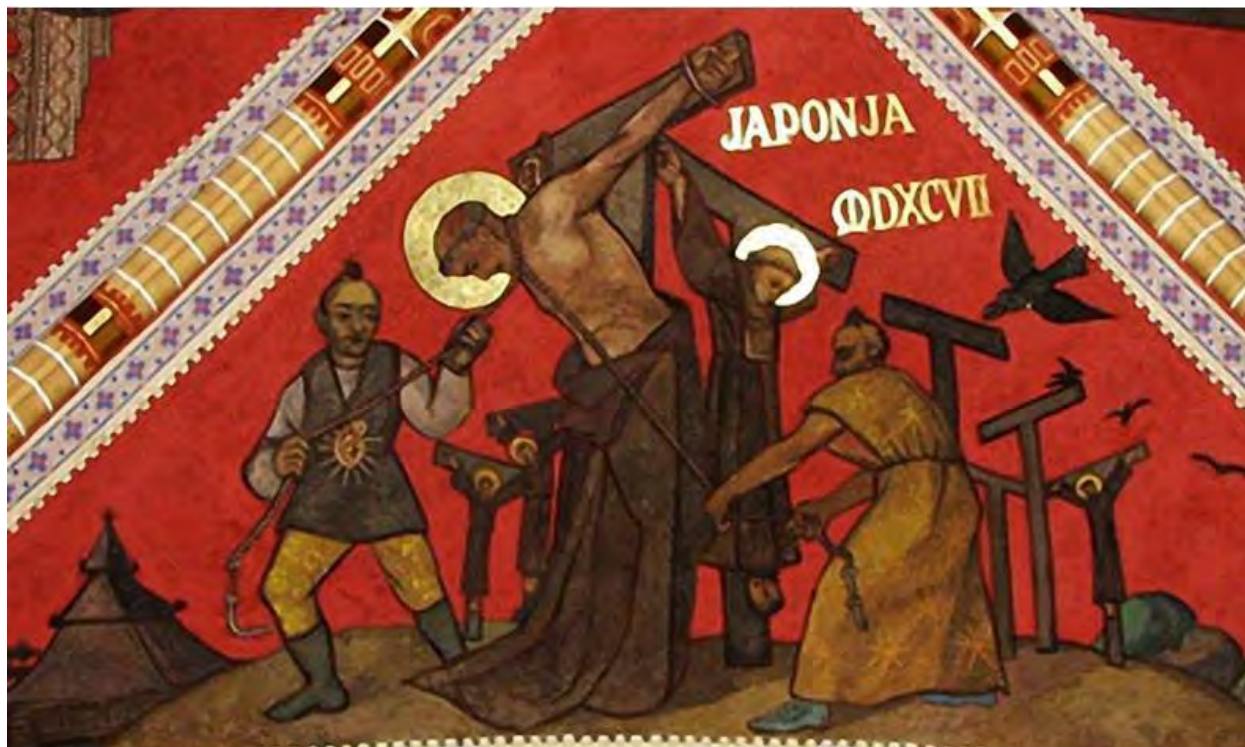


## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: 12 Religious Freedom NGOs Denounce Japan

Knut Holdhus  
October 15, 2023



*From Japan's history of religious persecution. Here, scene from a painting depicting the 26 martyrs of Japan, a group of Catholics martyred by crucifixion in Nagasaki 5<sup>th</sup> February 1597. Photo: Abraham / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 3.0 Unp. Cropped*

### Heads of 12 religious freedom NGOs appalled by Japan's treatment of Family Federation

**BITTER  
WINTER**

In an [article](#) published by [Bitter Winter](#), the leading magazine on religious liberty and human rights, 14th October 2023, 12 religious freedom NGOs, both religious and secular, protest the Japanese government's recent actions to dissolve the [Family Federation](#).

They all express great concern that the [Family Federation](#), formerly the [Unification Church](#), has been held responsible for the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe last year.



