

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japanese system of abduction, faith-breaking and lawsuits

Knut Holdhus
December 22, 2025



New book reveals shocking Japanese system of abduction, confinement, faith-breaking and lawsuits, all orchestrated in order to get religious minority Family Federation dissolved

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[Interview Feature]

Is the Objective of the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales to Crush the Anti-Espionage Law?

Part 1 of Interview with Masumi Fukuda, Author of "A Sacrifice to the State"

by Susumu Fujihashi (藤橋進)



Masumi Fukuda promoting her latest book December 22, 2025

Questioning a series of developments and media coverage surrounding the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly the Unification Church), nonfiction writer Masumi Fukuda (福田 ますみ) pursued the truth behind them. Her book A Sacrifice to the State (Asuka Shinsha), which compiles and expands upon articles she serialized irregularly in the monthly magazine Hanada, has now been published. We spoke with Ms. Fukuda about her purpose in writing the book and her 1,200 days of reporting.

Abduction → Forced Renunciation → Lawsuits: Has this become a system?

A strong causal relationship with the dissolution order against the Family Federation

Interviewer: Special Editorial Committee Member Susumu Fujihashi (藤橋進)

– What was your objective in writing this book?

There are two central pillars to what I want to argue: abduction and confinement, and the true nature of

the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (全国霊感商法対策弁護士連絡会) – also simply known as Zenkoku Benren (全国弁連).



The front cover page of "Our Unpleasant Neighbors: The Tragedy of the 'Rescue' of a Female Believer from the [Unification Church](#)" by Kazuhiro Yonemoto (2008)



The reality of faith-breaking: Toru Goto, a member of the [Family Federation](#), in 2008, barely able to move after being held in forcible detention by his own family in league with professional faith-breakers for more than 12 years. Photo: Kazuhiro Yonemoto / [Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion](#)

I had known, from reading a bit of *Our Unpleasant Neighbors* by Kazuhiro Yonemoto (米本和広), that believers of the [Family Federation](#) were being [abducted, confined](#), and subjected to forced renunciation of faith (deprogramming or faith-breaking) [See editor's note below]. But I was shocked to learn that there were more than [4,300 victims](#). In the book I describe it as "unspeakably horrific", and through my reporting I learned that people suffered terribly – some sustained serious injuries while escaping, there were suicides, and even women who were raped. It was deeply shocking.

When I interviewed Toru Goto (後藤徹), who had been confined for [12 years and 5 months](#), I was even more astonished to hear from him that this had become a system. Believers who were [abducted, confined](#), and forcibly made to renounce their faith would then become "victims" and sue the [Family Federation](#). This became a recurring cycle. I felt this was something that had to be written about.

Then there is the true nature of Zenkoku Benren [National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales], which the mass media does not report at all. While wondering why they have so fiercely opposed the [Family Federation](#) for so long, I searched for materials at the Soichi Oya Library. There I came across articles in the May and July 1987 issues of the monthly magazine *Zenbo* titled "Political Activity Under the Guise of 'Victim Relief'" and "The True Aim of 'Crushing Spiritual Sales' Is to 'Crush the Anti-Espionage Law'."

I asked Toru Goto (後藤徹) whether he knew that the real objective of Zenkoku Benren, which claims to rescue victims of spiritual and fraudulent sales, was actually to block the enactment of an anti-espionage law. He said he did. I was stunned, and at the same time I felt a profound and hopeless gap in information between believers and ordinary citizens like myself.

– Attorney Hiroshi Yamaguchi (山口広), who later became secretary-general of Zenkoku Benren, served as one of the legal representatives for the Socialist Party in a defamation lawsuit that the International Federation for Victory over Communism won against the party. This lawsuit arose after the Socialist Party's newspaper, *Shakai Shinpo*, reported during the 1982 Levchenko Affair – when a Soviet KGB spy defected – that "Levchenko's testimony was a conspiracy by the International Federation for Victory over Communism and the U.S. CIA."

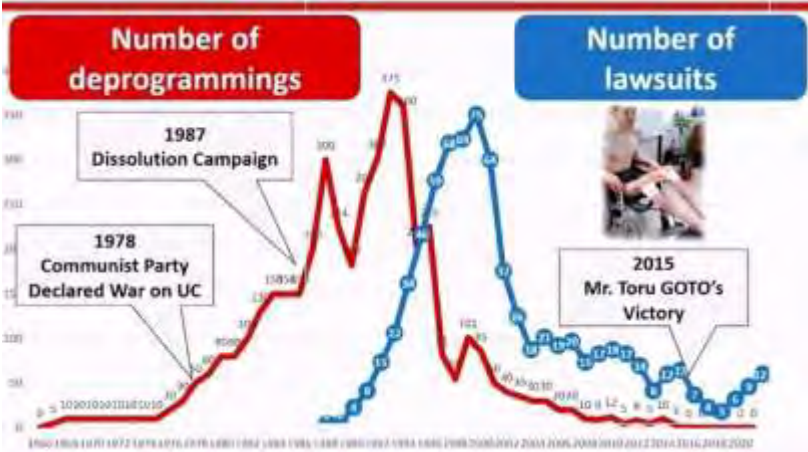
In an article dated 20th February, shortly after the February 1987 formation of the Lawyers' Network for Victim Relief from Spiritual Sales (Higaibenren), the predecessor of Zenkoku Benren, Yamaguchi stated in *Shakai Shinpo*:

"Ultimately, we want to pursue anti-social activities and demand that the Ministry of Education revoke religious corporation authorization."

