

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japan Confiscates 260 Churches - Parishioners Barred

Knut Holdhus
March 6, 2026



The Japanese headquarters of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly the Unification Church) in Shibuya, Tokyo, where a court-appointed liquidator has entered. March 4, 2026



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Family Federation believers voice rights concerns as access to hundreds of churches blocked by state after dissolution order

Tokyo, 5th March 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Family Federation: Believers Anxious After Being Barred from Facilities

Guidelines State, "Use Should Be Permitted"

by editorial staff of [Sekai Nippo](#)

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A notification of closure by the liquidators, on the door of a [Family Federation](#) place of worship March 5, 2026 in Odawara (小田原市 - population 185,000), Kanagawa prefecture, Japan

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Following the [Tokyo High Court's decision](#) ordering the dissolution of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), liquidation procedures began on 4th March. A court-appointed lawyer acting as a liquidator has taken control of the [religious organization's](#) assets in order to compensate victims of "donation-related damages".

Believers have expressed shock that religious activities were restricted immediately.

According to reports, a team numbering in the hundreds of personnel has been organized to investigate roughly 300 churches nationwide. Soon after the [High Court's ruling](#) was issued, the liquidator entered the [religious organization's](#) headquarters, and staff members were no longer allowed to enter the premises or conduct religious activities such as worship services.

Liquidators simultaneously entered church facilities across the country. On social media, members of the [Federation](#) posted comments such as:

"We can no longer enter our church."

"Our place of prayer has been taken away."



Nozomi Kojima, representative of "The Second-Generation Association for Protecting the Human Rights of Believers", here speaking at a press conference on 26th March 2025 in Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan

Nozomi Kojima (小嶋希晶), head of the Association of Second-Generation Believers for the Protection of Believers' Human Rights, wrote the following on her X (formerly Twitter) account:

"When I passed in front of the headquarters just now, there was a notice posted. As soon as the result was announced at 11 a.m. today, liquidators came to churches nationwide all at once and closed them.

There was even a website prepared - when did they start preparing all this?

We were told that only the corporate status would disappear and that our religious life could continue unchanged, but that's completely different. We cannot enter the church, and we cannot hold worship services. All staff are prohibited from religious activities. We can't do anything anymore."

Guidelines issued by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in October 2024 regarding the liquidation of designated religious corporations state:

"When managing or disposing of the assets of a corporation under liquidation, the liquidator should, insofar as it does not interfere with liquidation duties, and taking into account the degree of necessity, permit believers to use facilities and otherwise give consideration to the freedom of religion of believers belonging to the religious organization that currently exists."

"When managing or disposing of the assets of a



Oze Cemetery, owned by the [Family Federation](#), in Katashina Village, Gunma Prefecture, Japan

However, the guidelines also note that if liquidation procedures continue for a long period, the use of facilities may be restricted. This could significantly affect believers' religious practices, raising concerns that the freedom of religion guaranteed by the Constitution may be undermined.

On 5th March, a liquidator also entered the [Oze Cemetery](#), owned and managed by the [religious organization](#) in Katashina Village, Gunma Prefecture. Restrictions that had been feared - such as limits on funeral ceremonies, memorial services, and grave visits - are beginning to become a reality.

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Constitution: Dissolution Requires Public Trial

March 5, 2026 • Knut Holdhus

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Legal expert says it is unconstitutional to hold closed proceedings in dissolution case against large religious minority Family Federation



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Ignoring the Right to a Public Trial, Procedures that Violate the Constitution

Commentary by Seishiro Sugihara, Former Professor at Musashino Women’s University

by Seishiro Sugihara (杉原誠四郎)

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Just as with the [Tokyo District Court’s decision](#) last March, the biggest problem with the [Tokyo High Court’s recent dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#) is that it was issued without granting the right to a public trial based on Articles 32 and 82 of the Constitution, and instead was handled as a closed, non-contentious case [\[See editor’s note below\]](#). **The dissolution of a religious corporation – an action equivalent to a death penalty for an individual – was carried out without the public trial required by the Constitution. This clearly constitutes a constitutional violation and is a matter of grave concern.**



Front page of 2018 English version of Religious Corporations Act of Japan.

It is true that the *Religious Corporations Act* stipulates that court proceedings regarding dissolution orders requested by the executive branch are to be treated as non-public, non-contentious cases [\[See editor’s note below\]](#). However, the original intent of this provision in the *Religious Corporations Act* was **to prevent the executive branch from recklessly issuing dissolution orders against religious corporations**. For that reason, the law requires the executive branch to request a dissolution order from the court and obtain the court’s judgment before such an order can be issued.

In other words, this system assumes circumstances in which a religious corporation has engaged in actions violating the criminal law and the criminal penalties have already been finalized, or when acts have repeatedly been recognized as unlawful in court judgments. Only when such situations have occurred and the organization still fails to correct its conduct despite administrative guidance – when the grounds for dissolution are already clearly evident to anyone – does the government then petition the court, after which the court issues a dissolution order. Because the grounds are already obvious in such cases, the proceedings may be handled as a non-contentious case [\[See editor’s note below\]](#).

In the present case, however, the *Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* requested the dissolution order merely by collecting reports from individuals claiming to be victims. **No verification was conducted as to whether the reported harm actually existed**

as fact, nor whether – although it might subjectively be perceived as harm – it could **legally be recognized as an unlawful act**. Without examining any of these issues, the matter was treated as a closed, non-contentious case [\[See editor’s note below\]](#) based solely on victim reports collected by the Ministry from **people identifying themselves as victims**, and a dissolution order was then issued. **This decision clearly ignored the right to a public trial and is plainly unconstitutional** in terms of procedural



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Requested dissolution order merely by collecting reports from individuals claiming to be victims: The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan. Here, its symbol. Photo: [文部科学省 \(MEXT Japan\)](#) / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#)

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that and is plainly unconstitutional in terms of procedural fairness.

Furthermore, regarding this dissolution order, **reports about alleged damages have been circulating that are difficult to accept unless one assumes that all donations made to the [Family Federation](#) should be interpreted as harm.** Many related parties have also made comments readily affirming such claims as damage. However, **the principle that donations made based on religious faith cannot be treated as harm should be included in the discussion.**

What is currently being described as “damage” represents an **expansive**



Giving donations included in expansive definition of harm. Here, a woman offering donation at a Sunday service. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 21st January 2025.

interpretation of harm. If such reasoning is allowed, then **other religious organizations should also be criticized under the same standards.** Yet in reporting on this dissolution order, references to other religious groups have not been permitted, and the mass media has shown a clear tendency to direct attention exclusively toward the [Family Federation](#). This too **runs counter to the principle of fairness in a state governed by the rule of law,** and one could say that with the [Tokyo High Court’s decision](#) to issue the dissolution order, a kind of “darkness at high noon” has occurred.

If the type of criticism now being directed at the [Family Federation](#) – premised on the assumption that dissolution must occur – were applied to other religious corporations, it is likely that a very large number of them would become targets. Nevertheless, no mention whatsoever is made of other religious corporations, while severe criticism is directed solely at the [Family Federation](#). This contradicts the fairness of the law, and it would not be unreasonable to say that **this decision was based on the arbitrary judgment of the presiding judges.**

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Featured image above: Seishiro Sugihara (杉原誠四郎), former professor at Musashino Women’s University and expert on issues of freedom of religion and constitutional law. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

[**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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