*Victory over Communism campaign in Japan in 1969, supported by the Unification Church*

The 12 NGOs point out that after the terror attack on Abe, a network of lawyers and others "hostile to the [Family Federation](#)" used the murder of Abe as a pretext to revive an old campaign started by left-wingers mainly for political reasons. For decades, they had been afraid of the [Family Federation](#)'s "successful sponsorship of anti-Communist initiatives".

In their [letter](#), it is described how immediately after Abe had been murdered by a terrorist, "press conferences and an unprecedented media campaign of slander followed."

The 12 voice their concern,

"We note, however, that with respect to the [Family Federation](#), they have been reported unfairly and one-sidedly, listening only to the militant lawyers and to 'apostate' ex-members whose stories in some cases have been exposed as false by independent journalists."

The network of activist leftwing lawyers in Japan that is hostile to the [Family Federation](#), calls themselves National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales. The [letter](#) from the 12 NGOs emphasizes that "spiritual sales" is a concept devised by opponents to describe activities by members of the [Family Federation](#) "that have long since ceased".

Indeed, the [Family Federation](#) advised "over-enthusiastic members" to stop such sales projects and condemned them in a public statement published 14 years ago, in 2009. In the years that followed, there were only a handful of lawsuits against so-called "spiritual sales" by members of the [Family Federation](#). Most cases mentioned in media reports after the Abe assassination, are about occurrences that took place further back than 15 years. There have also been cases when the lawyers from the hostile activist network intentionally have tried to make the sales appear more recent by referring to the date a court case began, years after the alleged "spiritual sale" took place.



*Persecution in China: Tibetan Monks arrested in 2008. Photo (5th April 2008)*

In the [protest letter](#) the 12 signatories state bluntly that a dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) will be a step similar to anti-religious measures used in nations like communist China and Putin's Russia, and that do not belong in a democratic country like Japan.

Also, the [letter](#) brings up several important points that must be quite embarrassing for the Japanese government.

The dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) is out of proportion with the charges raised against it.

The dissolution is not consistent with the [Family Federation](#)'s law-abiding behavior.

The dissolution will pave the way to similar action against other religious minorities.

The signatories deplore the measure taken by the Japanese government, saying that it may "forever taint the image of Japan "as a country committed to democratic principles, including FoRB" (freedom of religion or belief).

At the end of the [statement](#), there is a quote from a commentary on RealClearPolitics, an American website for political news, authored by two religious freedom authorities - Suzan Johnson Cook, who served as the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom from 2011 to 2013, and Katrina Lantos Swett, former chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). The two compare Japan to totalitarian regimes,

"where unpopular religious minorities are 'liquidated' after the ground has been prepared by slanderous media campaigns."

The [statement](#) was signed by



*Eric Roux*



*Thierry Valle*



*Camelia Marin*



*Aaron Rhodes*



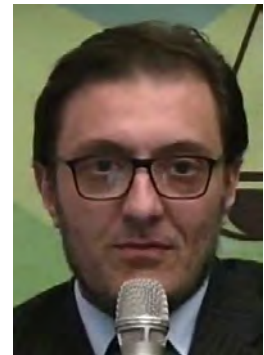
*Dr. Massimo  
Introvigne*



*Marco Respinti*



*Willy Fautré*



*Alessandro  
Amicarelli*

**Marco Respinti**, Director-in-charge, [Bitter Winter](#), a daily magazine on freedom of religion and human rights

**Thierry Valle**, President, CAP-LC - Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience

**Massimo Introvigne**, Co-founder and Managing Director, CESNUR - Center for Studies on New Religions

**Eric Roux**, Chairman, EIFRF - European Inter-Religious Forum for Religious Freedom

**Francesco Curto**, Co-founder, Fedinsieme [Faiths Together]

**Alessandro Amicarelli**, President, FOB - European Federation for Freedom of Belief

**Aaron Rhodes**, President, FOREF - Forum for Religious Freedom Europe

**Hans Noot**, Director, Gerard Noodt Foundation for Freedom of Religion or Belief

**Willy Fautré**, Co-founder and Director, HRWF - Human Rights Without Frontiers

**Raffaella Di Marzio**, Managing Director, LIREC - Center for Studies on Freedom of Religion, Belief, and Conscience

**Rosita Šorytė**, President, ORLIR - International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees

**Camelia Marin**, Deputy Director, Soteria International

---

"12 Religious Freedom NGOs Denouncing Japan" - text: Knut Holdhus

More about religious freedom NGOs and Japan: [Conference on Religious Freedom Violations](#)