Astonishingly, less than one month after Higaibenren was established, he was already saying they would demand the revocation of the [Unification Church](#)'s status as a religious corporation. By any measure, this is not a purely victim-relief activity. It is an ideologically driven political struggle aimed at crushing forces that seek to enact an anti-espionage law. Ordinary people know nothing about this. That was another reason I very much wanted to write this book.

– It is also largely unknown that more than half of the former believers who are pursuing the

[church](#) as "victims" were forcibly converted through illegal [abduction and confinement](#).



Strong proof of intentionally created court cases: correlation between number of deprogrammings and number of lawsuits. Illustration: Tatsuki Nakayama, lawyer



Hiroshi Yamaguchi (山口広), activist leftwing lawyer and founder and leading member of National Spiritual Sales Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS)As I wrote in the chapter "The Ministry of Education's Suppression of Speech", the linkage – after a short time lag – between [abduction and confinement](#) on the one hand and refund lawsuits on the other is immediately obvious if you look at the graph showing the relationship between the number of abduction victims and the number of plaintiffs.



Agency for Cultural Affairs

If abduction and confinement had somehow been eradicated, those people would not have emerged. More than half of the "victims" interviewed by the Ministry of Education were people who had left the [church](#) after being [abducted and confined](#). Ultimately, this means that [abduction and confinement](#) have a very deep causal relationship with the Tokyo District Court's [decision ordering dissolution](#).

– After FNN (the Fuji Television Network) reported this graph as a scoop, it is said that FNN executives were summoned to the Ministry of Education and reporters were temporarily barred from entering the ministry.

When FNN reported it, they did not properly explain the graph. So I think viewers probably did not really understand what it meant. Tetsuo Goda (合田哲雄), Deputy Commissioner of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, reportedly said,

"Do not air the church's one-sided claims!"

But this may have been the first time the four characters meaning "abduction and confinement" appeared in a standard news broadcast. That must have touched a nerve with Deputy Commissioner Goda.

– The Ministry of Education should, as an administrative body, be responsible for guaranteeing freedom of religion.

What proved to be the decisive move against the religious organization in the developments after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) was a series of statements by former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄). Before the incident, the Religious Affairs Division of the Ministry of Education (MEXT) functioned as a safeguard against Zenkoku Benren's demands for a dissolution order, because it was an agency tasked with protecting freedom of religion.

However, as if "crossing the Rubicon", the ministry shifted after Kishida's remarks. From that point on, in line with the prime minister's intentions, the Ministry of Education (MEXT) laid down the tracks and barreled ahead with the goal of dissolving the Family Federation.

See also [Rising Religious Persecution in SKorea, Japan](#)

[Editor's note: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members,

professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

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Rising Religious Persecution In SKorea, Japan

- December 7, 2025
- Knut Holdhus



A wake-up call to the free world: International solidarity needed against rising use of authoritarian tactics in democratic states against vulnerable minority faiths

A Dangerous Precedent: Japan's Assault on Religious Freedom and Its Global Fallout – 2

Part 2 of an address by Peter Zoehrer, journalist and Executive Director, FOREF Europe (Forum for Religious Freedom Europe), given at the plenary session on day one, 18th November 2025, of the CESNUR 25 Conference at the CTICC-1 (Cape Town International Convention Center 1) in Cape Town, South Africa. CESNUR is short for Center for Studies on New Religions, an international network of associations of scholars working in the field of new religious movements. The conference was co-organized by CESNUR, African Hidden Voices, African Forum for Religious and Spirituality Liberty (AFRSL), and International Society for the Study of New Religions.

See part 1: [Warning Signal from Japan: Dangerous Precedent](#)

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From a CESNUR conference 2025 poster

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Silencing the World: Deaf Ears to Global Appeals

This is not simply a Japanese domestic issue. A broad coalition of academics, constitutional scholars, ForB experts, former UN officials and civil-society networks have formally and publicly appealed to Japan to pause and reconsider its path. These appeals have taken the form of open letters, legal analyses, human-rights briefs and international pressure. Yet Tokyo has largely remained unmoved.

Through the *UN Special Rapporteur* [\[See editor's note below\]](#) on freedom of religion or belief at the Human Rights Council, Nazila Ghanea, the UN should be able to lead dialogue with Japan.



