

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Steinar Murud's news columns on Japan's blatant persecution of FFWPU

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Steinar Murud preaching in Oslo, Norway November 13, 2022

National Christian paper in Norway publishes FFWPU response to coverage on Japanese dissolution case



An article by Steinar Murud, chairman of the [Family Federation](#) in Norway 2008-2022, written in response to a news report issued by NTB, Norway leading press agency, and printed in several news outlets. Murud's response was first published in Norwegian in the online edition of the Christian newspaper Dagen (The Day) 8th April. Steinar Murud now serves as the [Family Federation](#)'s representative on the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Oslo.

Verdict Against the Family Federation: A Violation of Religious Freedom in Japan

An NTB news report titled "Japanese Court Orders Dissolution of Controversial Religious Community" was published in Dagen on Tuesday, 25th March. The report states that the [religious community](#) may continue as before but loses its registration as a religious organization and its tax-exempt status.

However, the legal process behind the dissolution has received little attention, and the consequences of such a dissolution are being severely underestimated.

Numerous human rights advocates dispute the [verdict](#) from the Tokyo District Court. A religious community that has not committed criminal acts cannot be ordered dissolved. Civil disputes do not qualify for dissolution. The [verdict](#) is a serious violation of religious freedom.



Sent formal UN request to Japan, but no reply: Nazila Ghanea, UN Rapporteur on Religious Freedom since February 2023

A dissolution represents a "death sentence" where the authorities not only remove the [organization](#)'s religious registration but may also confiscate all funds and properties and introduce legislative changes that hinder parents from passing on their faith to the next generation. In addition, dissolution brings immense social stigma.

The Japanese government's rejection of a request from Nazila Ghanea, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, to visit Japan and make her own assessments points to a questionable process.

Several problematic aspects led to the government's request for dissolution and the [court's verdict](#) on Tuesday, 25th March:

An investigative committee composed of declared opponents of the [Family Federation](#).

Manipulation of the Council for Religious Organizations, where each member was individually visited at home by the ministry to create consensus for dissolution.

Use of partially [falsified evidence](#). The ministry has recently been reported for specific incidents.

Use of court proceedings behind closed doors, without access for the defendants.

Instead of investigating the assassin, the [Family Federation](#) was made the scapegoat. Right after the assassination, a press conference was organized by a network of lawyers who are activists on the political left. This legal network has long aimed to eliminate the [Family Federation](#) due to the [faith community's](#) criticism of totalitarian and atheistic communism.

Claims from the press conference quickly spread through the media and shaped public opinion. This put pressure on the government. The matter rapidly turned political, benefiting the lawyers network and the Japanese Communist Party, while harming the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) and the [Family Federation](#).



Aaron Rhodes

Aaron Rhodes, former president of the International Helsinki Federation, stated on 31st January 2023,

- It is deeply regrettable that Japanese authorities, instead of defending religious freedom, have listened to popular prejudice and propaganda generated by the Communist Party and quasi-legal groups to delegitimize the [Family Federation](#), aiming to make it impossible for the religious community to operate and to eliminate its presence in Japan.

Haruhisa Nakagawa, president of Japan's Christian Theological Institute, confirms the same,

- I did research on the [Family Federation](#) for 25 years from a negative perspective. However, I have now decided to send a letter

to the court requesting not to dissolve the [Family Federation](#). The main reason is that the information presented to the public deviates so much from what I personally have observed.

Last year, four UN special rapporteurs sent a letter of concern to the Japanese authorities regarding the unusual measures Japan is taking to limit parents' ability to pass on their faith and traditions to their children.



Seishiro Sugihara pointing out that legal process against [Family Federation](#) is unconstitutional

Professor emeritus Seishiro Sugihara of Musashino University, author of the book "The Ideal Regulation of Church-State Separation and Constitutional Reform", said the following about the legal process,

- If a religious organization is dissolved without an open trial, according to Article 32 of the Constitution, the process is clearly [unconstitutional](#).

The methods and legal changes implemented over the two and a half years since the assassination of Shinzo Abe have been criticized by many. Political motives seem to play a larger role than considerations of religious freedom. The verdict sets a precedent that may affect any religious community solely because of civil disputes. The [verdict](#) will be [appealed](#).

Dagen pointed out,

"This is an opinion piece. The article reflects the author's personal views."

Dagen also mentioned,

"For simplicity, we use '[Family Federation](#)'. The full and proper name is [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#). The community is also known as the Unification Church and formerly the Unified Family."

Translated from Norwegian. Dagen published the photo of Dr. Seishiro Sugihara.

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On 7 April, the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) filed an **immediate appeal** with the **Tokyo High Court**, opposing the **Tokyo District Court's decision to order its dissolution**. This is the first **dissolution order** based on a “wrongful acts according to civil code”, and the [religious organization](#) had previously indicated its intention to challenge the ruling.

In a statement, the [organization](#) said:

“The **dissolution order** is a predetermined conclusion that disregards both law and facts.”

Norishige Kondo (近藤徳茂), Deputy Director of the [religious organization's](#) Legal Affairs Office, spoke to reporters in front of the Tokyo District Court, emphasizing that the court's finding of unlawful acts was based on **presumptions**, rather than proven facts:

“This is something that must not happen in a democratic society. We have no choice but to fight to the very end.”

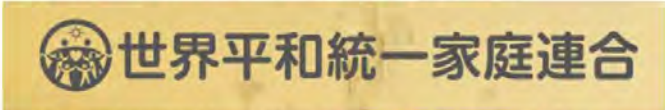
He stated that the **written reasons for the appeal** would be submitted **within two weeks**, adding:

“We will take our time to thoroughly respond.”

In its 25th March [verdict](#), the *Tokyo District Court* stated that “an unprecedented, massive scale of harm had been caused,” concluding that those acts constituted the “violations of the law” that are the legal requirements for dissolution set out in the *Religious Corporations Act*.

Related Articles:

- 1. [Certain Appeal: Unprecedented Dissolution Order](#)
- 2. [Critics Warn Japan of Dangerous Legal Precedent](#)



Logo from header of website of [Family Federation of Japan](#), where [statement about appeal](#) in dissolution case was published. See [original statement](#) in Japanese.

Excerpt from the [Statement](#) Issued by the [Family Federation](#):

- Before the shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍 晋 三), the number of consultations received by consumer centers regarding [our organization](#) in 2020 and 2021 made up only about 0.003% of total cases.
- 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.
- The group strongly opposes what it calls an **unnecessary request for dissolution**, stating that even discussing the group's dissolution is merely **a political maneuver or pandering to public opinion**.

The *Tokyo District Court*, while



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Japanese judges using “speculative reasoning”, instead of evidence-based, in order to dissolve religious minority organization. Illustration.

Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 6th January 2025.

acknowledging the **clear decline in incidents** since the compliance declaration [See editor's note below], nonetheless ruled based on **speculative reasoning** about potential undisclosed cases – an action that the **Family Federation** says **clearly violates the principle of evidence-based trials**.

“This **decision** seems to have reached a preordained conclusion, ignoring both facts and law.”

According to the **statement**, following the court decision, **persecution against the organization's churches and believers has intensified**, threatening **Japan's democracy** and **violating the human rights and right to life** of its followers – Japanese citizens.

The **Family Federation** concludes with a warning:

“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.”

[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” (靈感商法) 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.]

Featured image above: Norishige Kondo (近藤徳茂)– left – Deputy Director of the Legal Affairs Bureau of the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification**, responds to questions from the media on the morning of 7th April in Kasumigaseki, Tokyo. Photo: Keizo Mori (森啓造)

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