

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Pure Activism In Japanese Media

Knut Holdhus
September 4, 2023



Japanese media promoting pure activism for dissolution of the [Unification Church](#)

The Asahi Shimbun

Asahi Shimbun, a major left-leaning newspaper in Japan - followed by Japan Times, Japan Today, Yomiuri Shimbun and others - quoting unnamed sources, published 3rd September 2023 articles about the possibility of Japan seeking a court order to disband the [Unification Church](#). Leftwing Asahi wrote that such an order will be sought, other papers that it may or could be sought. Kyodo News pointed out that it remains uncertain.

Some media in the Western world have also picked up the story.



Fumio Kishida, Japanese Prime Minister, in 2020

There is not much new information in the reports. The dissolution option is commonly known from before. In fact, it is easy to conclude that the Asahi article may well have been published as pure activism in order to put pressure on the Japanese government to do something. The leftist Asahi has been campaigning for decades against a [Unification Church](#) known to have advocated a crystal-clear criticism of the ideological fallacies of totalitarian and genocidal communism.



The Soka Gakkai International flag

Judging by the many vicious attacks on the [Unification Church](#) by communists in Japan, or communist-initiated projects like National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, the [Unification Church](#), now called the [Family Federation](#), may indeed be the one religion that the communists fear the most.

They have not launched similar attacks on the Soka Gakkai new Buddhist movement behind the Komeito, the governing Liberal Democratic Party's coalition partner, even though the Soka Gakkai is much larger than the [Family Federation](#) and is much more heavily involved in Japanese politics.

The Japanese media quote unnamed sources close to the government in their pure activism articles. One obvious candidate behind the pure activism, disclosing the information, may well be Masaki Kito, fanatic

and uncompromising activist from National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, founded by communists.



Masaki Kito, anti-religious activist

In spite of his more than dubious background and having led numerous attacks on the [Unification Church](#) for years, he was appointed as an "expert" on the [Unification Church](#) to a committee to review "spiritual sales" under the Consumer Affairs Agency of Japan. This makes the entire examination of the [Unification Church](#) by the Japanese authorities biased.

It is easy to understand why Masaki Kito, and others, may be pushing for a dissolution to be ordered possibly already in October. They want it well before the court case against Tetsuya Yamagami begins at the beginning of next year. The proceedings there are likely to vindicate the [Family Federation](#), which to a large extent has been blamed for the assassination of Shinzo Abe 8th July last year. The case may also reveal that anti-cult activists influenced and even helped Yamagami to carry out his act of terror.

Dr. Michael Balcomb, President of the [Family Federation](#) of Europe and the Middle East, issued 4th September a statement on the articles,



Dr. Michael Balcomb

"We are aware that the courts in Japan are contemplating a dissolution order, and anticipate that they will conclude that religious freedom is too important a human right to be arbitrarily or capriciously removed.

We expect that the criminal case against Tetsuya Yamagami will reveal that the [Family Federation](#) is innocent of any connection to that tragic crime. We encourage the Japanese Government to allow that legal process to conclude, and not allow themselves to be pressed by the media into hasty actions in blatant disregard of the human rights of our community and, almost inevitably, those of others.

Experiences in other countries, and indeed in Europe itself, show that such attacks on religious freedom of one minority do not stop there, and may well spread to actions such as hate speech and violence against other religious groups, especially minorities."

14th June 2023, a letter was sent to the Japanese government, written by four academics and human rights activists, all leading experts on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). They urged the Japanese authorities to [halt the ongoing witch hunt against](#), and respect the rights of, the [Unification Church / Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU), a minority religion that has been constantly attacked by anti-cult activist lawyers.

In the letter, published 3rd July by [Bitter Winter](#), the online magazine for religious liberty and human rights, the four experts - Willy Fautré, Ján Figel, Massimo Introvigne, and Aaron Rhodes - "call for an end to what increasingly appears as a witch hunt".

