

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: First Day Of Japanese Court Hearings In FFWPU Dissolution Case

Knut Holdhus
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Representing Family Federation in Tokyo District Court: Nobuya Fukumoto (left) and Nobuo Okamura

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Highly discriminatory dissolution case begins at Tokyo District Court

Tokyo District Court convened 22nd February 2024 the first session of its hearings for the case brought by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) requesting the court to issue an order to dissolve the religious organization.



Tomihiko Tanaka at press conference in Tokyo 7th Nov. 2023



時事通信社

Jiji Press

Jiji Press reports 22nd February on nippon.com that Presiding Judge Kenya Suzuki (鈴木謙也) listened during the closed-door session to arguments presented by Tomihiko Tanaka (田中富広), the leader of the Japanese branch of the international organization, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, which handles religious matters.

Tanaka asserted to the judge that contributions from adherents were allocated for missionary activities both domestically and internationally, emphasizing that soliciting donations was an integral aspect of religious practices, as stated by Nobuya Fukumoto (福本修也), a legal representative for the [Family Federation](#).

The leader vehemently opposed the characterization by the culture ministry, which portrayed the [religious organization](#) as engaging in illicit asset accumulation. Additionally, he criticized Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's announcement of severing ties with the [Family Federation](#) and associated organizations, deeming it discriminatory based on ideological grounds and a violation of constitutional rights.

the japan times

The Japan Times reported 23rd February that the above-mentioned Tomihiko Tanaka during the hearing, disputed the ministry's characterization of the [religious organization](#), suggesting that the ministry's perspective was flawed. In its defense, the [Family Federation](#)'s representatives argued that the credibility of ministry interviewees should be treated with caution as they were introduced by a group of lawyers associated with assisting what they call "victims of the [religious organization](#)".

"In accordance with a relevant law, the hearing was held behind closed doors. Although the government has not disclosed what opinions it expressed, this is an important trial for freedom of religion. The progress of the trial and the evidence presented should be made public."



Masahito Moriyama, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)



The Kyodo News report published by the Japan Times point out that the case has been further complicated by government minister Masahito Moriyama from the department that requested the dissolution order, acknowledging in early February his endorsement ahead of the general election in October 2021 of the policies of Federation for World Peace (FWP), an organization associated with the [Family Federation](#). [More](#) about this.

The Japan News writes that in the parliament, opposition parties are intensifying their scrutiny of Masahito Moriyama, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, regarding allegations of receiving support from the same organization (FWP).

It is alleged that Moriyama participated in a policy briefing session organized by the organization (FWP), received a letter of endorsement, and signed a document affirming the group's

endorsement of his candidacy, effectively constituting a policy agreement. Asahi Shimbun writes that Moriyama still receives the newsletter of the organization at his office.

Moriyama's responses in the Diet have been deemed unsatisfactory. His statements have been inconsistent, ranging from "I do not recall" to "I may have signed it," and then reverting to "I do not remember," creating the impression of dishonesty. See also [Unfunny Comedy of Ministers Lacking Integrity](#)

According to the Japan News report, some members of the governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) speculate that the organization associated with the [Family Federation](#) is divulging information to the press as a retaliatory measure against the request for an order to dissolve the [religious organization](#). This speculation stems from the emergence of internal information, such as photographs depicting Masahito Moriyama alongside leaders of the group and testimonies suggesting Moriyama's involvement with individuals connected to the group.

At the end of last year, a leaked photo depicted another individual linked to the [Family Federation](#) attending a meeting between Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and a former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives during Kishida's tenure as the chairman of the LDP Policy Research Council. It is highly probable that someone associated with the group took the photograph.

The article in Japan News even claims that dissemination of such information may well create political turmoil, and that might be exactly "what the sources want". It might be of interest to the discerning reader that Chinese media outlets like Xinhua and china.org also wrote about the first day of hearings in Tokyo District Court.

