

## FFWPU Europe & the Middle East: Claims in Tokyo - Government Acting Illegally

Knut Holdhus  
September 14, 2023



### Claims made at Tokyo press conference of Japanese government acting illegally



Tokyo headquarters of the [Family Federation of Japan](#)

In response to the 7th September 2023 announcement by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) that the [Family Federation](#) of Japan would be fined for not answering properly to questions from the ministry, the [Family Federation](#) held a press conference the day after, 8th September, at the national headquarters in Shibuya, Tokyo.

The press conference was attended by major Japanese news outlets like the Asahi Shimbun, NHK, Kyodo News, the Yomiuri Shimbun, Jiji Press, and many others.

Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto representing the [Family Federation](#) of Japan, opened the conference. He explained the Family

Federation's stance and how it will respond, stating,

"The exercise of the right to ask questions was carried out by the Government, by changing the interpretation of the law overnight. It does not comply with the guidelines for the exercise of the implementation of the right of questioning written in the Religious Institutions Act, article 78,2. We consider this to be illegal.



Masumi Fukuda in April 2023

Therefore, we consider that we are justified in not answering such illegally made questions, whether in part or in full. A fine for refusing to answer is not admissible. We intend to contest the fine in court and fight the case all the way in order to seek a dismissal."

Activist leftwing lawyers, particularly opposed to the [Family Federation](#)'s severe critique of totalitarian communism, have for decades waged a hate campaign against the faith society.

Investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda, present at the press conference, describes the hate campaign,

"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 Japanese media has often uncritically echoed claims made by the activist lawyers, especially after the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe 8th July last year. The activist lawyers succeeded in blaming the Family Federation for the act of terror soon after it happened.

Fukuda writes about the current situation,

"Last October, bowing to pressure from the media and public opinion, Prime Minister Kishida reversed his previous cautious stance and announced his intention to exercise the right to ask questions to the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) [a move that under Japanese law is preliminary to seeking the dissolution of a religious organization].

In response, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) exercised its first right to ask questions on November 22. And in December, approximately 200,000 online signatures were submitted to the Division of Religious Affairs of the Agency for Cultural Affairs in the MEXT, demanding that an order to dissolve the [Family Federation](#) should be sought and obtained as soon as possible." ([The Plot to Destroy the Unification Church in Japan. 1. Why the Church Should Not Be Dissolved](#), [Bitter Winter](#) 23rd June 2023)

Two registered religious movements have previously been dissolved, both after their leaders had committed criminal acts. The activist lawyers campaigning against the [Family Federation](#), have long claimed that it has committed acts deemed to be "detrimental to the public welfare, in violation of laws and regulations." Such claims are part of the lawyers' strategy to get the [Family Federation](#) dissolved.

Attorney Fukumoto explained at the press conference 8th September that leaders of the [Family Federation](#) had never committed such criminal acts. He stated,



*Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto at press conference 8th Sep. 2023*

"The conclusion is that 'violation of the law, extremely prejudicial to the public welfare' is interpreted as referring to acts that fall under criminal cases. On the flip side, this means that civil law torts do not enter the case. In fact, the interpretation that it is limited to criminal cases is an interpretation that the Government itself has repeatedly confirmed and expressed since the decision of the Tokyo Supreme Court was issued.

Prime Minister Kishida still followed this interpretation at the Budget Committee of the House of Representatives on 18th October [2022], the day after he instructed the Ministry (MEXT) to exercise its right to ask questions, and clearly stated that civil case acts do not enter the case. Since the shooting incident, the Government has repeatedly stated that since there is no criminal case against the former [Unification Church](#), there is no grounds for dissolution and the right to ask questions cannot be exercised.

Since on 18th October still he repeated the same statement saying that civil case acts do not enter the case, then the opposition parties voiced severe criticism, saying, "Then we can't exercise our right to ask questions and we can't order the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#)."



*Prime Minister Fumio Kishida 16th April 2023*

Fukumoto points that Prime Minister suddenly made a complete U-turn,

"In response to this criticism, the Prime Minister changed his previous interpretation of the law at the Budget Committee of the House of Councillors on 19th October, stating that if the law is clearly defined as 'organised, malicious and continuous' and falls under the requirements of the Religious Institutions Law, it may also include civil law tort actions."

