

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japanese Court Accused of Speculation

Knut Holdhus
March 14, 2026



Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto, here speaking at a press conference in Tokyo September 8, 2023



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Main attorney for persecuted religious minority accuses recent Tokyo High Court ruling of violating evidence-based adjudication, using speculation to justify dissolution order

Tokyo, 13th March 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Inference-based rulings of unlawfulness disregard human rights

"Contrary to the Principle of Evidence-Based Trials," Says Family Federation Attorney

by editorial staff of [Sekai Nippo](#)



The building housing Tokyo High Court and Tokyo District Court

Following the [decision](#) on 4th March by the Tokyo High Court to dismiss the [appeal](#) in the case concerning the dissolution order against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)), attorney Nobuya Fukumoto (福本修也), representing the appellants, released his opinion on 12th March on his law firm's website and other platforms.

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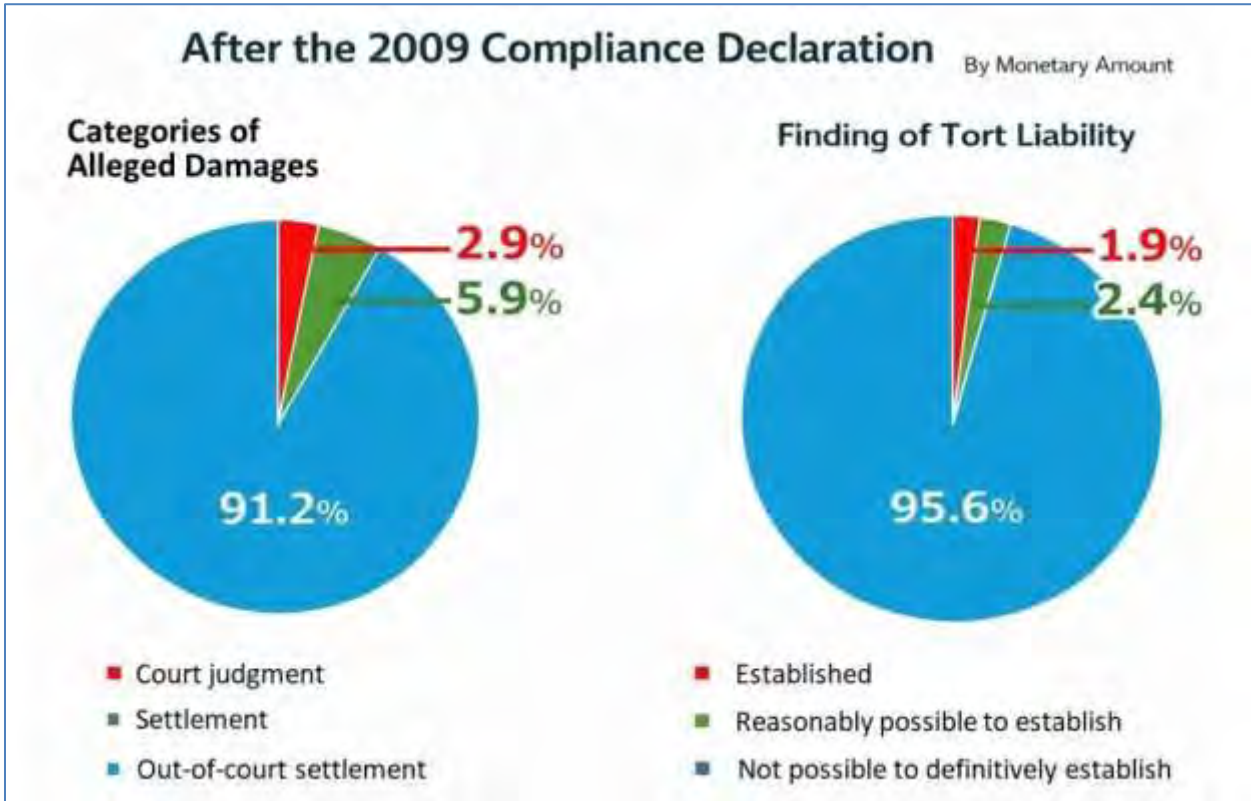
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Fukumoto strongly criticized the [ruling](#), stating that it "disregards the freedom of religion and human rights of more than 100,000 believers and has effectively handed down a death sentence to a religious corporation based on 'delusions' not grounded in fact."

Fukumoto argued that the [High Court's decision](#) essentially followed the [ruling issued by the Tokyo District Court](#) in March last year. He said the ruling recognized tort liability based solely on abstract speculation without identifying specific unlawful acts, and therefore "further deepened and expanded the serious defect of violating the principle of evidence-based adjudication."

In October 2023, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology petitioned the Tokyo District Court to dissolve the organization. The ministry cited 32 civil judgments recognizing tort liability as well as settlement cases, claiming that donation-related damages totaled about ¥20.4 billion (around 1,550 victims).

The Tokyo District Court determined that more than 1,500 people suffered damages totaling approximately ¥19.4 billion between around 1980 and 2009.



Pie charts showing the causes of damages after the [Family Federation's](#) compliance declaration (left) [See editor's note 1 below] and the determination of tort liability. English version aided by ChatGPT.



Furthermore, according to international lawyer Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹), since the [religious organization](#) issued its "Compliance Declaration" [See editor's note 1 below] in 2009, out of 144 individuals alleged to have suffered damages in relation to large donations and similar matters, tort liability has been recognized for only four people (one through settlement), or 2.8%.

In monetary terms, about ¥18.6 million out of approximately ¥957 million in alleged damages - 1.95% - was found to involve tort liability. Settlements were reached with 132 individuals. Nakayama stated that it is clear that damages have drastically decreased since the compliance declaration [See editor's note 1 below].