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Collusion To Rob Minority Of Its Rights

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Japanese government in collusion with group hostile to Family Federation

Third of six parts of Seiron report – More on [part 1](#), [part 2](#), [part 4](#), [part 5](#), [part 6](#)

The Japanese monthly opinion magazine Seiron (正論) published in its December 2023 issue a feature article on the **outrageous**



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persecution of the [Family Federation](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) in Japan.

One part of the report by Makiko Takita, well known journalist and editor-in-chief of the magazine, is an interview with Dr. Massimo Introvigne, Italian sociologist of religion and editor-in-chief of [Bitter Winter](#), the leading international online magazine on religious freedom and human rights.



The cover front page of *Monthly Seiron* December 2023.

 [Bitter Winter](#) published this part of the report of *Seiron* on 19th January 2024, as the **third of six parts** of the English version of the original Japanese article. Read the [whole Bitter Winter article](#). Read more on [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#).

In the interview with Dr. Introvigne, he says he is concerned about the legal actions taken against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), formerly the [Unification Church](#), in Japan.

The sociologist of religion, famous globally for his work, expresses his worry about the Japanese government's request for a dissolution order against the [Unification Church](#), citing that the organization has not committed any crimes in Japan, a democratic country that guarantees freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). He emphasizes that, in his experience working globally to defend freedom of religion or belief, this is the **first time he has seen such a request for dissolution in a democratic country**.

"[...] and it is a great shock to me," the scholar says, expressing his concern about what he perceives as an **unusual and concerning legal action** against the [Unification Church](#) in Japan.

Introvigne draws comparisons with other countries, mentioning that even in countries where there is criticism of the [Unification Church](#), such as the United States and Italy, there is no government action to legally regulate or dissolve the organization. He also contrasts the situation with Russia and China, where religious organizations, including the [Unification Church](#), face persecution and dissolution by the government. However, he notes that China and Russia are not democratic regimes, and the criteria for what constitutes a crime differ from those in Japan.




Front page of 2018 English version of *Religious Corporations Act of Japan*.

Massimo Introvigne further discusses the situation in Japan where the government is pursuing the dissolution of the [Unification Church](#) under the *Religious Corporations Act*. He compares this to the dissolution of an organization called *Artgemeinschaft* in Germany in September 2023.

Introvigne points out that even in democracies, systems for dissolving organizations exist, but their application is typically limited to cases where a crime, punishable under the penal code, has been committed. He provides an example of the dissolution of *Artgemeinschaft* in Germany, which he describes as a political organization rooted in Nazism rather than a religious movement. The dissolution of *Artgemeinschaft* was requested based on criminal activities, aligning with the general principle that **dissolutions in democracies are tied to criminal conduct**.

Introvigne emphasizes that the situation in Japan, where the government is seeking to dissolve the [Unification Church](#) without it having committed any criminal acts, is unique and


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unusual in a democratic country that upholds freedom of religion. He points out that the current events in Japan are being highlighted in Chinese and Russian media as a form of propaganda, drawing parallels between Japan's actions and those of China in suppressing religious groups. Introvigne explains how the **situation in Japan is being used for propaganda purposes by China and Russia,**



Persecution in China: Tibetan Monks arrested in 2008. Photo (5th April 2008): SFT HQ (Students for a Free Tibet) / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 2.0 Gen. Cropped

"I am the editor-in-chief of a daily web magazine called '[Bitter Winter](#),' which covers news about religious freedom violations around the world. I carefully watch the Chinese media, and every week an article about the dissolution of the [Unification Church](#) in Japan always catches my eye. The articles are full of claims that 'Japan is doing the same thing as China' 'We have been proven right,' 'Cults should be suppressed,' and so on. Similar arguments can be read in the Russian government-affiliated media, and the **current events in Japan are being used for propaganda purposes by China and Russia.** We would do well to keep this in mind."

The Seiron report provides an overview of events surrounding the [Unification Church](#) in Japan, particularly in the aftermath of the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe by an individual with a grudge against the [Unification Church](#). Introvigne expresses concerns about the way the government and certain groups have been handling the situation. Certain **important facts about the assassin seem to have been ignored completely by the media.** The general public appears to have been given a **slanted picture of the situation.** The Italian scholar points out,

"I noted that **the man [the assassin] had been interacting with journalists and other opponents of the [Unification Church](#) on social media before the incident.** Obviously, I do not believe that they encouraged him to kill Abe, but I wonder if they might have **excited his hostility** to punish the [Unification Church](#). Why did the man commit such a heinous act? I do not believe that this has been fully clarified."