The attorney representing the [Family Federation](#) made it clear that only courts may make such a change of interpretation of the law,

"However, the authority to interpret the law rests with the courts, and not with the head of the executive government. This changed interpretation of the law is merely a new interpretation of the law, which the executive government claims unilaterally."

Attorney Fukumoto presented an overview of the time after the assassination of Abe,

"8th July, shooting of former Prime Minister Abe.

On 12th September, at an opposition party hearing, the Agency of Cultural Affairs (in charge) declared that the requirements for requesting a dissolution order from the court were not met.

On 20th September, the same Agency of Cultural Affairs officially replied that it would be difficult for the court to issue a dissolution order while the church leaders and others had not been criminally punished. (Explanation: exactly what I have explained.)

14th October, the Cabinet's written answer to a written question: "With regard to the former [Unification Church](#), based on the relevant interpretation (the higher decision in the case of the request for a dissolution order for Aum Shinrikyo), we have decided that it does not fall under items (81) 1 and 2 of the same paragraph, and therefore the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the competent authority, has so far not requested a dissolution order against the former [Unification Church](#). The government has not made a request for a dissolution order against the former Unification Church."



*Keiko Nagaoka, government minister for education, culture, sports, science and technology (MEXT)*

On 15th October, Nagaoka, Minister for MEXT, told a press conference, "Based on precedents, we are cautious. At the moment, it is difficult to order a dissolution request."

On 17th October, Prime Minister Kishida instructed Nagaoka, Minister of MEXT to exercise her right to ask questions.

On 18th October, Prime Minister Kishida declared in the Diet that the term 'in violation of laws and regulations' does not include torts under the Civil Code.

Overnight, the interpretation changed.

On 19th October, Prime Minister Kishida stated in the Diet that the statute 'in violation of the law' could include civil law torts."

Fukumoto pointed out,

"Here, the right to ask questions cannot be exercised if there are no important material reasons for dissolution, which amounts to dissolution if there is no doubt.

In exercising the first right to ask questions, the Minister for MEXT even said at a press conference, 'I would like to consider requesting a dissolution order as soon as possible.' Is such a thing permissible in a country governed by the rule of law?"

During his presentation, attorney Fukumoto emphasized that previously when religious movements have been dissolved by the Japanese authorities, it was because of fraudulent acts committed by leaders of those movements.

He explained why there are no reasons for dissolution,



*Sign at the entrance of the Family Federation's national HQ in Tokyo*

"However, in the civil trials in which the [Family Federation](#) was the defendant, there has not been a single case in which a representative officer of the faith society, currently President Tanaka, or a senior officer of the faith society gave the order and used the personnel, material and organisation of the faith society to carry it out. [...]

Naturally, the Agency of Cultural Affairs was from the very beginning aware of its decision to exercise the right to ask questions. It must have been aware of it, because it must have checked all the precedents that it knew at that time. There was not a single corresponding case, and yet they exercised the right to ask questions. That was a completely illegal act. [...]

The [Family Federation](#) could have refused to answer any of the questions in the exercise of its right to ask illegal questions. However, in view of the boiling media coverage and public opinion, we had the option of refusing to answer all the questions, but we avoided this and answered as many as possible in relation to questions on illegal activities. This was also because we judged that it would be effective in explaining the actual situation of the Family Federation to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and in clearing up misunderstandings.

However, despite these efforts, we are very disappointed that the MEXT now has decided to seek a sanction in the form of a fine against the Family Federation."

More about the questions from the government, article coming soon.

Featured image above: From the press conference 8th September, at the [Family Federation](#) national headquarters in Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#) Japan.

"Claims: Government Acting Illegally" - Text: Knut Holdhus

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# Government Changing The Law Overnight

September 12, 2023 • Knut Holdhus

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**Changing the Law: Spotlight on Judicial Decisions Concerning Japanese Government's Right to Ask Questions**

By editorial department of Sekai Nippo

12<sup>th</sup> September 2023 – Published as an editorial in the Japanese newspaper Sekai Nippo. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#)

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The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has decided to impose administrative penalties on the grounds that the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** (Family Federation) did not answer questions based on the "Report and Questions" of the Religious Corporations Law, and decided to proceed to the Tokyo District Court.