UN Special Rapporteur: Nicolas Levrat. Photo: OHCHR / United Nations



UN Special Rapporteur: Nina Romero. Photo: OHCHR / United Nations



UN Special Rapporteur: Farida Shaheed. Photo (2016): Wotancito / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped](#)

On 1st October 2025, four United Nations Special Rapporteurs [\[See editor's note 1 below\]](#) issued a [joint statement](#) from Geneva expressing “serious concern over Japan’s continued stigmatization of religious minorities.” The experts are: Nazila Ghanea – Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; Nicolas Levrat – Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Gina Romero – Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association; and Farida Shaheed – Special Rapporteur on the right to education. ([OHCHR](#))



UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom: Nazila Ghanea. Photo: GiovannaKa / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#)

Their concerns included discriminatory school-materials that portray religion as potential child-abuse, the misuse of the “public welfare” doctrine to justify broad restrictions, and the risk that religious minorities are penalised under vague legal standards. Japan was urged to revise its Q&A Guidelines, to cooperate fully with UN mechanisms, and to restore institutional equality for religious organisations under the law. ([Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan](#))



Belonging to a persecuted religious minority in Japan: A female believer at a street display for Jehovah’s Witnesses in Naha City, Okinawa, Japan 13th January 2025. Photo: Naha Mama Pavilion. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

When a democracy ignores international counsel, suppresses domestic dissent, and moves to dissolve a faith-organisation under administrative pretexts, we must ask: which model of democracy is in play?

Real-World Consequences: The Human Cost

Law and policy matter – but they are not just abstract; they affect real people. In Japan, following the dissolution request and the campaign against the [Unification Church](#) [\[See editor's note 2 below\]](#), members report:

- Bullying, exclusion and stigma in schools and universities due to religious affiliation.
- Frozen bank accounts, [denial of rental services](#) (cars, apartments, event-spaces) once affiliation is disclosed.
- Job interviews cancelled, job offers rescinded when the affiliation became known.
- Social ostracism, exclusion from inter-faith networks or public-forum engagement.
- In some cases, depression and even [suicide](#) among individuals feeling isolated, stigmatised and abandoned. ([bitterwinter.org](#))

Now let us widen the lens to include South Korea. On 22nd September 2025, the leader of the global Unification Movement, Dr [Hak Ja Han](#) – age 82 – was reportedly [detained](#) by South-Korean investigators in a case involving [alleged bribery](#) tied to the wife of former President Yoon Suk-yeol and senior lawmakers.

What is striking is that the detention came while she was medically vulnerable: she had recently undergone heart surgery in early September 2025 and is reported to suffer from impaired eyesight and diabetes. Her detention in the context of fragile health is not a mere legal act – it is a warning. It signals that leadership of a minority faith can be targeted, not just membership. When affiliation or leadership becomes a liability, freedom is at risk.



Hak Ja Han, also called Mother Han or Holy Mother Han. Photo: FFWPU

CCP Endorsement: A Chilling Signal

The situation becomes even more worrying when authoritarian regimes applaud these democratic actions. The Chinese-Communist-Party-linked tabloid *Global Times* [hailed Japan’s dissolution](#) of the [Unification Church](#) [\[See editor's note 2 below\]](#) as a

“positive example” and called on other nations to follow suit.

The irony is profound. The same regime is actively engaged in the mass internment of Uyghur Muslims, suppression of underground churches, banning the Falun Gong movement and controlling religious life in Tibet and elsewhere. That a dictatorship would cheer a democratic country's suppression of a religious organisation should send alarm throughout all free societies. If authoritarian regimes applaud such moves, then we must recognize we may be sliding not into overt repression, but into a new form of state-approved religion or state-controlled belief.

Continued in [part 3](#).

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Featured image above: Peter Zoehrer, journalist and Executive Director, [FOREF Europe \(Forum for Religious Freedom Europe\)](#), speaking, here 4th July 2025 in Vienna, Austria. Photo: Tony Cook

[Editor's note 1: A Special Rapporteur (or Independent Expert) is an independent human rights expert appointed by the United Nations (UN) to provide reports or advice on human rights issues from either a thematic or country-specific perspective. These experts are selected by the UN Human Rights Council and operate independently of any government, playing a crucial role in monitoring the actions of sovereign nations and democratically elected governments.

Special Rapporteurs do not receive financial compensation from the United Nations for their work. However, they receive support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and are often funded by charities and corporations. Annually, they convene in Geneva to discuss common issues, coordinate their efforts, and engage with various stakeholders, including states and civil society organizations.

These experts frequently conduct fact-finding missions to investigate human rights violation allegations in different countries. In addition to these missions, they regularly review complaints from alleged victims of human rights abuses. If a complaint is verified, they send an urgent letter or appeal to the concerned government. Even without a specific complaint, Special Rapporteurs can intervene on behalf of individuals or groups at their discretion.]

[Editor's note 2: Although Peter Zoehrer uses the name “Unification Church” and also 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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