

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Protest Japan's Minority Faith Banning Policy

Knut Holdhus
March 20, 2026



From the demonstration in front of the Japanese embassy in Washington DC March 19, 2026.

Freedom of religion in focus as protesters rally at Japanese embassy in Washington DC over Japan's religious crackdown on large minority faith

If you stood among the crowd in front of the Japanese Embassy in Washington, D.C., on 19th March - listening to the testimonies, watching families stand together, hearing prayers rise into the air - you would find it hard to reconcile what you saw with the narrative coming out of Japan.

These were not extremists or shadowy figures. They were ordinary people: families, young adults, spouses, and believers speaking openly about their faith. And yet, they belong to the very [religious movement](#) the Japanese government has asked the [courts](#) to dissolve.



From the demonstration in front of the Japanese embassy in Washington DC March 19, 2026

Roughly 500 demonstrators gathered that day, united by a shared concern: that Japan, a nation long regarded as a stable democracy, is now setting a dangerous precedent for religious freedom. At issue is the government's [request to disband](#) the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - formerly known as the [Unification Church](#) - a move critics argue is driven less by law than by political pressure, media campaigns, and activist litigation.

This is not simply a dispute about one religious organization. It is a test case. If a government can be swayed to dismantle a religious body under public and political pressure, what does that mean for the protection of minority beliefs more broadly?

The demonstration's timing underscored the urgency. On the same day, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi met President Donald Trump at the White House. While leaders discussed diplomacy and security, just blocks away, demonstrators appealed to a more fundamental principle: the right to believe, to gather, and to practice one's faith without fear of state intervention.



The demonstration at the Japanese embassy in Washington DC took place at the same day that Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi met President Donald Trump at the White House. Here, when they met in Japan on Oct. 28, 2025



Rev. Demian Dunkley, President of the [Family Federation](#) in the United States, speaking in front of the Japanese embassy in Washington DC March 19, 2026

Rev. Demian Dunkley, President of the [Family Federation](#) in the United States, addressed this directly in an open letter to Prime Minister Takaichi, calling for restraint and a reaffirmation of Japan's commitment to religious liberty. Dunkley read out loud,

"Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi,

I write to you as a faith leader who is deeply connected to Japan. The recent decision to [uphold the dissolution order](#) of the [Family Federation](#) has been so painful to our global faith family.

For many, this may appear to be a policy matter. For us, it is deeply personal. It affects real families, real communities, and people who have spent their lives trying to live for the sake of others.

For decades, Japanese members of [our movement](#) have quietly served around the world - with humility, discipline, and deep love. They have contributed to peacebuilding, humanitarian work, and the strengthening of families across cultures.

Prime Minister, these Japanese men and women have helped Japan shine globally.

I have worked alongside them. I have seen their sincerity. These are not people who weaken society - they are people who strive to uplift it.

Today, [our church](#) is asking for help.

Not for privilege, but for fairness. Not for exemption, but for understanding.

At stake is something fundamental: the freedom to believe and to practice one's faith without fear of being dismantled.



From the demonstration in front of the Japanese embassy in Washington DC March 19, 2026

In recent years, religious organizations around the world have increasingly faced dissolution. This moment extends beyond our own community and raises broader questions about how religious freedom is protected.

For many of our members, the impact has already been deeply felt. Decades of personal sacrifice and care were suddenly swept away when [hundreds of churches](#) and offices were closed in a single day.

Japan has long been respected as a nation that upholds dignity, stability, and human rights. The world is watching. The [decisions made now](#) will shape not only Japan's future, but its moral leadership on the global stage.

I ask you to consider the human side of this decision - the parents, the children, the grandparents. Families like mine. Families like those across Japan.

Respectfully, Rev. Demian Dunkley"

But perhaps the most compelling voices were those of the individuals whose lives are directly affected. Japanese believers spoke of a reality in which public gatherings have become impossible following the [closure of their places of worship](#). Others - spouses and second-generation members - gave voice to those who say they cannot speak freely in Japan today. Japanese believers shared personal testimonies, putting a human face on what demonstrators describe as an escalating crisis.

The organizers were deliberate in their tone. "This gathering is not about anger or confrontation," they stated. "It is about standing with our family of faith in Japan and reminding the world that religious freedom matters." And indeed, the demonstration was peaceful, measured, and resolute.

That restraint only sharpened the message.

Because what is happening in Japan should concern more than just one religious community. It raises a broader and more uncomfortable question: are democratic societies willing to uphold religious freedom even when it is unpopular, misunderstood, or politically inconvenient?

In Japan today, members of the [Family Federation](#) cannot gather publicly in the way their counterparts did in Washington. That contrast is striking. It is also telling.