Featured image above: Pressure on Keiko Nagaoka from anti-cultists. She is government minister for education, culture, sports, science and technology (MEXT). Photo (May 2023): U.S. Department of State. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

"Pure Activism in Japanese Media" - text: Knut Holdhus

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Call To End Witch Hunt

July 5, 2023 • Knut Holdhus

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Yoshimasa Hayashi
Photo: 外務省

Fumio Kishida
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Keiko Nagaoka
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4 leading experts ask Japanese government to stop witch hunt

Four academics and human rights activists, who are leading experts on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), wrote on 14th June 2023 a letter to the Japanese government, urging it to stop the current witch hunt and protect the rights of the **Unification Church / Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU)**, a religious minority that has been targeted by anti-cult activist lawyers. On 3rd July, **Bitter Winter**, the online magazine for religious liberty and human rights, published the **letter**.

In it the four experts



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– Willy Fautré, Ján Figel, Massimo Introvigne, and Aaron Rhodes – “call for an end to what increasingly appears as a witch hunt”.

The [letter](#) argues that the rights of [FFWPU](#) are denied by stigmatizing it as a “cult”, an expression used to demonize and persecute minorities. On 12th December last year, the European Court of Human Rights agreed that words like “cults” “should not be used in official governmental documents”.



Massimo Introvigne.
Photo: [FOREF](#)



Aaron Rhodes.
Screenshot



Willy Fautré.
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Jan Figel. Photo: Elekes Andor.
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Likewise, the experienced four experts, point out that the concept of “brainwashing” is a “pseudo-scientific concept used to reinforce the discrimination between ‘good’ religions, which allegedly do not use brainwashing to convert their new members, and ‘bad’ ‘cults’, which supposedly do.”

Those very concepts have been used in Japan to justify thousands of cases of “the criminal practice of deprogramming, where adult members of certain religious minorities were kidnapped, illegally detained, and submitted to various forms of violence until they gave up and agreed to abandon their faith.”



[Bitter Winter](#) published the letter

In their letter asking the Japanese government to put an end to the current witch hunt against the [Family Federation](#), the four experts also emphasize that media and anti-religious groups often rely on statements by “apostate” ex-members in order to attack certain faiths.

“Apostate” refers to a small number of ex-members who become militant crusaders against the movement they left. Scholars have, however, often warned that “apostates” have an agenda and “are not representatives of the majority of former members of a religion”. The letter written by the four scholars states,

“As in other similar cases, the campaign against the [UC / FFWPU](#) relies heavily on a few apostate ex-members. One goes under the pseudonym ‘Sayuri Ogawa’ and has been heavily promoted by the anti-UC Network and even introduced to Japan’s Prime Minister. As it has happened with other apostates, in its crucial and essential points her story is demonstrably false [...]”



Front page book cover of Sayuri Ogawa's book in Japanese.

The four writers of the [letter](#) have serious objections to how the Japanese authorities are handling the attacks on the

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Family Federation,

“Relying on apostates such as Ogawa is an example of dubious procedural practices or even respect for natural justice that are of deep concern in this case. It seems to us that testimonies hostile to the UC / FFWPU are systematically privileged, that militant opponents of the religious movement are included in official commissions dealing with it, and different opinions and testimonies are not seriously considered.”

The **letter** from the European scholars is addressed to Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, and Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology Keiko Nagaoka. It explains that since 1987, the attacks against the **Unification Church / Family Federation** have been orchestrated by National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales. The **letter** describes the intention of those lawyers,

“There is a significant journalistic and scholarly literature demonstrating that most of the lawyers who established the Network were politically motivated. They wanted to punish the **Church** and another organization established by the same founder, the International Federation for Victory over Communism, for its anti-Communist activities and its effective support to anti-Communist and conservative politicians.”

In their witch hunt, the same network of activist lawyers has been campaigning for years for the removal of the **Family Federation's** religious corporation status. The four scholars point out that the conditions for such an extreme measure “are simply not there”. The religious body has never been “found guilty of any criminal wrongdoing”.