The **Family Federation** issued a statement claiming that it "sincerely responded to questions from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) every time while protecting the privacy and religious freedom of believers."



The Sekai Nippo logo

#### Due to partial non-response

This is the first time that the right to question a religious corporation has been exercised, and if a religious corporation refuses to answer or gives a false answer when asked a question, a fine of up to 100,000 yen may be imposed on the representative officer of the religious corporation. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) said that it had asked the **Family Federation** 500 questions, and the reason for the fine was that it did not answer about 100 items.



Symbol of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan. Photo: 文部科学省(MEXT Japan) / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int

## 文部科学省

It is believed that the **faith society** answered about 80% of the questions,

but the specifics of the questions, the content of the answers, and the details of the contents that were not answered, have not been made public. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has exercised the "right to report and ask questions" seven times, but it is safe to assume that the decision to ask for a fine was intended to accumulate evidence for the dissolution order from the beginning, contrary to the initial "prudent judgment".

Originally, it cannot be said that the exercise of the right to question the **Family Federation** was carried out in a calm discussion. After the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe last July due to a grudge against the **faith society**, criticism of troubles surrounding the **faith society** swept the media. Furthermore, with regard to election campaigns and religious votes, the opposition parties raised the issue of "points of contact" with the LDP.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida declared a break with religious groups, and the Diet passed the Act on Prevention of Unreasonable Solicitation of Donations (Victim Relief Law) as a measure to deal with donation troubles. In addition, regarding the legal interpretation of "violation of laws and regulations" – a requirement for requesting a dissolution order for a religious corporation, as a "criminal penalty", based on a Supreme Court judgment – the prime minister replied to the Diet that civil law torts also belong to this category. The prime minister changed the legal interpretation overnight.

Prior to this change in interpretation, the Religious Affairs Division of the Agency for Cultural Affairs of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) replied that the **Family Federation** was "not subject to a request for a dissolution order", but later exercised its right to



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later exercised its right to question the [Family Federation](#) in an attempt to bring the request for a dissolution order. Overseas human rights groups and religious officials are concerned that this move could lead to serious religious persecution.

*Logo of the Agency for Cultural Affairs. [Public domain image](#)*

In response to some media outlets reporting on the “penal fine policy” of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the [religious group](#) issued a statement stating that “if a court case over the fine against the corporation is pending in the future, the corporation will do everything it can to contest the legality of the exercise itself of the right to question.” Criticism and debate are natural as former believers and family members have come forward to complain of damage, but the religious freedom and privacy of believers who continue to practice the faith should also be considered.

### Relationship with religion questioned

The hurdle to exercising the right to question was lowered to “civil,” and political power over religion was expanded. It will be necessary to pay close attention to how the right to question religious corporations will be exercised for the first time, and how the court proceedings will unfold over the fines required by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, in order to determine how the basic human rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the administrative power should be protected.

*Featured image above to illustrate “Government Changing the Law Overnight”: Fumio Kishida 5th October 2021. Photo: [首相官邸 / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#)*

*“Government Changing the Law Overnight” – text: Editorial Department of the [Sekai Nippo](#), Tokyo, Japan.*

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# New Admission By Top Japanese Communist

September 7, 2023 • Knut Holdhus

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## Chairman revealing intense fight to crush Family Federation in new admission

With its close to 300,000 members, the Japanese Communist Party (JPC) is one of the world's largest. Since the 1970's, the party has been fighting systematically to destroy the **Unification Church**, regarded as a key player among the anti-communist forces.

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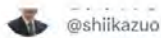
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@shiikazuo

あれだけの批判を浴びながら、なお「集団結婚」を続ける統一協会。徹底  
追及の手をゆるめてはならない。

#しんぶん赤旗

Kazuo Shii making a new admission on his X-account 4th Sep. 2023.