Even more about religious freedom NGOs and Japan: [Japan: Threat to Religious Freedom](#)

And yet more about religious freedom NGOs and Japan: [Call to End Witch Hunt](#)

See also [Japan Copying Totalitarian Regimes](#)

# BITTER WINTER

A MAGAZINE ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Home / From the World / News Global

## The Request for Dissolution of the Unification Church in Japan: A Tragic Violation of Freedom of Religion or Belief

10/14/2023 BITTER WINTER

A+ | A-

Twelve NGOs, representing a who's who of religious liberty advocacy throughout the world, protest the Japanese government's actions.

by Bitter Winter



*Unification Church/Family Federation leader Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon at a conference in Nagoya, Japan, in 2019. From Facebook.*

We represent religious and secular organizations that share a commitment and an interest in freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), which scholars have identified as the most threatened human right in the world today. We also share a sympathy and admiration for Japan, its culture, and its vibrant democracy in a part of the world plagued by bloody non-democratic regimes.

We have followed with great concern the developments in Japan after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, including the attempt to make the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly known as the Unification Church) somewhat responsible for it and to request its dissolution as a religious organization.

We understand that the assassin has offered as motivation for his heinous crime that he intended to punish Abe for his collaboration with the Family Federation, a religious organization he hated, he claimed, because his mother went bankrupt in 2002 after her excessive donations to the group. Not all is clear in the crime, including why the assassin waited for 20 years after his mother's bankruptcy to kill Abe. The fact that members of the Family Federation partially reimbursed the donations after relatives of the criminal's mother complained is rarely mentioned in the media. Nor is the fact that the assassin himself was never a member of the Unification Church emphasized, as it should be.

Following the crime, an old campaign was revamped by lawyers and others hostile to the Family Federation mostly for political reasons, as they resented for decades its successful sponsorship of anti-Communist initiatives. It was claimed —through a mixture of truths referring to events that occurred decades ago, half-truths, and outright lies—that the Family Federation was an anti-social organization financing itself by soliciting extravagant donations and through “spiritual sales” of objects sold to devotees for sums greatly exceeding their value, and that second-generation members suffered because of their strict education. Press conferences and an unprecedented media campaign of slander followed.

We acknowledge that excessive pressure on devotees to donate and a strict education not all second-generation

members agree with are problems that exist in many religious organizations. We note, however, that with respect to the Family Federation, they have been reported unfairly and one-sidedly, listening only to the militant lawyers and to "apostate" ex-members whose stories in some cases have been exposed as false by independent journalists.

"Spiritual sales" is a label created by opponents to designate activities carried out by believers of the Family Federation that have long since ceased. The Family Federation counseled its over-enthusiastic members to cease these sales activities and issued a public declaration condemning them in 2009. Before the assassination of Shinzo Abe, the number of lawsuits against "spiritual sales" by Family Federation members that occurred after 2009 had decreased to only a handful. Many of the cases advertised in the media refer to incidents said to have happened more than 15 years ago. Hostile lawyers claim otherwise, but facts do not agree with their statements, and they sometimes maliciously confuse the dates when the so-called "spiritual sales" occurred with the dates of the lawsuits started years thereafter.

As for soliciting donations and educating their children in a strict conservative way, there is no evidence that the Family Federation acts in a way that is significantly different from how dozens of other religious organizations behave.

It seems that the dissolution of the Family Federation, a measure reminiscent of practices current in China and Russia rather than in democratic countries, is out of proportion with the charges raised against it and not consistent with the Federation's law-abiding behavior. It will also open the way to similar action against other religious minorities unpopular with certain lawyers or political groups and the media.

