

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Corrupt Lawyers Move to Seize All Japanese Church's Assets

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Scene from the Suginami Church Bazaar in November 2023



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Accused of overstating victim claims, activist legal groups press for full liquidation of Family Federation's assets as day of verdict in appeal hearings draw closer

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[Series] Where Will the Believers Go? The Issue of the Family Federation's Dissolution and Its Corporate Facilities (Church Properties) (Part 4)

Review of Asset Liquidation Has Begun

The Moves of National Network of Lawyers "Must Not Be Allowed"

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)



Entrance to the Suginami Church of the [Family Federation](#) - Suginami Ward, Tokyo, Japan

See part 1: ["Liquidation Is Like Being Robbed of Our Assets"](#)

See part 2: ["No Freedom of Assembly If State Seizes Church"](#)

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The Suginami Church of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) holds charity bazaars two to three times a year. Part of the church's parking lot, visible from the street, becomes

part of the venue, and local residents regularly participate, making it a lively festival-like event.

Before each bazaar, church members visit about 200 homes in the surrounding area to distribute flyers asking for donations of goods. A female believer in her 60s, recounting her experience, said,

"In most cases, people accept the flyers kindly."

She explained that ever since the church moved into its owned building 15 years ago, they've made an effort to foster good relationships with the community, aiming to be an "open church".

However, in July 2022, after former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) was fatally shot during an election campaign speech, reports emerged that the suspect's mother was a member of the [religious organization](#). This caused a sense of alarm to arise within the [organization](#). On 31st August of that year, right after the Liberal Democratic Party declared it was severing ties with the [organization](#), nuisance phone calls began to come in. Loudspeaker vans from right-wing groups also blasted critical messages. These disturbances soon subsided.

But in March of this year - two years and eight months after the assassination - the Tokyo District Court issued a [dissolution order](#) for the [Family Federation](#). The [organization](#) immediately [appealed](#), and the case is currently under review at the Tokyo High Court.



Meanwhile, on 28th May, the Agency for Cultural Affairs held a meeting to consider procedures for asset liquidation after the dissolution. Topics under consideration include:

Investigating the [religious organization](#)'s financial status

Compensating victims of unlawful activities

Respecting the [religious organization](#)'s freedom of religion

Aiming to issue guidelines around the fall, Deputy Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Akio Fujiwara (藤原章夫), reportedly stated,

"The liquidator must consider both victim relief and religious freedom. I urge careful and specific deliberation."

However, in the lead-up to the Ministry's request for dissolution, the [religious organization](#) claims its side was not heard, nor was there any sign that the petitions gathered from believers were taken into account. Observing what they view as a one-sided dissolution process, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations (JFBA) issued on 20th February an "Opinion Paper Calling for Legislative Measures for Liquidation after the Dissolution Order", calling for legislative measures to enhance the authority of liquidators. On 25th February, they also held a joint study session with the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (Zenkoku Benren) at the House of Representatives' Second Office Building for Legislators.



Regarding these legislative efforts, lawyer Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹), who opposes the government's move to dissolve the [Family Federation](#), commented:

"This is an attempt to seize all the assets of the [religious organization](#). It must not be allowed."

The [Family Federation](#) has about 300 churches nationwide, and according to the [organization](#)'s public relations department, "the number of corporate locations (churches and training facilities) is 108." Each of these corporate churches was actually built by

grassroots believers who wanted to have their own church in the area where they live, rather than renting one, and who used donations to build it. For many, these churches embody their devotion.

The Ministry cited damages involving approximately 1,550 people and totaling 20.4 billion yen (including out-of-court settlements) as grounds for dissolution. The [religious organization](#) issued a compliance declaration [See editor's note below] in 2009, and a 42-year-old male staff member at the Suginami Church, who joined the [Family Federation](#) later, said:

"I believe the [religious organization](#) had shortcomings and caused harm in the past. But it's also true that the [organization](#) has changed and now values what society values. That gave me hope."

He also expressed the emotional significance of the [Family Federation](#)'s facilities:



Demonstration by young members of the [Family Federation](#) together with a Member of Parliament on 29th June 2025 in Osaka, protesting the authorities' attempt to dissolve the [religious organization](#) and seize its assets

"To active believers, the church is more than just a building. It's a place that replenishes their spiritual energy. If churches disappear, believers will be left adrift. We want people to understand that we need these churches."