On 4<sup>th</sup> September 2023, Kazuo Shii, chairman of the Japanese Communist Party since 2000, made a new admission about their decades long campaign and wrote on his large Twitter / X account with more than 200,000 followers,

“Despite being criticized so much the **Unification Church** still continues its “mass weddings”. We must not relax our thorough pursuit.”

The “thorough pursuit” he mentioned in his new admission is part of the JCP’s deliberate effort to eliminate anti-communists.

In an interview in November 2022 with Shii, the *Shimbun Akahata*, the daily organ and official national newspaper of the Japanese



The logo of the *Shimbun Akahata* (Red flag)

Communist Party, it was made clear that the fierce campaign after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe 8<sup>th</sup> July 2022 is the communists’ “final war” against the **Unification Church / Family Federation**.

Shii said in the *Akahata* interview that the war had started already in 1978 at the elections of the governor of Kyoto. “This time”, he said after the Abe assassination – *making a new admission at the time* – “we will fight thoroughly and completely until we win the struggle.”

See also [The ‘Japanese communists’ final war’ against the Unification Church](#)

Many times, communists prefer to work undercover, often through so-called front groups. One would rarely hear them admit publicly that they are behind a certain project or group. A good example is the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales*, the body through which they have been fighting the **Unification Church** since 1987.

Award-winning investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda explains,

“Almost all of the lawyers in the Network were affiliated with the former Socialist Party and the Communist Party, [...] were connected with extremist groups and North Korea, and were ideologically leftists and self-styled atheists.”

[\(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](#) 30<sup>th</sup> March 2023)



Masumi Fukuda in April 2023. Photo: FOREF

It has indeed been in line with a long-term communist strategy to weaken voices like the **Unification Church**, that is highly critical of the God-denying, totalitarian society communists systematically work to create, the likes of which we see in China and North Korea.



At an international [conference in South Korea](#) on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2022, Michael Pillsbury, author and prominent authority on China, said that it is not only the

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Michael Pillsbury, Senior Fellow for China Strategy at the Heritage Foundation. Photo: Hudson Institute / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 2.0 Gen. Cropped

China, said that it is not only the Japanese Communist Party that exploits the assassination of Shinzo Abe. Also Chinese President Xi Jinping believes he may use the assassination – and the alleged grievances of Tetsuya Yamagami, the terrorist behind the murder, towards the **Unification Church** – to stain the reputation of the church and the legacy of Abe and undermine freedom of religion in Japan and other countries.

Pillsbury served from 2014 to January 2023 as director of the *Center on Chinese Strategy* at the *Hudson Institute*, a prestigious Washington, D.C think tank. In addition, he has been an adviser to most American presidents since Richard Nixon. He now works for the *Heritage Foundation*, one of the top 10 think tanks in the world, as Senior Fellow for China Strategy.

Pillsbury added,

“It’s obvious to me why China also wants to undermine the memory of Abe. He was the most anti-Chinese Communist Party Prime Minister in Japanese history. The Japanese Communist Party not only attacks the Abe wing of the LDP, but also the work of the **Unification Church** in Japan and around the world. China attacks the **Unification Church**. At the same time, it attacks everything Abe worked for.”

See also [Communists of China Exploiting Assassination](#)

In an article titled “Don’t Allow the Attack on Kishida to Become a Trend” 16<sup>th</sup> April this year by columnist Gearoid



Reidy, The Japan times commented that the assassination of Abe “was exploited for political gain.”



Logo of the Japanese magazine Monthly Hanada.

In a series of articles in the monthly magazine Hanada, above-mentioned journalist Masumi Fukuda explains precisely how that was done. She revealed how a leftwing

group of activist lawyers managed to sell a totally fabricated story to the media that it was the **Unification Church** that was the real perpetrator. Read [the story!](#)

Fukuda explains where the activist lawyers' network – National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales – comes from,

In addition, the award-winning journalist exposes that the network of lawyers for more than 20 years had been extensively involved in the abduction and forcible confinement of members of the **Unification Church**,

“There were lawyers who became rich through these cases, as did



Yoshifu Arita. Photo: 碧庵 / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp. Cropped



Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka. Photo: Mikkabie / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped





Masaki Kito from National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales. Photo: Screenshot / [Bitter Winter](#)

deprogrammers and Christian pastors involved in the abductions, who received substantial amounts of money from the relatives of the believers they deprogrammed.

