

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japanese Politician's Flawed Reasoning for Backing Torts

Knut Holdhus
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Hiroshi Kurose: Born in 1951 in Hiroshima Prefecture. Completed a master's program in legal philosophy at the Graduate School of Law, Waseda University, in 1975. He graduated from Tokyo Theological University in 1978, completed advanced studies at Seinan Gakuin University's Faculty of Theology in 1979, and graduated from the Zurich Baptist Seminary in 1984. He currently serves as pastor of Tokyo West Baptist Church. His major publications include A New Development of Christianity (Good Time Publishing)



Religious leader points out faulty reasoning of politician with "anti-cult" viewpoints who served as government advisor urging it to redefine the rules and include civil law violations

Tokyo, 30th May 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Part 1a of opinion contribution by Hiroshi Kurose, Pastor of Tokyo West Baptist Church

"It Is Rash to Conclude That 'Laws and Regulations' Includes the Civil Code"

Response to Shiori Yamao in the June Issue of Monthly Hanada

by Hiroshi Kurose, Pastor of Tokyo West Baptist Church

On 4th March 2026, the Tokyo High Court [upheld the dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)). It had previously been [issued by the district court](#). [Liquidators](#) are currently seizing and liquidating the [organization's assets and property](#).

See also [Warning of Dangerous Precedent: "Like Inquisition"](#)

Concerning this matter, I felt considerable discomfort with remarks made by attorney and former House of Representatives member Shiori Yamao (山尾志桜里) and literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎), chairman of the Japan Institute for Peace Studies, in their dialogue published in the June 2026 issue of Monthly Hanada, titled: "Great Clash Debate Series 4: Dissolution of the Former Unification Church - What Was Actually Judged?"

Accordingly, I would like to summarize my objections to Yamao's arguments (along with several other points).



Eitaro Ogawa, here on 19th Oct. 2025



The front cover page of the June 2026 issue of Monthly Hanada

First Issue: Does "Laws and Regulations" Include the Civil Code?

The first issue concerns Yamao's statement on page 44 of the magazine:

"The provision for dissolution orders in the Religious Corporations Act was established in 1951. At the time of enactment, the government understood the term 'laws and regulations' as a broad concept encompassing laws and ordinances. ... If it were intended to be limited to criminal law violations, the

statute would have explicitly stated so. Since it deliberately uses the term 'laws and regulations,' the natural reading is that it includes all laws and ordinances - not only criminal law but also civil law."



Vehemently opposed to the [Family Federation](#): Shiori Yamao, née Kanno, here in 2025. She is a former member of the Japanese House of Representatives, for the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) 2014-2016, the Democratic Party (DP) 2016-2017, Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) 2017-2020, and the Democratic Party for the People (DPP) 2020-2021. She became well-known for her fierce opposition to former prime minister Shinzo Abe

The question is whether, prior to the dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#), it was generally understood that the interpretation of "laws and regulations" included the Civil Code.

Yamao argues that because the Religious Corporations Act uses the expression "laws and regulations", which includes civil law, it is only natural that violations of civil law can serve as grounds for a dissolution order.

This explanation is misleading.

The Religious Corporations Act was enacted about seventy years ago. Naturally, the term "laws and regulations" used at that time included the Civil Code, but it was also an extremely broad term encompassing cabinet orders and local ordinances.

Yet Yamao has not even attempted to investigate why, throughout the subsequent history of the law, the interpretation that civil-law violations could serve as grounds for dissolution orders was never adopted.

The Religious Corporations Act was created primarily to grant legal personality to religious organizations. Accordingly, dissolution orders (Article 81) were not among its principal objectives, as is evident from the fact that they appear in Chapter 9, "Supplementary Provisions."

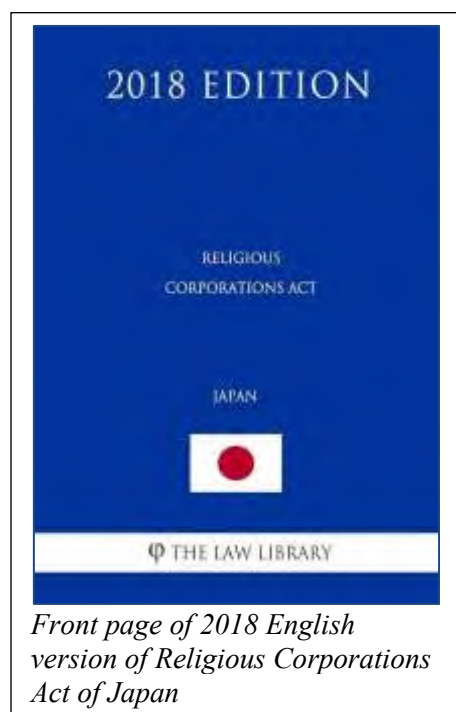
Why, then, were dissolution orders included?