The [High Court decision](#) itself acknowledged that "it cannot be definitively determined" that unlawful acts occurred due to lack of facts and evidence, while simultaneously stating that "the possibility cannot be denied."

Fukumoto criticized this reasoning as internally contradictory, saying:

"The court piles inference upon inference until it somehow arrives at a definitive recognition of unlawful acts, and then uses that conclusion to emphasize the necessity of a dissolution order. Such reasoning completely departs from the fundamental structure of judicial proceedings in a rule-of-law state."

Nakayama also pointed out that it is difficult to claim that there were acts clearly recognized as "seriously harming the public welfare".

As for the background behind what he called "the adoption of unjust logic", Fukumoto suggested two factors:



The courts were influenced by a strong social climate (public opinion) demanding that the [Unification Church](#) be destroyed, leading to a conclusion-driven judgment.

Because the proceedings were conducted as closed-door non-contentious proceedings [See editor's note 2 below], the court was able to push through reasoning that would never be accepted in ordinary civil litigation.

On 9th March, the [organization](#) [filed a special appeal](#) to the Supreme Court.

It plans to challenge the [ruling](#) on the grounds that the [High Court decision](#) contains serious legal problems, including violations of the Constitution and international law.

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[Editor's note 1: 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](#).]

[Editor's note 2: 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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Final Legal Avenue: Special Appeal Filed

March 13, 2026 • Knut Holdhus

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Claim of religious freedom violation raised in Supreme Court appeal over dissolution as Family Federation believers pursue final avenue in the Japanese legal system

The Japanese daily [Sekai Nippo](#) reported on 10th March on the latest development in the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the Unification Church). The [paper](#) writes,



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Preparations Underway For Supreme Court Appeal

March 8, 2026

“The [religious organization](#) filed a special appeal with the Supreme Court on 9th March, challenging the [Tokyo High Court's decision](#) that ordered its dissolution.

The [liquidation process](#) – such as compensation to victims of donation-related “damages” – being carried out by a liquidator appointed by the Tokyo District Court will continue.



The logo of the [Sekai Nippo](#)

Because of the [High Court's ruling](#), the dissolution order has already taken effect, and the [religious organization](#) has already lost its legal status as a religious corporation. However, if the Supreme Court overturns the [dissolution decision](#), the effect of the dissolution would be suspended, and the [liquidation procedures](#) would stop.

As of 10th March, the [religious organization](#) has not issued a comment. In the statement of reasons for the special appeal to be submitted to the Supreme Court, it is expected to argue that the ‘violation of laws and regulations’ – a requirement for dissolution under the *Religious Corporations Act* – does not include torts under civil law, and that the [dissolution order](#) infringes upon the constitutionally guaranteed ‘freedom of religion’.”

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In Japanese procedure, a special appeal (特別抗告 – tokubetsu kōkoku) is a very limited appeal to the Supreme Court used when a party claims that a lower court decision violates the Constitution or involves a serious legal error. It is not a normal appeal about facts or evidence.

In many procedural matters (including certain civil rulings and non-trial decisions), once the High Court has ruled, there is normally no ordinary appeal left. The only remaining route is a special appeal to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court will usually consider it only if the appellant claims a violation of the Japanese Constitution, or a serious procedural/legal defect in the decision.

The Supreme Court generally does not re-evaluate evidence or factual findings. It reviews constitutional or legal interpretation issues only.

The Supreme Court rejects most special appeals quickly, often without detailed reasoning.

According to the [Sekai Nippo article](#), the [religious organization](#) plans to argue that the [dissolution order](#) violates “freedom of religion”. This may be seen as strategic because freedom of religion is protected by Article 20 of the Constitution of Japan. Constitutional claims are one of the few valid grounds for a special appeal.

So the argument the [Japanese daily](#) describes is essentially that the [dissolution order](#) violates constitutional protections for religious freedom. That gives the many believers of the [Family Federation](#) a procedural doorway to the Supreme Court.

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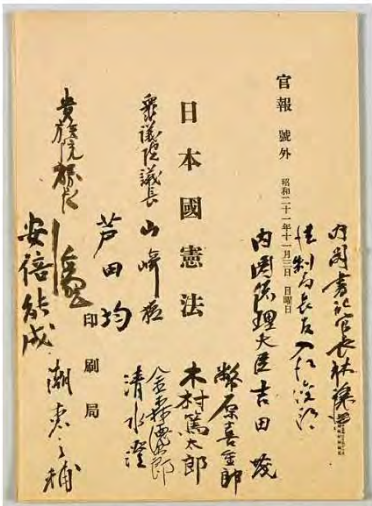
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Such a special appeal is not unusual procedurally, but rarely successful. Parties frequently file a special appeal after losing in the High Court when no ordinary appeal remains. However, the Supreme Court accepts only a very small fraction. Most are dismissed summarily.

Even though the legal mechanism of this case is common, the subject matter is highly unusual. The dissolution of a religious corporation in Japan is extremely rare. It raises constitutional questions about religion and state authority.



Shinzo Abe in March 2022, few months before he was assassinated. Photo: United States Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

The case is connected to the political and social fallout after the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三). That context is why the appeal has drawn substantial attention.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: the Grand Bench of the Japanese Supreme Court, the highest judicial panel, consisting of all 15 justices, which handles critical constitutional issues, landmark cases, and changes to legal precedent. It sits at the top of the Japanese judicial system to ensure consistent interpretation of the law. Photo: Tetsu2266 / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain](#) image

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