When the lawyers were consulted by the believers' parents, they first introduced them to the deprogrammers. If and when deprogramming was successful, the lawyers took over from the deprogrammers as 'handlers' of the former believers, made them plaintiffs, and filed lawsuits. The anti-[Unification Church](#) group, including Attorney Kito and journalists Yoshifu Arita, and Eito Suzuki, still defends deprogramming to this very day, and claims it was performed to 'protect' the former members of the [Unification Church](#)." (Hanada / [Bitter Winter](#))

Fukuda explains how thousands of members of the [Unification Church](#) were kidnapped, forcibly confined and deprogrammed. Not only were they forced to denounce their belief. They also had to prove that they had separated themselves from the church by asserting they had been "victims of spiritual sales". The network of lawyers made them go to court against the [Unification Church](#) demanding to retrieve the money they once had donated.

See also [Lawyers Manipulating, Coercing, Lying](#)

More than 4,300 members were kidnapped and deprogrammed in this way. With so many forced by leftwing lawyers to sue the [Unification Church](#), this communist-inspired activist network managed to inflate figures immensely and portray the [Unification Church](#) as a group "detrimental to public welfare".

Fukuda reveals how for decades, the leftwing lawyers in the afore-mentioned network have used tactics like coercing ex-members to join their lawsuits against the [Unification Church](#), making up evidence, and extorting money from a perfectly legitimate religious movement, that is constantly being attacked and painted black by those lawyers. Masumi Fukuda calls those lawsuits fraudulent. She says,

In fact, there are many cases in which relatives consulted with the Network on how to force the donors-believers to sue." ([The Plot to Destroy the Unification Church in Japan. 3. Fraudulent Lawsuits](#), written by Masumi Fukuda, published in [Bitter Winter](#) 26<sup>th</sup> June 2023.)



The network was actually organised in order to put an end to the [Unification Church](#), now called the [Family Federation](#). In her articles the Japanese journalist exposes how the activist lawyers, many of them hard-core communists, used trumped-up charges against a new religious movement, while the "crime" it has committed, is to be against communism.

In this way the communists wage their "final war" against the [Family Federation](#), by pushing for its dissolution order.

It is hard to think of a more dishonest, immoral and sly way to attack one's enemy.

Featured image above to illustrate "New Admission by Top Japanese Communist": Kazuo Shii 30<sup>th</sup> March 2023. Photo: Attribution: [若田宗雄](#) / [Wikimedia Commons](#)

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"New Admission by Top Japanese Communist" – text: Knut Holdhus. Published 7th Sep 2023 at 9:51 am, updated 2:14 pm same day.

See also [Call to End Witch Hunt](#),

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◀ Previous  
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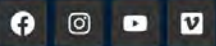
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# Call To End Witch Hunt

July 5, 2023 • Knut Holdhus

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Fumio Kishida Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ

Keiko Nagaoka Photo: 文部科学省

## 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> July, [Bitter Winter](#), the online magazine for religious liberty and human rights, published the [letter](#).

In it the four experts



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Government Changing The Law Overnight

September 12, 2023



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September 8, 2023



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September 7, 2023



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September 4, 2023



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August 23, 2023

– 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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.  
Photo: [FOREF](#)



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*

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# Japan: Threat To Religious Freedom

July 17, 2023 • Knut Holdhus

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*Current threat to religious freedom in Japan may have global consequences*

Aaron Rhodes, human rights expert and author, warns in a [commentary](#) in the Washington DC based news website *The Messenger* 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023, about the present threat to religious freedom in Japan since the Abe assassination one year ago. Much is at stake for religious liberty in Japan and



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globally because of what he describes as a **campaign led by Japan's Communist Party against a minority religion.**

Normally, we see such attacks in communist and totalitarian states. Although Japan is a free nation, it has one of the largest communist parties in the democratic world.