The network of lawyers has, however, actively supported the serious crime of deprogramming. The **letter** to the Japanese government says,

“This obnoxious and criminal practice was actively supported by anti-**Unification Church** lawyers and continued in Japan from the 1970s to the Supreme Court decision of 2015 on the case of Toru Goto, a Unification Church believer who was detained by his family and the deprogrammers for more than twelve years. The enormous amount of violence and suffering involved in deprogramming should always be considered [...]”



*Activist lawyers caused great damage and suffering to **Unification Church** members. Here Toru Goto after 12 years of forcible detention. Photo: **FFWPU***

The experts on religious freedom also advise the Japanese authorities to learn from a similar witch hunt case in Europe in the 1980s,

“In a significant precedent, the British Government was unwise enough to base almost its whole case for the removal of the ‘charitable status’ (very similar to Religious Corporation Status in Japan) from The **Unification Church** in the United Kingdom, which it launched in 1984, at the behest of the ‘anti-cult movement’, on the testimonies of ‘apostates’ from the **Church**. Many of them had been subjected to having their faith forcibly broken by professional ‘deprogrammers’, and the great majority of them had been influenced by the anti-cult movement in the United Kingdom or in the USA.

When this phenomenon was exposed by lawyers representing the [Church](#), the government's case collapsed, and it was forced to withdraw it entirely and to pay the equivalent at today's prices of over USD 6 million in costs. The case also put an end to cooperation between the British government and anti-cultists and led to the decision to cooperate instead with academic scholars of new religious movements through an organization called INFORM."

The four European scholars urge the Japanese government to stop the witch hunt against the [Family Federation](#) and protect the freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) of all religious groups,

"The international FoRB community is watching what is happening in Japan, which represents the most serious FoRB crisis in a democratic country of our century. We hope that all organizations that support and defend FoRB in Japan and internationally would support our appeal. The liquidation of the [FFWPU](#) as a religious corporation would be a measure comparable to the actions taken against several religious minorities in China and Russia, and unprecedented in a democratic country.

It would also expose Japan to considerable international criticism. What is more, should the Japanese government proceed with this action, it will give cover to assaults on religious groups by authoritarian and totalitarian states around the world, undermining efforts by international human rights institutions to protect religious liberty."

Featured image above:

Photo of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida – license: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#),

Photo of Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi – license: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#),

Photo of Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology Keiko Nagaoka – license: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#).

"Call to End Witch Hunt" – text: Knut Holdhus

Read the [whole letter](#) in [Bitter Winter](#)

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Heavily Biased Japanese Reporting

July 11, 2023 • Knut Holdhus

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Heavily biased article by Kyodo News in Japan Times and Japan Today

The first anniversary of the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe 8th July 2022 received extensive media coverage. Much of it focused on Abe's accomplishments as the longest serving premier, 2006-2007 and 2012-2020.

Kyodo, Japan's leading news agency,



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had however quite a different focus. It becomes apparent already in the headline: "One year on, Abe assassination leaves controversial issues unresolved".



And the main "controversial issue" the news agency zooms in on, is Abe's and lawmakers' "ties" to the [Unification Church](#). And as Kyodo's bias dictates, the links are "dubious".

the japan times

The Japan Times was one of the papers that published the heavily biased Kyodo report. In an article 16th April this year, written by columnist Gearoid Reidy, the very same newspaper questioned the existence of those "ties", writing,

"For months, Japan's front pages and TV shows were dominated by links between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the [Unification Church](#)."

There was virtually no mention of the connections to other religious movements, even though the LDP's government coalition partner Komeito have open links to the new Buddhist group Soka Gakkai and was founded by its members.

The Japan Times then pointed out that media reports on the connection between the [Unification Church](#) and the Liberal Democratic Party

"frequently used the language of 'ties' between the LDP and the [church](#), which often meant little more than holding meetings or shaking hands.

A relentless barrage of stories focused on how senior politicians, including Abe, met with the church representatives, but failed to provide the context that politicians everywhere routinely associate with interest groups, particularly those with money."

