

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japanese Government Secrecy in Family Fed Case

Knut Holdhus
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The unconstitutionality of dissolving a religious organization in secret. Illustration: ChatGPT



The Constitution of Japan

Japanese legal expert calls dissolution order legally void as he challenges the deliberately chosen secrecy of proceedings, calling it unconstitutional

On 20th March 2026, Japanese constitutional scholar Manabu Ishizaki (石崎学) shared a concise but pointed legal argument on [his personal X account](#) concerning the legality of the [dissolution order](#) issued against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - formerly the [Unification Church](#). Writing from the standpoint of constitutional law, Ishizaki challenges the procedural framework under which such dissolution orders are handled, arguing that it conflicts with fundamental guarantees enshrined in Japan's Constitution. His post distills a complex legal issue into a focused critique: whether the classification of dissolution proceedings as "non-contentious cases" [See editor's note below] can withstand constitutional scrutiny when fundamental rights are at stake.

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At the center of Ishizaki's argument is Article 82 of the Constitution, which establishes the principle that

trials must be conducted publicly. This provision reflects a core tenet of modern constitutional democracies - transparency in judicial proceedings serves as a safeguard against arbitrariness and ensures public trust in the legal system. However, under the Religious Corporations Act, proceedings related to the dissolution of religious organizations are directed to follow the Non-Contentious Case Procedures Act [See editor's note below]. This classification effectively removes such proceedings from the category of formal "trials", thereby exempting them from the constitutional requirement of public hearings.



X account of constitutional scholar Manabu Ishizaki 20th March 20, 2026



Constitutionally highly problematic proceedings against [Family Federation](#) were held behind closed doors in joint building of the Tokyo High Court, Tokyo District Court, and Tokyo Summary Court in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, Japan.

Ishizaki's critique hinges on the tension between this statutory framework and the substantive nature of dissolution orders. He argues that labeling these proceedings as "non-contentious" [See editor's note below] is a legal fiction that fails to reflect their real impact. Non-contentious cases are, by definition, matters that do not directly adjudicate the rights and obligations of individuals. Yet, a dissolution order against a religious corporation has profound consequences: it restricts the freedom of religious association, including the ability of a group to exist as a legal entity. This freedom is explicitly protected under Article 20 of the Constitution, making any state action that curtails it a matter of constitutional significance.

From this perspective, Ishizaki contends that dissolution proceedings are not merely administrative or procedural matters but are, in substance, adjudications of rights. They determine, in a final and binding manner, whether a religious organization may continue to operate. As such, they bear all the hallmarks of a "trial" as contemplated by Article 82. If this interpretation is accepted, then the current practice of conducting these proceedings behind closed doors becomes constitutionally problematic.

He further reinforces his position by invoking Article 82, paragraph 2, which explicitly mandates that cases involving the rights guaranteed in Chapter III of the Constitution must always be conducted publicly. Since freedom of religion is among those protected rights, any judicial or quasi-judicial process that directly affects it should, in principle, be open to public scrutiny. The implication is clear: the procedural route prescribed by existing law cannot override constitutional requirements when fundamental rights are involved.

Ishizaki's conclusion is that the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#) should be understood not as a routine administrative matter but as a constitutional adjudication requiring full procedural safeguards, including public hearings. The use of non-contentious procedures [See editor's note below], which are typically closed to the public, is therefore inappropriate in this context. It creates a structural inconsistency between statutory law and constitutional mandates, one that cannot be resolved simply by formal classification.

Consequently, Ishizaki argues that the [dissolution order](#), having been issued through a non-public process, violates Article 82 and

should be regarded as unconstitutional and legally void. He extends this reasoning to the appellate level, asserting that the Supreme Court, upon reviewing the case through a special appeal, bears the responsibility to correct this constitutional defect. Specifically, it should nullify the [Tokyo High Court's decision](#) on the grounds that it rests on an unconstitutional procedural foundation.

Ishizaki's post presents a tightly reasoned constitutional critique that calls into question not only a specific legal outcome but also the broader procedural framework governing state intervention in religious organizations.