Rhodes is a long-time campaigner for human rights and religious freedom and served from 1993 to 2007 as *executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights*. In the article headlined "**Japan's Threat to International Religious Freedom**", he points out the dangers posed to believers not just in the land of the rising sun, but all around the world, if the communists in Japan were to succeed in their decades long war against the **Family Federation**, formerly the **Unification Church**.



*Shinzo Abe March 2022. Photo: US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel / Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image. Cropped*

The communists, aided by leftwing activist lawyers, **exploited politically the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe** 8<sup>th</sup> July 2022. In a well-orchestrated campaign, they succeeded, as Rhodes points out, in telling the story that the **Family Federation** is to be blamed for the terror attack on Abe.

It is quite amazing how the **media took this story at face value** and focused on Japanese lawmakers' connection to the **Unification Church**, especially within the governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in spite of such connections often being slight.

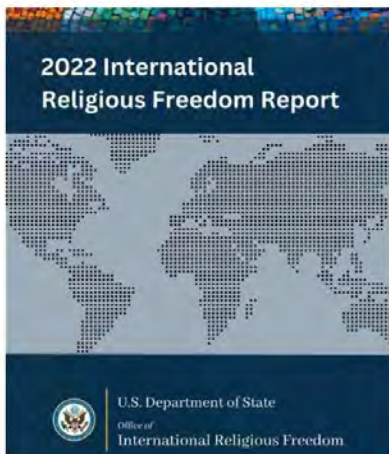
Not only that, the story told by the leftwing activist lawyers that "cults are dangerous", clearly was allowed to colour the articles of many a Japanese journalist and editor. And they printed the extreme claims unquestioningly even though those claims came from a body founded in order to destroy the **Unification Church**, now called the **Family Federation**.

Award-winning Japanese investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda makes this perfectly clear,

"Almost all of the lawyers in the Network were affiliated with the former Socialist Party and the Communist Party, who strongly opposed 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." (*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* 30<sup>th</sup> March 2023)



*Masumi Fukuda. Photo: FOREF*



Rhodes describes his disappointment that such extreme anti-religious claims from a body initiated by communists were given abundant space in the US Department of State's *2022 International Religious Freedom Report*. He writes,

"the U.S. government's report

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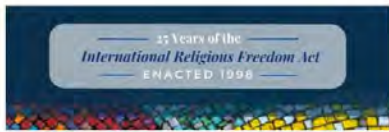
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on international religious freedom gives equal coverage to the

typical anti-cult position that the attack against the [Unification Church] and the Jehovah's Witnesses 'was not about religious freedom' but about 'harm' caused to members and society."

Rhodes describes this as disappointing lack of action taken by the United States, "the champion of religious freedom around the world". Last year's report on the condition for religious freedom globally was however exceptionally "soft" on Japan, even though the Japanese government clearly has done its part to create what leading religious freedom expert Massimo Introvigne calls "the most dramatic religious liberty crisis in a democratic country."

In spite of serious issues with freedom of faith in Japan, the country has been dealt with in an unusually soft manner. Rhodes, and Introvigne attribute this to political bias as Japan is one of the key allies of the USA in the Far East.

Rhodes is also critical of *Freedom House*, the Washington DC based non-governmental organization that measures the degree of civil liberty in each nation. The US human rights expert claims that *Freedom House* bypassed the Japanese "government's threat to religious freedom in its report."



Because of the lack of reaction by the United States and the international human rights community, Rhodes fears that the Japanese government may face little criticism even though it continues to ignore the constitutionally granted religious freedom of a religious minority.

And this may well become a much larger problem and affect other religious minorities not only in Japan, but potentially around the world. As Rhodes emphasizes,

"authoritarian states may see a green light for further assaults on Christians, Muslims, minorities such as the Ahmadi Muslims, Jews, the Baha'i and others. [...] With so much at stake, human rights monitors and friends of Japan should help ensure that the principle of religious freedom is not corroded."

Featured image above: Dr. Aaron Rhodes, executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights 1993-2007. Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

More about threat to religious freedom: [Japan Given Bottom Rank](#)

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