

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Protesting Japan's Secret Trial of Unification Church

Knut Holdhus
July 15, 2025



Nozomi Kojima - center), representing the "Association of Second-Generation Members Protecting the Human Rights of Believers," and attorney Shinichi Tokunaga (right) hold a press conference on July 11, 2025 in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo



Young believers petition court and demand fair trial as they challenge lack of transparency in secretive proceedings behind closed doors

Tokyo, 14th July 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

"This concerns us"

Believers request to participate in non-contentious court proceedings regarding the dissolution of the Family Federation

by Takahide Ishii (石井 孝秀)

The Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#) reports,



Nozomi Kojima (2025)

"Amid closed-door proceedings at the Tokyo High Court regarding the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (MEXT) request to dissolve the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), eight believers [submitted a petition](#) to the Tokyo High Court on 10th July, requesting to participate as interested parties.

On 11th July, the eight held a [press conference](#) with their legal representatives, raising objections to the fact that such a significant outcome - losing their place of worship and potentially their jobs and livelihoods - could be decided in closed proceedings without their knowledge."

The eight individuals who took the stage at a venue in Uchisaiwaichō, Tokyo, are second- and third-generation believers, whose parents or grandparents are members of the [religious organization](#).

Representing the voluntary group "Association of Second-Generation Members Protecting the Human

Rights of Believers," Nozomi Kojima (小島希晶 - 29) reflected on how the Tokyo District Court's [decision to order the dissolution](#) of the [Family Federation](#) motivated them to search for ways to more actively participate in the legal process. Through this, they learned of a legal provision called participation as an interested party in non-contentious proceedings [See editor's note below], which allows those directly affected by a court decision to join the process.



The eight believers who [submitted a petition](#) to participate as interested parties, with their legal representatives

While preparing this petition, the association also launched a nationwide signature campaign calling for fairness and transparency in the trial. As of now, more than 35,550 people have signed. Kojima explained,



Attorney Shinichi Tokunaga

"The signatures keep coming in. Of course, we couldn't include everyone, so we limited the request to these eight people."

She also referred to reports suggesting that some of the evidence submitted by MEXT may have been fabricated, and added,

"There are many believers crying out for a just and fair trial. We want the court to protect freedom of religion and deliver a proper judgment."

The Tokyo District Court issued the [dissolution order](#) in March, and the [religious organization](#) immediately [appealed](#), sending the case to the Tokyo High Court. Attorney Shinichi Tokunaga (徳永 信一), representing the association, emphasized,

"Unlike the first trial, if the appeal court upholds the dissolution, all church property - facilities, religious tools used for rituals and worship - will be placed under the control of a court-appointed trustee. This will undoubtedly affect the believers."

He argued,



Attorney Kai Sasaki

"Any believer has a legitimate interest in the case."

It is unclear when the court will decide on the petition to participate, but even if it is rejected, the [religious organization](#) can appeal to the Supreme Court. Through this participation by interested parties, the young members hope to make the currently "closed-door" dissolution trial more transparent - by gaining access to case materials and calling witnesses separate from the church's legal team.

Attorney Kai Sasaki (佐々木海), who helped draft the petition, stated that their claims include:

The believers' freedom of religion is being violated.

Staff of the [religious organization](#) could suffer economic losses through dismissals.

The trial regarding the dissolution order should, under Article 82 of the Constitution, be open to the public.

In addition, some of the petitioners spoke about the damage and concerns they have experienced due to media "bashing" of the [religious organization](#) following the July 2022 shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三).

Makoto Imanaka (今中誠 - 29), a second-generation believer and employee of the [religious organization](#), shared how fears of dismissal due to the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) led him to apply to two recruitment agencies. One did not introduce him to a single company. The other did, but the prospective employer declined to proceed, citing concerns about potential recruitment into the [religious organization](#). Imanaka said,

"I couldn't accept the atmosphere and climate that have led to this. If I actually lose my job, a harsh reality awaits."



Miki Shiiba (椎葉実希 - 29), a second-generation female believer, recounted her anxiety while filling out daycare application forms for her four-month-old daughter at the time when then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄) declared the government would sever ties with the [religious organization](#). Because her mother-in-law, who lives with them, is a staff member of the [Family Federation](#), she hesitated to disclose her workplace for fear of denial of entry or backlash.

"I can't accept being told by the government that what I've believed in is wrong, without understanding why. I wanted to see the contents of the trial with my own eyes, and that's why I decided to be here."

The process leading up to the dissolution of the [religious organization](#) - including the Cabinet decision, Diet deliberations, the Religious Council of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, the use

of the right to question, and the request for a dissolution order - has not been made public. The eight believers' petition to participate as interested parties stems from a very basic desire: they simply want to know what is happening.

[**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.]

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Japan Exporting Repression: Global Ripple Effect

• July 14, 2025
• Knut Holdhus



Global warning issued as democratic Japan sets a dangerous precedent exporting its repression of faith minorities, a move already copied by less democratic regimes

“If a government can dissolve a religious group based on social stigma instead of criminal evidence, no minority is safe.”

(Continued from [first part](#))

Second part (final) of a speech by **Peter Zoehrer**, Journalist & Executive Director, **FOREF Europe** at



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the 8th annual conference of the European Academy of Religion (EuARe) at the University of Vienna. The speech was delivered on the 3rd day of the conference, on 10th July 2025, in a session on second-generation members of, and apostates from, new religious movements in Japan and elsewhere. The conference is a premier international forum for scholarly exchange on religion's role amid socio-cultural transformation. The European Academy of Religion is known as the major forum for academic research on religion and its relevance for society.



