugihara, Professor Emeritus at Musashino Women's University

I find this deeply regrettable. It is the duty of judges to issue rulings that reflect the proper structure of society. They should have given more consideration to freedom of religion and the principle of separation of church and state.

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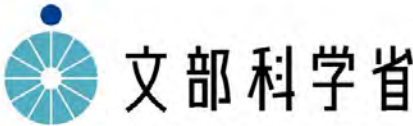
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Front page of 2018 English version of Religious Corporations Act of Japan.

Specifically, when it comes to supervising religious corporations, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) cannot act solely on the will of the Minister. Instead, it must go through deliberation by the Religious Corporations Council before requesting a dissolution order from the courts. This multi-step process is designed to make dissolution orders difficult to issue, aligning with the secondary purpose of the law.



Symbol of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan. Photo: 文部科学省 (MEXT Japan) / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int

Historically, dissolution orders have only been issued when a religious corporation has committed criminal acts. While civil violations are not entirely outside the scope of dissolution orders, they must meet strict conditions: repeated losses in civil lawsuits, continued civil disputes despite guidance from the supervisory authority (MEXT), and approval from both the Religious Corporations Council and the courts. Only under such circumstances should a dissolution order be issued.

The court proceedings regarding dissolution orders fall under **non-contentious cases** [See editor's note below], meaning they are a form of administrative action by the court rather than a public trial. Consequently, non-contentious cases are not held in open court, and closed-door deliberations are standard. However, if a religious corporation can be dissolved solely through a non-public administrative procedure, the affected organization – in this case, the former **Unification Church** – would be deprived of its constitutional right to a public trial under **Article 32 of the Constitution**, which guarantees the right to access the courts.

Thus, dissolving a religious organization through such a process must be deemed **unconstitutional**.

Given this, the Tokyo District Court, upon receiving the dissolution request, should have explicitly acknowledged the right to seek judicial review in a proper trial before issuing the dissolution order. Likewise, the former



The sign outside Tokyo District Court. Photo: FFWPU

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Unification Church, in response to the order, should immediately file a public lawsuit in the same court to challenge the decision.

Finally, regarding the [dissolution order](#) in this case, the statements submitted by the *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* (MEXT) from individuals claiming to be victims are poorly constructed, collected without a clear time frame, and severely [lacking in evidentiary value](#). Therefore, issuing a dissolution order based on these statements raises serious doubts from the perspective of evidentiary reliability. A public trial should be held where these statements submitted by MEXT must be disclosed, and the reasons for dissolution should be examined in a manner that allows the general public to be informed.

[Editor's note: 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.]

Featured image above: [Seishiro Sugihara](#) – Born in Hiroshima Prefecture in 1941. Earned a master's degree from the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Education in 1967. Previously served as a professor at Josai University and Musashino Women's University (now Musashino University). Author of *The Ideal Regulation of Church-State Separation and Constitutional Reform* (Jiyusha, 2015) and co-author of *The Disease Called Shigeru Yoshida* (Jiyusha, 2021), among others. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

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