The bias of the Kyodo piece is made obvious also by the word "cult" being used about the [Unification Church](#). Well-known Italian sociologist of religion Massimo Introvigne, by many considered the world's leading expert on new religious movements, has this to say,



Dr. Massimo Introvigne.
Screenshot

"A large majority of scholars of religions agree that there are no cults. 'Cult' is just a label used to discriminate against groups that powerful lobbies, for whatever reasons, do not like." (Quoted from the article [The Abe Assassination. The Word 'Cult' Is A Tool for Discrimination](#), published by [Bitter Winter](#), a magazine on religious liberty and human rights, 2nd Sept. 2022.)

The source of the heavily biased reporting becomes rather obvious when Kyodo mentions "lawyers", and one of them seemingly being opposed to "believers 'willingly' offering 'massive donations' to them [the [Unification Church](#)]."

The lawyers Kyodo is basing much of its content on, are of course [National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales](#), a network formed specifically by leftwing activist lawyers to destroy the [Unification Church](#).



Japanese award-winning investigative reporter Masumi Fukuda clearly reveals the origin of the activist lawyers' network,

"Almost all of the lawyers in the Network were affiliated with the former Socialist Party and the Communist Party, who strongly opposed

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Masumi Fukuda. Photo: FOREF

the enactment of the Anti-Espionage Law, were connected with extremist groups and North Korea, and

were ideologically leftists and self-styled atheists. In contrast, the former [Unification Church](#) is an anti-communist and conservative organization that opposes atheism. It is clear that this was an ideological battle between the two camps.

Attorney Hiroshi Yamaguchi also clearly stated, 'We want to make a big public announcement [about 'spiritual sales'] because it will be good for containing right-wing activities, especially for preventing the passing of the Anti-Espionage Law.'" (*The Truth About the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales*, article by Masumi Fukuda in the monthly magazine *Hanada*, republished in English in *Bitter Winter* 30th March 2023)

Kyodo echoes many false allegations from the network of activist leftwing lawyers. Standard network expressions repeated by Kyodo in its article, are "victims of controversial religious groups", "maliciously soliciting donations", "people pressured into purchasing", "depriving the organization of its status as a religious corporation", and "the [Unification Church](#) has violated laws and damaged public welfare".

Kyodo simply presents those activist lawyers out to destroy the [Unification Church](#), as "lawyers". Not a word is said about their origin, their extreme political views, their goal to have the [Unification Church](#), now called the [Family Federation](#), dissolved. Hiding such key facts puts Kyodo News in a really bad light. This is definitely not objective reporting, and looks suspiciously like heavily biased campaigning journalism to paint the [Unification Church](#) black.

Fukuda also writes,

"The Network would not hesitate to use all means to destroy the former [Unification Church](#). They are willing to tell all sort of stories, including lies, to achieve what they believe is a righteous purpose. They often throw the words 'anti-social' and 'cult' at the former [Unification Church](#), but considering their involvement in the abduction and confinement of believers, one may wonder whether they are not more deserving of these labels themselves." (*'Sayuri Ogawa': When 'Apostates' Slander the Unification Church. 5. Why the Story Is Not Believable*, *Bitter Winter* 6th March 2023)



The heavily biased Kyodo article claims that the [Unification Church](#) puts pressure on members to make large donations. This is one of the standard allegations from the network of activist lawyers. Above-mentioned Dr. Massimo Introvigne criticizes such a claim, saying,

"In its general principles, the [Unification Church's](#) theology of donations is surprisingly similar to its Catholic and Protestant counterparts. [...]"

Ultimately, the problem is theological and philosophical. For a believer, donations may be deep spiritual experiences. For an atheist, or somebody who believes that groups such as the [Unification Church](#) are not "real" religions, no caution would be good enough, and no donation would ever be recognized as the fruit of a free and reasonable choice." (*The Abe Assassination. Donations to the Unification Church: Separating Facts from Fiction*, *Bitter Winter* 3rd Sept. 2022)

"Heavily Biased Japanese Reporting" – text: Knut Holdhus

Featured image above: *Shidome Media Tower*, located in *Shiodome*, *Minato*, *Tokyo*, *Japan*. Floors 1–24 are the headquarters of *Kyodo News*, *Japan's largest news agency*.

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