See part 1: [Urgent Need to Resist State-Led Persecution](#)

5. Real-World Consequences: The Human Cost



Second-generation members of the [Family Federation](#) protesting 6th May 2025 outside the Japanese parliament against the dehumanizing treatment inflicted on them by the authorities in league with militant lawyers. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Beyond the legal arguments and diplomatic implications lies a deeper human tragedy: the daily suffering of ordinary believers – especially among the second-generation – who have been scapegoated for a crime they had no part in.

Since the dissolution order was filed, [Church](#) [\[See editor's note below\]](#) members have experienced:

- Mobbing and bullying in schools and universities
- Rejected applications and blocked access to education
- Bank accounts frozen, car rentals denied
- Public venues withheld from use
- Marriages destroyed under social pressure
- Job interviews canceled after religious affiliation was revealed
- Social and interfaith exclusion
- And in some tragic cases, depression and suicide

You will soon hear the powerful video testimony of Seijin, a second-gen member whose life has been deeply affected by this campaign. His story reveals the silent emotional toll of being stigmatized and scapegoated by the state and media alike.

6. CCP Endorsement: A Chilling Signal

Shockingly, China's *Global Times* – a mouthpiece of the *Chinese Communist Party* – praised Japan's crackdown, calling it a "positive example" and encouraging other nations to follow suit. ¹

This endorsement comes from a regime known for:

- Cultural genocide in Tibet
- The internment of over a million Uyghur Muslims
- The banning of house churches, *Falun Gong*, and other groups



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Falun Gong protesters about to be arrested in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in the early phase of the persecution. Source: [Falun Dafa Information Center](#).

If the CCP applauds Japan's actions, something is gravely wrong. Democracies should never adopt tactics that win praise from authoritarian regimes.

7. The Copycat Effect: From Asia to Africa and Europe

The repercussions are global. Across Africa, at least five nations are now considering or implementing restrictions against minority religions.

In Rwanda, more than 5,000 Christian churches were shut down under the pretense of “public order”.² A regulation banning groups that reference a messiah has now passed.

Even South Africa is currently debating laws to monitor and potentially dissolve religious organizations deemed “controversial” or “harmful to public harmony.”³

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Logo of MIVILUDES

In Europe, especially France, government agencies like MIVILUDES – in coordination with FECRIS, a network of anti-cult organizations – have reportedly consulted with Japanese officials to explore similar strategies.⁴

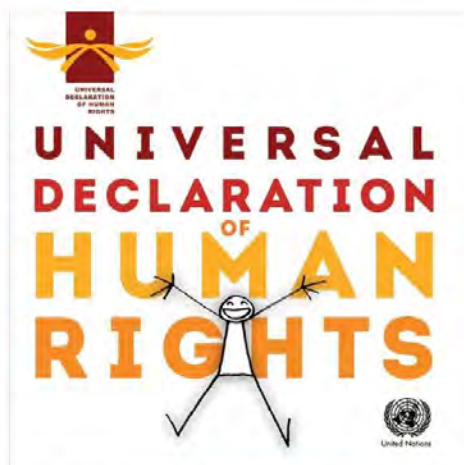
This is not religious reform. It is the spread of soft totalitarianism: where bureaucratic tools replace open repression, and religion is quietly erased under the cover of legality.

8. Why This Matters for All of Us

Let me be clear: this is not a theological debate. It is a matter of principle.

If a government can dissolve a religious group based on social stigma instead of criminal evidence, no minority is safe. Today it's the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note below] – tomorrow it could be another community.

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.”
– Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18



The front page of [illustrated version](#) of Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Illustration: UN

This right is not dependent on popularity, orthodoxy, or state approval. It is either universal – or it means nothing at all.

9. A Call to Moral and Academic Leadership

This university is a beacon of knowledge. This conference is a forum of conscience. So I appeal to you:

- **Academics:** Challenge the Japanese narrative with rigorous scholarship
- **Journalists:** Break the media firewall and restore balance to public discourse
- **Governments and NGOs:** Speak out clearly and courageously – before this becomes a global norm

The dissolution of the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note below] in Japan is not a routine legal measure. It is a dangerous precedent. If left unchallenged, it will become the template for religious repression worldwide.

Let us choose courage over conformity. Truth over propaganda. Let us protect freedom – before it's too late.

Thank you.

See part 1: [Urgent Need to Resist State-Led Persecution](#)

Footnotes:

1. "China's *Global Times* hails Japan's crackdown on the Unification Church," *Global Times*, Nov 2023.
2. "Rwanda closes thousands of churches," *Reuters*, March 2018.
3. FOR SA and South African religious freedom watchdog reports, 2024–2025.
4. Reports from CAP-LC, OSCE HDIM side events, and European Parliament Intergroup on FoRB, 2023–2025.

Featured image above: **Peter Zoehrer**, journalist and Executive Director of **FOREF Europe**. Here, in Tokyo, Japan in April 2023. Photo: **FOREF**

[Editor's note: Although Peter Zoehrer uses the word "church", please be aware that the Unification Church in Japan in 2015 changed its name to *Family Federation for World peace and Unification*.]

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