We urge Japanese authorities and courts not to proceed with a measure that would forever taint the image of Japan as a country committed to democratic principles, including FoRB. Pressing for dissolution will align Japan with totalitarian regimes "where unpopular religious minorities are 'liquidated' after the ground has been prepared by slanderous media campaigns," as Amb. Suzan Johnson Cook, former Ambassador-at-Large for the Office of International Religious Freedom at the U.S. State Department, and Dr. Katrina Lantos-Swett, co-chair of the International Religious Freedom Summit, wrote in a [September op-ed on Real Clear Politics](#).

This is not the Japan we have learned to respect and love.

*October 14, 2023*

Marco Respinti, Director-in-charge, Bitter Winter, a daily magazine on freedom of religion and human rights

Thierry Valle, President, CAP-LC – Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience

Massimo Introvigne, Co-founder and Managing Director, CESNUR – Center for Studies on New Religions

Eric Roux, Chairman, EIFRF – European Inter-Religious Forum for Religious Freedom

Francesco Curto, Co-founder, Fedinsieme [Faiths Together]

Alessandro Amicarelli, President, FOB – European Federation for Freedom of Belief

Aaron Rhodes, President, FOREF – Forum for Religious Freedom Europe

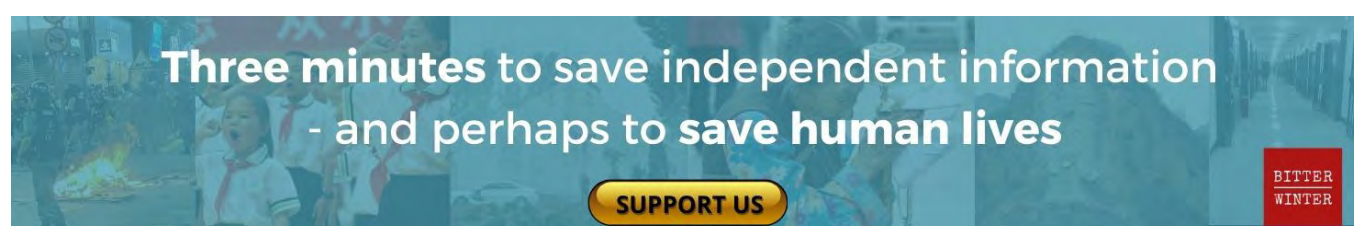
Hans Noot, Director, Gerard Noodt Foundation for Freedom of Religion or Belief

Willy Fautré, Co-founder and Director, HRWF – Human Rights Without Frontiers

Raffaella Di Marzio, Managing Director, LIREC – Center for Studies on Freedom of Religion, Belief, and Conscience

Rosita Šorytė, President, ORLIR – International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees

Camelia Marin, Deputy Director, Soteria International



TAGGED WITH: [JAPAN](#), [RELIGIOUS LIBERTY](#), [UNIFICATION CHURCH](#)

**Related articles**



The Unification Church Issue in Japan: A Japanese Christian Theologia... Federation



Why the Unification Church Should Not Be Dissolved. 2. Dissolving Would Be Co... the Law



The Destruction of Buddhism in Pakistan: A Tragic Reality



Can Religious Liberty Bring Taiwan to Build an Alternative Internatio... Diplomacy?

## Keep Reading



Post-COVID Purge: Over 2,100 Church of Almighty God Members Arrested in Two Provinces

In Anhui and Jiangsu, as soon as COVID quarantines ceased, the banned church's devotees started being persecuted again. Two died.



Why the Unification Church Should Not Be Dissolved. 1. A General Outline

We serialize a book where a prominent Japanese lawyer explains why he decided to represent the church, and tells Prime Minister Kishida that dissolving it would be a tragic mistake.



The Unification Church Issue in Japan: A Japanese Christian Theologian Speaks. 1. Lies About Abe's Relations with the Church

The former Prime Minister was assassinated because false information was spread about him.



Germany, State-Funded Lutheran Church's "Sect Filters" for School Teachers

You should state you have not attended events of, or sympathize with, Scientology, Jehovah's Witnesses, "Moonies," "Hare Krishna," or Universal Life (other religions are not mentioned).