More demonstrators across the street from the Japanese embassy in Washington DC March 19, 2026

Those who demonstrated in the United States did so not only for themselves, but for the hundreds of thousands of fellow believers in Japan who currently lack that same opportunity. Their signs, their voices, and their presence carried a simple but urgent appeal: that the international community pay attention before a line is crossed that cannot easily be redrawn.

Religious freedom is rarely lost all at once. More often, it erodes - case by case, exception by exception - until the principle itself is weakened.

The question now is whether this moment in Japan will be seen, in hindsight, as one of those turning points.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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Update On Trial Proceedings Of Mother Han (83)

March 19, 2026 • Knut Holdhus



Trial update on latest developments in Mother Han’s legal proceedings as the old and frail religious leader soon will have been kept detained in tiny cell for six months

A brief report on the progress of Mother Han’s trial and



하늘부모님성회
세계평화통일가정연합

From the header of the webpage of the Family Federation of South Korea. Screenshot

investigation, issued 18th March 2026 by the Culture and Public Relations Department of the Korean headquarters of the Family Federation for World peace and Unification. See the original report in Korean.

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This past week the schedule for [True Mother](#)'s trial (court hearings) and investigative proceedings continued and many members have joined in offering prayer and devotions. There were two sessions of the trial that is currently in progress, and an additional session of questioning by the joint investigation headquarters of the prosecutors and police. We are therefore offering this brief report to update members, who have been anxious.

Testimony by Former International Headquarters Director-General

The court sessions on Tuesday, 10th March, and Friday, 13th March, consisted of the prosecution's direct examination and the defense's cross-examination of the [former International Headquarters director-general](#). As you may already be aware, the [former director-general](#)'s statements to the prosecution [in court] and the special prosecutor [investigator] are currently considered virtually the only evidence supporting the charges against [True Mother](#). Accordingly, the examination process to assess the credibility of those statements carries greater significance than ever before.

Additional, regarding the issue of whether [True Mother](#) could be released on bail, the court has also stated it would "decide after reviewing the extent to which the evidence has been examined," creating the possibility that this period of questioning may serve as a critical turning point for future judicial decisions. From the court's perspective, there is also an unavoidable concern that key figures in the case could possibly be subjected to external influence, especially influence from the [organization](#).



Yoon Yeong-ho, *former director general of the international headquarters of the [Family Federation](#), here 11th February 2022. Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#)*

Developments During the Hearings

The defense team, recognizing that [True Mother](#)'s physical strength has greatly declined, have respectfully urged her, "[Mother](#), you must stay strong." As the [former director-general](#), in the process of deflecting or downplaying his own actions, is asserting that they were carried out under [True Mother](#)'s direction and approval, it was deemed necessary for her to participate directly in these sessions in case there may be a need for her to confirm something or respond to the testimony.



Min Joong-gi ([민중기](#)), *the head of an army of special prosecutors with extensive investigative powers. Image: Grok xAI, Jan. 2026.*

Throughout the hearings, the [former director](#) often refused to testify or declined to provide answers to questions regarding the core charges. He also made lengthy statements on other issues that offered a distorted view of the entire [church](#) as a group habitually engaged in unlawful or illegal acts. In particular, he went so far as to make statements that a person of faith would never make and which directly singled out [True Mother](#), including, "Nothing was left unreported," "Only the leader ([Mother](#)) can determine political objectives," and "Please ask the President ([Mother](#))."

Through her legal counsel, [True Mother](#) repeatedly and firmly declared, "Such things absolutely did not occur," and "There is no reason they would." As the hearings extended for hours,

the court periodically checked on the condition of [True Mother](#)'s health. Nevertheless, [True Mother](#) expressed her determination to remain until the end and attended the proceedings until they concluded after 8:00 PM.

Progress Report on the Joint Investigation

On Wednesday, 11th March, [True Mother](#) underwent a third round of questioning by the joint investigation headquarters of the prosecutors and police. This investigation, too, was prompted by statements the [former director-general](#) made to the special prosecutor and to the court. The 10th March trial session ended at 6:00 PM, the 11th March questioning at 5:00 PM, and the 13th March trial session extended past 8:00 PM. Despite the relentless schedule day after day, [True Mother](#) faced every step of the process with dignity.

Beloved members, this is a time when our prayers and devotions are needed more than ever. Though [True Mother](#) has asked, "Do not pray for me," we surely feel unable to cease our prayers. We earnestly ask all members to unite in prayer with one heart so that under Heavenly Parent's protection the truth may be revealed and [True Mother](#) may return home in health and at peace.

We pray that Heavenly Parent's grace will be with each family.

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Featured image above: [Hak Ja Han](#) being questioned during trial. Illustration: ChatGPT, 19th March 2026

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