Manabu Ishizaki (石崎学 - born 1968) is a Japanese constitutional scholar and professor in the Department of Law, Faculty of Law, Ryukoku University in Kyoto.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

[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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Demonstration at Okayama Station, Okayama City in Japan against the religious persecution members of the [Family Federation](#) suffer in the country. Photo: Sheepro

On 4th March, the [Tokyo High Court](#) [dismissed](#) the [immediate appeal](#) against the [dissolution order](#) of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#). As a result, a liquidator was appointed, and the [Family Federation](#) transitioned into a liquidating corporation. Consequently, the religious activities of its believers have been severely suppressed.

See also [Scholar Questions Secrecy in Dissolution Case](#)

A liquidating corporation cannot conduct any business other than liquidation. Since all [Family Federation](#) staff, including pastors, have become employees of the liquidating entity, they are no longer able to carry out religious activities – for example, officiating worship services or delivering sermons.

Believers are no longer allowed to enter [Family Federation](#) buildings. Guidelines established by the [Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology](#) in October 2025 regarding the liquidation of designated religious corporations state that “to the extent that it does not interfere with liquidation procedures, and taking into account the degree of necessity, consideration should be given to the freedom of religion of existing believers, such as permitting them to use facilities.” However, it is difficult to feel that such consideration is being shown by the liquidator.

Looking at this dissolution process, it is clear that there was a definite objective from the outset – namely, the complete destruction of the [Family Federation](#).

If there were problems, the administration should have issued corrective recommendations to the [corporation](#). Such provisions exist in the [Companies Act](#) and the [General Incorporated Associations Act](#). However, there is no such provision in the [Religious Corporations Act](#), allowing the authorities to immediately petition for dissolution. Since dissolving a religious corporation concerns freedom of thought, it should be the most restricted measure; yet it is easier to dissolve than companies, which represents a legal inconsistency.



Demonstration at Shibuya Mark City in Tokyo against the religious persecution members of the [Family Federation](#) suffer in Japan. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

The Ministry of Education exploited this inconsistency. The dissolution provisions of the [Religious Corporations Act](#) stipulate non-contentious case [\[See editor's note 1 below\]](#) procedures, which were also utilized to request the dissolution order. Considering that, simultaneously with the [High Court decision](#), [liquidators entered](#) nearly 300 churches nationwide, it is unavoidable to conclude that the dissolution policy had been predetermined, and that the state had carefully prepared for it.

While there are many issues with the [High Court's decision](#), I would like to highlight two points that further undermine democracy compared to the [Tokyo District Court's decision](#).

First, the [ruling](#) steps into doctrinal matters. Currently, the [religious organization](#) does not compel donations in any way. However, the High Court held that, because the [organization](#) operates based on doctrines that compel donations – such as past statements by its founder – it cannot be expected to exercise self-restraint regarding donations. If dissolution can be justified on the basis of doctrine, then freedom of both corporations and individuals could be suppressed based on ideology. This would effectively roll back modern democracy by more than a century.

Second, the [decision](#) states that the dissolution is necessary



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to prevent unlawful acts. The court's greatest difficulty was how to justify dissolving an organization that is currently causing no problems. Since its compliance declaration [See editor's note 2 below], the religious organization has improved dramatically, and the High Court could not prove a level of maliciousness warranting dissolution.

The Ministry submitted written statements from former believers as recent examples, but fabrications were pointed out, such as the inclusion of statements from members of other religious groups, making them unusable as evidence. As a last resort, the court devised the reasoning that "the necessity of ordering the appellant's dissolution lies not in remedying past damages, but in preventing its believers from engaging again in inappropriate donation solicitation in the future."



A Japanese member of the Family Federation spreading the word on 15th March 2026, even though the religious organization had been dissolved by the authorities 11 days earlier. Photo: FFWPU

Dissolution of a religious corporation extinguishes a legal entity with rights and obligations; if compared to a natural person (自然人 = a human individual, in legal terminology), it is equivalent to the death penalty. Even if a person has a criminal record, would they be sentenced to death for past crimes if they are currently causing no problems? It must be said that this High Court decision is outrageous, as it fundamentally denies the principles of democracy.

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Featured image above: Hiroshi Ogasawara, founder of the Association to Protect Japanese Families, on 12th March 2026. Screenshot from video by Hiroshi Ogasawara.

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[Editor's note 2: 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" (靈感商法) 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.]

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