

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan Becoming the Land of the Setting Sun

Knut Holdhus  
March 28, 2025



*Patricia Duval, French attorney and expert on international human rights law. She has defended the rights of minorities of religion or belief in domestic and international fora, and before international institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union, and the United Nations. She has also published numerous scholarly articles on freedom of religion or belief. Here, speaking at the International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington DC February 5, 2025*



[Sekai Nippo](#)

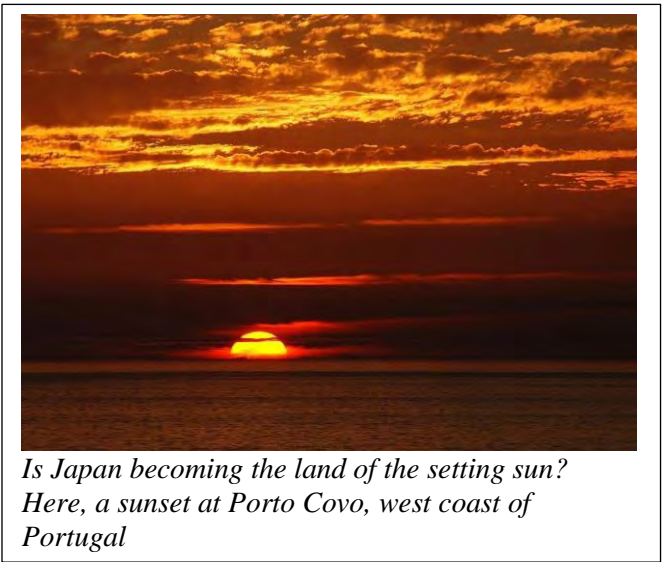
**Leading expert on international human rights law calls Tokyo District Court's dissolution order a "parody of justice", warning that Japan is rapidly becoming "the land of the setting sun"**

Tokyo, 27th March 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

"The Land of the Rising Sun Becomes the Land of the Setting Sun"

International Human Rights Lawyer Criticizes Tokyo District Court Over Dissolution Order for Family Federation

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



Following the Tokyo District Court's decision on 25th March to [order the dissolution](#) of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) at the request of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), French international human rights lawyer Patricia Duval contributed a comment to our paper titled, "Will Japan, the Land of the Rising Sun, Become the Land of the Setting Sun in Terms of Freedom?" She writes,

"The Tokyo District Court's decision is a 'parody of justice'. The ruling appears as though it was written long ago, and the trial itself was nothing more than a pretense of delivering justice. This is because the court ignored all the arguments put forth by the defense and made no attempt to address them in its ruling."

At the end of last year, cross-examinations of witnesses - selected from both the Ministry's side and the [religious organization's](#) side - revealed fabricated and distorted testimonies from the Ministry. Yet, the

court remained silent on this matter. Likewise, the court ignored the fact that many of the Ministry's witnesses had undergone abduction, confinement, and forced renunciation of faith, with testimonies dating back decades.



*Japanese judges using "reasonable inference" in order to dissolve religious minority organization even though there was no evidence for it*

The judges have made a "reasonable inference" [See editor's note below] despite the lack of evidence proving the "continuity" of unlawful acts. The court also remained silent on the violations of international human rights law, which I particularly emphasize. Even evidence provided by the defense - demonstrating that the religious organization refunded donations in good faith - was twisted by the court and used against the [religious organization](#) as proof of wrongdoing.

In this "I win, you lose" game, the [religious organization](#) has no chance of victory.

Despite the absence of any concrete legal violations or criminal acts, the Tokyo District Court ordered the dissolution of the [religious corporation](#) on grounds of "deviation from social norms" and "harm to public welfare". In other words, this amounts to "the [social exclusion](#) of a religious minority".

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**[Editor's note:** In a court case, "reasonable inference" refers to a conclusion that a judge or jury can logically draw from the evidence presented, even if it is not explicitly stated. It is based on facts, circumstances, and common-sense reasoning rather than mere speculation or guesswork.

A reasonable inference must stem from actual evidence introduced in the case, not just assumptions. In the above case, it is claimed that the judges use reasonable inference "despite the lack of evidence proving the 'continuity' of unlawful acts." And it is precisely the continuity of unlawful acts that is a key condition for dissolution. The judges appeared to have inferred a continuity that is not there, as there have been virtually no civil cases brought against the [Family Federation](#) since 2009.]

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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 27<sup>th</sup> 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&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."**



*Imbalanced scale of justice in dissolution case as solid claims by [Family Federation](#) were not recognized. Photo: 991joseph / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image](#)*

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 (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."



*Norishige Kondo, here speaking in Tokyo 10th Sep. 2023. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by [National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion](#)*

**[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

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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.]

**Featured image** above: To the right: Tomihiro Tanaka ((田中富広)), President of the Family Federation in Japan, speaking at a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan on the afternoon of 27<sup>th</sup> March in Tokyo. To the left: Norishige Kondo (近藤徳茂) Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀).

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