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[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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“Seizing the Church Is Heartless”

Isehara: A New Church Built by Having Discussions

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of Sekai Nippo

See part 1: “Liquidation Is Like Being Robbed of Our Assets”

See part 2: “No Freedom of Assembly If State Seizes Church”

See part 4: Church Assets: Lawyers Move to “Seize Them All”



Location of the Isehara City (population ca. 100,000), located on the main island of Honshu. Illustration: Maximilian Dörrbecker (Chumhwa) / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp

Located in central Kanagawa Prefecture, Isehara City lies just north of Isehara Station, where one can see Mt. Ōyama spreading out from the Tanzawa mountains. This region has long been known for its strong grassroots religious traditions, such as pilgrimages to Mt. Ōyama since the Edo period.

About a 10-minute walk toward Mt.

Ōyama brings you to a white stone gate marked with the name of the “Isehara Church” of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly Unification Church). This building is one of the organization’s corporate-owned facilities.

In early June, around 60 believers gathered in the second-floor sanctuary for Sunday service. After the service, the preacher shook hands with each attendee, smiling and engaging warmly. The church, which has about 200 members, only had its dedication ceremony on 22nd September of last year. The long, narrow plot of about 250 square meters faces a busy road, and the three-story building – formerly housing banks and other offices – was renovated into a church facility.

Inside, a wall displays the names of contributors to the “Church Dedication Fund”. The nameplates show families and individuals who donated to transform the building into a church. Church staff member Tomihiko Horikawa (堀川富彦, 62) explained that contributions were made “within each family’s means, without overburdening anyone”. Over 100 people donated to help purchase the facility.

To build the new church, the Isehara Church formed a “Dedication Committee” in March 2023. After each Sunday service, committee meetings were held where 24 representatives of the congregation discussed details like the renovations to be made.

Teruo Yamazaki (山崎輝夫, 74), a believer who worked tirelessly as the committee chair, emphasized,



Family Federation Isehara Church – Isehara City, Kanagawa Prefecture. Photo: Arisa Takezawa (竹澤安李紗)

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"This church reflects the voices of believers – from the floor plan to the wallpaper. That's why we're deeply attached to it,"

The committee reportedly held more than 50 meetings to finalize the details.

The previous facility, used for over 30 years, was a rental property in poor condition, with cracked walls and the appearance of an abandoned building. Hana Sato (pseudonym, 28), a second-generation believer whose parents are members, said,

"It was the kind of place you'd hesitate to enter. Compared to that, the new, clean building is a world apart."

As a committee member, she also gave input on things like wallpaper design. When the new facility was completed, she said she was "truly happy" and smiled as she showed off the youth room where other second-generation believers gather – a room she feels especially attached to because her ideas were included.



*The fate of hundreds of thousands of believers and hundreds of church properties is the hands of judges in a Japan where [government prosecutors always win](#).
Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 6th January 2025.*

However, if the dissolution of the [organization](#) is decided, liquidation procedures will begin, and corporate assets will be frozen. During this process, religious activities in buildings registered under the corporate name will, in principle, be prohibited. Liquidation is expected to take at least one year, potentially several. Until a decision is made on whether the property will be sold, religious activities by church members will be restricted.

Sato expressed her sorrow, saying:

"Now, second-generation members gather in the youth room for lunch, spending more time together. We've gotten close enough to talk about things we never could before. Just thinking about losing this place is heartbreaking."

She added:

"Some say it's okay – we can meet somewhere else – but that's far from easy. There are things we can only do in this space, which belongs solely to us. Even without making specific plans, we can come here, relax, connect without worrying about time, people, or surroundings, and expand what we can do. This facility we poured our hearts into – built through so much effort – must never be taken from us."

There remains concern about whether the voices of second-generation believers – who chose their faith of their own will – will be heard. Yamazaki also raised his voice:

"If this facility, less than a year after its dedication, is taken away and sold, that would be a heartless decision that completely ignores the voices of the believers on the ground."

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Featured image above: Worship service in the newly renovated sanctuary of the [Family Federation Isehara Church](#) – Isehara City, Kanagawa Prefecture. Photo: Arisa Takezawa (竹澤安李紗)

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