And straightaway after the assassination on 8th July 2022, the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (全国霊感商法対策弁護士連絡会), a group of largely leftwing activist lawyers who have been fierce opponents of the [Unification Church](#) for decades, called a press conference where they **blamed the church** for what had happened.

Dr. Introvigne describes the tactic of the network of lawyers as a **"reversal phenomenon"**. **The perceived victim becomes the perpetrator, and the alleged perpetrator is treated as a victim.**



Kingdom Hall in Hamburg-Alsterdorf, ten days after the killing spree on 9th March 2023: damaged door, flowers

The scholar mentions similar cases in South Korea and Germany where so-called anti-cult movements attempted to **shift blame** onto religious organizations,

and candles. Photo: NordNordWest / Wikimedia Commons. Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0 Germany

“Last March [2023] in Germany, a former member of the Jehovah’s Witnesses broke into a place of worship of this religion, called Kingdom Hall, and killed eight people with a gun. Then, some members of the anti-cult movement, which opposes Jehovah’s Witnesses, came forward and criticized the religion, saying that the cause of the incident was that ‘the Jehovah’s Witnesses have continued to abuse this man,’ and called for the religious organization to bear the brunt of the blame. The anti-cult movement deflected the blame from the mistakes of the authorities [who had given a license to carry weapons to a mentally disturbed man] and tried to create a campaign against the Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

Introvigne **criticizes the Japanese government for joining forces with the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales** (全国霊感商法対策弁護士連絡会) in various procedures related to a dissolution order against the **Unification Church**. He argues that such collaboration between the government and a so-called anti-cult movement is ideologically and politically strange.

The scholar says,

“Only in Japan has the **government totally jumped on the bandwagon**. In Korea and Germany, the media reports on the voices of anti-cult movements, and this can cause a lot of commotion. Sometimes there are campaigns to condemn these groups as ‘cults.’ However, there is no example of a democratic government reacting to such a campaign and moving toward the dissolution of the organization.”

Dr. Massimo Introvigne **denounces the Japanese government for all of a sudden changing its policy** and allowing cases of tortious conduct to be sufficient ground for dissolving a religious organization. He explains,

“If religious corporations can be dissolved for torts under civil law, there is **no such thing as a safe organization**. This shows that this **was not a legal decision, but a political decision**. What the Japanese government has done is a **clear violation of the principle of religious freedom**. It is a move that should be strongly condemned.”

Introvigne contends that the Japanese



Blatant discrimination: “Colored” drinking fountain from mid-20th century with African-American drinking from water cooler in streetcar terminal, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA. Photo (1939): Russell Lee (1903-1986) / Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image

government’s decision to pursue the dissolution of the **Unification Church** is a violation of the principle of religious freedom. He expresses concern that this move **may have a ripple effect and set a precedent for private entities to discriminate** against the **Unification Church**,

“and start saying, ‘We will have nothing to do with

them.' This is undeniable **religious discrimination**, which is unacceptable in light of international law, which stipulates that there shall be no discrimination based on ideology, creed, religion, or other such grounds.”

Introvigne **questions the legitimacy of the government's decision**, stating that it appears to be a political decision rather than a legal one.

In fact, there have already been **instances of discriminatory incidents** in Japan, such as local governments refusing to rent public facilities to independent organizations connected with the [Family Federation](#) or passing resolutions to sever relations with such organizations in local government councils.

And what makes matters worse in Japan, is the fact that there might be **collusion between the Japanese government and the courts**. For more on that particular issue, see [Does Japan Have an Independent Judiciary?](#)

More on [part 2 of the interview](#) (part 4 of the *Seiron* report).

More on [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#) in the *Seiron* report.

Featured image above: Dr. Massimo Introvigne in April 2023. Photo: [FOREF](#)

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