Primarily because there existed religious corporations that had ceased activities. The provision was intended to enable the dissolution of such inactive entities lacking real substance. That is likely why the lawmakers chose the extremely broad term "laws and regulations" as a basis for dissolution.

However, because this provision was not meant to be casually applied to active religious corporations, strict limiting conditions such as "significantly" and "clearly" were attached as safeguards against excessive use of dissolution orders.

The first dissolution order against a religious corporation based on violations of laws and regulations was the 1996 dissolution order against Aum Shinrikyo [See editor's note below].

That case was fundamentally different from the type of dissolution originally contemplated by the Religious Corporations Act. One might question whether legislation such as the Religious Corporations Act was truly adequate for dealing with such a situation, but perhaps no alternative existed.



Application of the Subversive Activities Prevention Act was also considered. Ultimately, however, dissolution proceeded under the Religious Corporations Act, and the Supreme Court ruled that doing so did not violate freedom of religion.

Even afterward, no dissolution orders were issued for civil-law violations.

Given the statutory language concerning "violations of laws and regulations", one might have expected numerous dissolution orders, yet in reality there were none. Why was that?

Likewise, why have many legal interpreters maintained that civil-law torts do not qualify as grounds for dissolution orders?

Ignoring those interpretations and focusing solely on the words "laws and regulations" in order to argue that civil law should be included only in the case of the former [Unification Church](#) seems excessively simplistic.

See also [Warning of Dangerous Precedent: "Like Inquisition"](#)

To be continued. Part 1b coming soon.

[Editor's note: Aum Shinrikyo, a Buddhist new religious movement founded in 1984 by Shoko Asahara, preaching apocalyptic prophecies. It was dissolved in 1996 due to its leaders' criminal acts, including the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack in 1995 and the Matsumoto sarin incident in 1994.]

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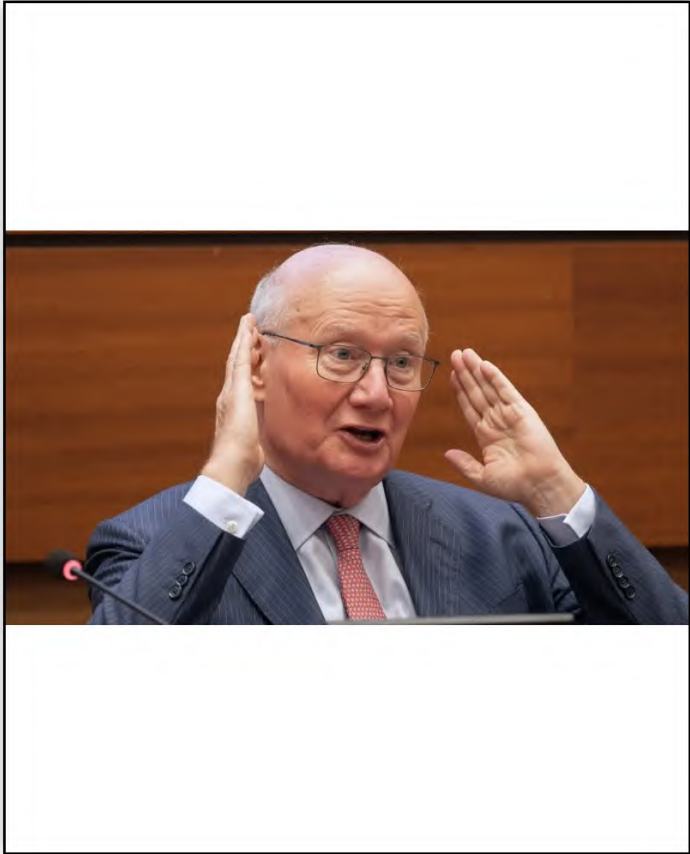












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on 28th March 2026, an [article](#) by sociologist of religion Massimo Introvigne examines the legal reasoning behind the [Tokyo High Court's endorsement](#) of the dissolution of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#). The [article](#) pays particular attention to accusations surrounding “spiritual sales” and substantial donations, exploring the courts' contention that such practices reflected psychological manipulation of believers.

See [part 1](#) of the opinion piece: [Civil Lawsuits as Weapons Against Religion](#)

See also [Flawed Reasoning of a Politician Backing Torts](#)

The [article](#) criticizes both the Supreme Court and the High Court for failing to explain convincingly why decades of established legal interpretation had suddenly been abandoned. Dr. Introvigne suggests that the reinterpretation of Japan's *Religious Corporation Act* appears specifically designed to target the [Family Federation](#). He further warns that such a precedent could affect many other religious communities in Japan, including organizations never accused of criminal activity but potentially vulnerable to civil lawsuits.



