

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: FFWPU Files Appeal, Citing Speculative Japanese Court Verdict

Knut Holdhus
April 7, 2025



Norishige Kondo, Deputy Director of the Legal Affairs Office at the [Family Federation](#) headquarters, outside the Tokyo High Court answering questions from media after handing in the appeal documents on April 7, 2025

The Family Federation of Japan files appeal against Tokyo District Court's dissolution order decision described as preordained and speculative verdict



Sign outside Tokyo District Court

Press release issued by the public relations department of the [Family Federation](#) of Japan 7th April concerning the [appeal](#) to the Tokyo High Court of the [dissolution order](#) case lost in Tokyo District Court. See [original article](#) in Japanese.

On 7th April, [our organization](#) [filed an appeal](#) regarding the [decision](#) made by the Tokyo District Court on 25th March concerning the request for a [dissolution order](#).

Since being certified as a religious corporation 60 years ago, [our organization](#) has not been involved in a single criminal case. In terms of civil cases, only two instances over these 60 years have resulted in findings of unlawful conduct allegedly committed by [our organization](#).



Changing the law overnight:
Former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Here, at press conference August 14, 2024

However, in October 2022, then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida [overnight abruptly reversed](#) the government's previous legal interpretation overnight, declaring that civil law violations could also constitute grounds for dissolution of a religious corporation under the Religious Corporations Act as a "violation of laws and regulations".

We believe that dissolving a religious corporation based on such vague civil infractions should never be permitted. The series of actions by the government - from the exercise of the "right to question" to the petition for a dissolution order - are nothing short of religious persecution by the state, specifically targeting [our organization](#), and are in violation of the Constitution.

Before the shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the number of consultations received by consumer centers regarding [our organization](#) in 2020 and 2021 made up only about 0.003% of total cases. Moreover, the 32 civil rulings cited by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) as reasons for dissolution all pertain to donation-related cases from over 11 years ago, with the average time since the plaintiffs were proselytized being about 32 years.

Since our 2009 compliance declaration [See editor's note below], we have promoted internal reform, resulting in a reduction of over 90% in both the number of lawsuits and claims via written notices.

Complaints to the Consumer Affairs Agency have also become virtually nonexistent. There is no necessity for a dissolution petition, and even discussing the dissolution of [our organization](#) is purely a political move or pandering to public opinion.



Norishige Kondo (rear) and another [FFWPU](#) representative leaving Tokyo High Court after [delivering the appeal](#) documents April 7, 2025

The Tokyo District Court acknowledged that cases of misconduct have clearly decreased since our compliance declaration [See editor's note below]. Yet it went so far as to issue a [dissolution order](#) based on speculative recognition of unreported cases, thereby violating the principle of evidentiary trial. This [decision](#) seems to have reached a preordained conclusion, ignoring both facts and law.

Furthermore, the court ignored several critical facts: that more than half of the plaintiffs in the 32 civil cases were former members who left the faith under coercion, such as [abduction and forcible faith-breaking](#); that some of the statements by former members compiled by MEXT were [fabricated](#); and that testimonies by so-called "apostates" lack credibility.

The most noteworthy aspect of this [decision](#) is its blatant disregard for UN recommendations and violation of international law. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has issued three recommendations to the Japanese government, stating that religious expression should not be restricted on the grounds of "public welfare". Yet, Article 81, Paragraph 1, Item 1 of the Religious Corporations Act, which MEXT cited as the legal basis for the [dissolution order](#), includes "infringement of public welfare" as a requirement. Thus, using this provision as a basis for a dissolution order is a clear violation of these recommendations, and the Tokyo District Court's decision constitutes a direct breach of international law.

Following this [ruling](#), persecution against our churches and members has intensified. Democracy in Japan is under threat for the personal gain of a handful of politicians and bureaucrats, while the human rights and right to live of our believers, who are Japanese citizens, are being violated.

The judiciary's role is to make impartial decisions, regardless of political motives or public opinion pressures. We sincerely hope that the judiciary will not break the foundational principles of democracy - such as the rule of law and legalism - or assist in religious persecution in defiance of international law.

[Our organization](#) is committed to fighting with all our strength to prevent 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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Court ruling that threatens the legal and corporate status of the Family Federation in Japan. He described the decision as a case of religious persecution, attributing it to xenophobia, distortions of the organization's donation practices, and broader violations of human rights.

The ruling, if upheld on appeal, could lead to the dissolution of the Family Federation as a legal entity in Japan. Such a consequence would potentially allow the government to seize a large number of properties held by the religious organization and confiscate donations made by everyday members, raising deep concerns about the future of religious freedom in the country.

Dr. Balcomb used the BBC platform to voice the organization's concerns and to clarify the mission and beliefs of the Family Federation. He gave a concise overview of the movement's founding principles, its spiritual orientation, and the important role it plays in the lives of its members around the world.



Demonstration against unjust and xenophobic verdict against the Family Federation in Japan. Here members in Karatsu City on the southern island of Kyushu protesting 30th March 2025. Photo: FFWPU

The controversial court decision has sparked considerable media attention both within Japan and internationally. As the case unfolds, many religious freedom advocates and observers are closely watching the implications it may have, not only for the Family Federation but for minority religious groups across Japan. Dr. Balcomb's BBC interview served as a critical opportunity to share the federation's side of the story and challenge narratives that he argues misrepresent the group's values and intentions.

Here is what Dr. Balcomb said,

"Of course, we think to appeal this decision because we think it's a serious mistake and that it's in contravention of the conventions on Human Rights and Freedom of Religion.

We think the real reason here is connected to lingering xenophobia and even racial prejudice among the Japanese people against Koreans, where our church originated.

The Family Federation was founded in 1954 by the Reverend Sun Myung Moon in South Korea in answer to a personal call from Jesus Christ and now led by his widow, Hak Ja Han.



Encouraging strong marriages. Here, a Family Federation couple, with their distinct Blessing rings, holdig hands. Photo: FFWPU

We call her 'Holy Mother Han'. We're a biblical faith and perhaps unique in our teachings, we teach that God is both Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother. Our focus, frankly, is on encouraging strong marriages and families because we believe that it's in marriage that we come to resemble God.

We do encourage our members to donate. Of course, all religions do that. We don't accept the Ministry of Education's explanation in Japan that this is excessive, or it is forced. They quote about 200 cases, but we'd have to remember that we have several hundred thousand

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members in Japan so, at most, we're talking about one tenth of 1%, over a period of about 25 years.

If I could put it in scriptural terms, Jesus said that [God](#) leaves 99 to save the one. Of course, as a pastor, I am sorry that any people who [donated](#) leave unhappy, but the [church](#) has never been accused of any crime, and I believe this is a case of religious persecution. The assassin of Shinzo Abe, [Tetsuya Yamagami](#), was never a member of our community and I think it's absurd that his crime should be laid at our feet."

Text: Knut Holdhus

Featured image above: Dr. Michael Balcomb 1st January 2025 and the BBC Radio 4 logo, which is a [public domain](#) image.

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