Reverend Shindō Mizuta (水田真道), chief priest of Kongo-ji Temple since 2014. Photo (2025): Sekai Nippo

Reverend Shindō Mizuta (水田真道), chief priest of Kongo-ji Temple, a Buddhist leader reportedly warned that the new interpretation threatens all religions and temples. The concern is that if civil claims become sufficient for dissolution, any unpopular religious movement might eventually face similar legal risks.

Another important issue discussed in the [article](#) concerns the High Court's treatment of settlements. Alongside civil judgments, the

court relied heavily on cases resolved through negotiated agreements. Dr. Introvigne argues that this approach is fundamentally flawed because settlements are not admissions of guilt. In legal practice, parties frequently settle disputes simply to avoid lengthy, expensive, or unpredictable litigation.

The [article](#) stresses that equating settlements with proof of wrongdoing undermines basic legal principles. It may also discourage religious organizations and other institutions from settling disputes in the future, since any compromise could later be interpreted as evidence of guilt in separate proceedings.

The High Court also addressed the [Family Federation's](#) argument that many plaintiffs in these cases were former members who had undergone deprogramming. The [religious organization](#) maintained that “anti-cult” lawyers and hostile Christian activists had encouraged parents to abduct and confine believers in attempts to force them to renounce their faith. According to the [Family Federation](#), some



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to the [Family Federation](#), some of these former members later became plaintiffs in lawsuits and settlements after developing deep hostility toward the [organization](#).



Dr. Hirohisa Koide, victim of kidnapping, forced detention, and attempted faith-breaking. Was pressured to sue the [Unification Church](#) after his coercive faith-breaking ordeal. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Dr. Introvigne notes that there are documented cases in which former believers allegedly faced pressure to sue the [faith organization](#) after coercive faith-breaking [[See editor's note 1 below](#)] experiences. Entire books and studies, he explains, have examined the relationship between faith-breaking (deprogramming), apostates [[See editor's note 2 below](#)], and “anti-cult” litigation.

The High Court rejected the [Family Federation](#)’s objections, arguing that if the plaintiffs’ claims truly lacked credibility, the [religious organization](#) would not have agreed to settlements. For the court, the very existence of settlements suggested that some wrongdoing must have occurred.

The [article](#) sharply criticizes this reasoning. Dr. Introvigne contends that settlements cannot reasonably be interpreted as confessions of guilt, especially in an environment where the [Federation](#) believed it faced widespread public hostility and judicial prejudice. In such circumstances, he argues, the [organization](#) may have considered settlement the only practical option regardless of whether allegations were accurate.

Ultimately, the [article](#) presents the High Court decision as evidence of a troubling shift in Japanese legal standards concerning religion. The [Family Federation](#) was dissolved despite the absence of criminal convictions against the [religious corporation](#) itself. Longstanding interpretations of the law were set aside, and civil judgments together with settlements were treated as sufficient proof of misconduct.

For Dr. Introvigne, this development raises broader questions extending far beyond one persecuted [religious movement](#). The case touches on the limits of state power, the protection of minority religions, and the danger that unpopular faiths may become vulnerable to political pressure and shifting public opinion. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the [Family Federation](#)’s theology or past practices, the [article](#) argues that the precedent established by the *Tokyo High Court* deserves careful scrutiny from anyone concerned with religious liberty and due process.

The debate therefore is not simply about donations or “spiritual sales” – a term coined by hostile activist lawyers. It concerns the standards by which democratic societies determine when a religious organization has crossed the line from protected religious activity into legally punishable misconduct. In the view presented by Dr. Introvigne, the [Tokyo High Court's decision](#) risks lowering that threshold in ways that may eventually affect many religious communities beyond the [Family Federation](#) itself.

See [part 1](#) of the opinion piece: [Civil Lawsuits as Weapons Against Religion](#)

See also [Flawed Reasoning of a Politician Backing Torts](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Dr. Massimo Introvigne, an Italian scholar specializing in the sociology of religion. He founded and serves as managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions, an international network of academics focused on the study of new religious movements. He has authored around 70 books and over 100 scholarly articles in this field. Here, speaking in Geneva, Switzerland 16th June 2025. Screenshot from video by UPF. Image resolution improved by Grok x41

[Editor's note 1: 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.
Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#).
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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.]

[Editor's note 2: Apostates here refer not just to someone who have left the religion, but who are now being used to **undermine** the group. Apostates in Japan are often being used by hostile and cynical lawyers for malicious reasons to cause harm to the faith they were forced out of, when they had their faith broken coercively by so-called faith-breakers (deprogrammers), working in league with activist lawyers.]

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