

Kumamoto Conference to Protect Freedom of Religion

Knut Holdhus

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FFWPU International Headquarters



Masumi Fukuda

Japanese investigative journalist and award-winning author Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ) gave a speech on 16th June 2024 at the "Kumamoto Conference to Protect Freedom of Religion" at a hotel in Kumamoto, a city of ca. 740,000 inhabitants on the southern island of Kyushu. The conference was attended by members and supporters of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, protesting against the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's request for a court order to dissolve the Family Federation of Japan.

Minority religion under attack in Japan urged to make itself heard

I am Masumi Fukuda. Thank you very much for inviting me. [...]

Previously, at gatherings in Nagasaki and other places, I have mentioned that demonstrations are a citizen's right. Given the current situation with the Family Federation, I believe we should raise our voices in a noticeable way.



Hachiko, the Loyal Dog at Shibuya station, Tokyo

[...] In the 1970s, Scientology faced a similar situation in America as the Family Federation is facing now. At that time, believers from all over the world surrounded the federal courthouse in Washington, DC, in a significant demonstration, which they said was quite effective.

In the United States and Japan, there are different perceptions of demonstrations. In Japan, especially among conservatives, demonstrations are often viewed negatively. Many ordinary conservatives think that demonstrations are something left-wing people do.

However, given the current situation, as someone mentioned yesterday, remaining a silent minority is not an option. The media is heavily biased, and the true nature of the Family Federation is not being conveyed to the general public at all.

I think it is the believers themselves who should raise their voices and hold such demonstrations. I think the members in Kyushu [the large southern island] are the most enthusiastic right now. So, I hope they can show the most enthusiasm for these demonstrations and inspire a wave of support from all over the country.

Ultimately, we must hold these demonstrations in Tokyo. (Applause) Thank you. I have been talking about this with the headquarters, but it seems they are not very enthusiastic about it at the moment. However, at this point, doing nothing is not an option. It's

not like you do nothing; you hold symposiums nationwide. But you still have to make your case to the general public.

During the Golden Week holidays in early May, people raised their voices at the bronze statue of "Hachiko, the Loyal Dog" (忠犬ハチ公) in Shibuya [in Tokyo]. So, I think this movement of raising voices and this enthusiasm are growing.

Anyway, the Family Federation is a religion that is currently misunderstood. As mentioned earlier, ordinary Japanese people often say, "We know about freedom of religion," and "We know religious persecution is wrong."

But they say, "The Family Federation is not a religion; it's just a money-collecting group disguised as a religion." That is entirely incorrect. It is outright religious persecution. (Applause)

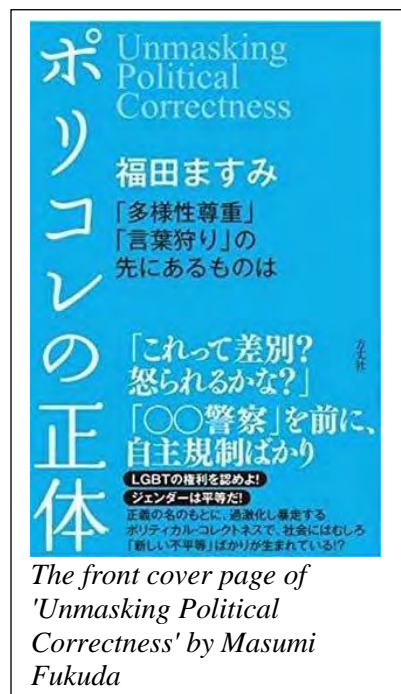
However, it is really true that this is indeed religious persecution, and that the Family Federation is a legitimate religious organization. The teachings, such as the profound and systematic Unification Principles, make it a genuine religion, perhaps even more so than organizations like Soka Gakkai. (Applause)

While I have attended lectures on the Unification Principles, I realized that its teachings are quite the opposite of my own lifestyle. (Laughter) I am not married, and I don't have a family or children. I believe marriage is optional, but the Family Federation's teachings emphasize the importance of the Blessing and having a family. This is something that is shared only among believers, not with the general public.

Although the teachings differ from my own views, I think it is still possible for someone like me, who doesn't align perfectly with their beliefs, to support the Family Federation. I find this somewhat unique. (Applause)

As an ordinary person, before the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe, I didn't really think deeply about religion. However, I have come to learn some terms like "the created world", which is used in the Family Federation. As I learned about "microcosm", such as the human body, and "macrocosm", such as the universe, I realized how well everything is made. This led me to think that perhaps there is some intentional will behind it, and at times I contemplated the will of God. But I always felt that religion was not something close to me.

However, since the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe two years ago, the Family Federation has been subjected to a lot of criticism. I have spoken at various symposiums on why I started covering the Family Federation.



One reason I began was that after publishing "Unmasking Political Correctness" (ポリコレの正体 っていう) at the end of 2021, "political correctness", known as "PC" in America, is sweeping across the country. While writing about it, I felt like I was learning a lot myself, and I completed the book.

During that time, I wanted to interview someone well-versed in American affairs, and I came across an editorial board member of Sekai Nippo (世界日報), who had a dialogue with Masayuki Takayama (高山正幸), a former Sankei Shimbun [large newspaper] commentator, in the conservative monthly magazine "Will". Since the editorial board member seemed knowledgeable about American affairs, I decided to interview him.

However, when I mentioned this to the editor of the publishing house that put out "Unmasking Political Correctness," he asked, "Isn't Sekai Nippo related to the Unification Church? Is it okay?"

I didn't know much about it at the time, but I knew that Sekai Nippo was established by Reverend Sun Myung Moon of the Unification Church. Despite the concern, I noted that many famous conservative

figures were giving lectures at Sekai Nippo events and that conservatives were reading Sekai Nippo. It had also published some scoops and provided useful references. So, I thought, "It should be okay." I proceeded to interview the editorial board member of Sekai Nippo and got a very good impression of him.

He answered the questions I wanted to ask most accurately and thoroughly and was very kind. I tend to be a bit clumsy sometimes, and I made a mistake with my voice recorder running out of batteries during the interview, so I couldn't record. I was lamenting about it, as I'm not very good with machines, but he

immediately changed the batteries in the voice recorder for me and reassured me, saying, "It's okay." His kindness left a great impression on me, and I believe we met about twice afterwards for some information exchange or something like that.

After that incident, when the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe occurred, and the intense bashing towards the Family Federation followed, naturally, I wondered if the editorial board members were okay. I wasn't sure if all the employees at Sekai Nippo were followers of the Unification Church. However, as the bashing worsened, I was contemplating whether to reach out.

At that time, a young editor from the Monthly Hanada magazine encouraged me and mentioned that he knew some people connected to conservatives at Sekai Nippo, including the young editor himself. According to him, "Sekai Nippo has high quality, and all the journalists there are good people. Fukudasan, if you contact them, I'm sure they'll be glad."

So, I thought, "Maybe I should contact them. I'll send an email." But I hesitated a bit, wondering if it would be okay.

Around August, over a month after Shinzo Abe's passing, when I checked online, the bashing against the Family Federation was still going strong. However, amidst all that, there was one comment that stood out: "This is a witch hunt." Upon reading that, I thought, "Yes, this is indeed a witch hunt. There's no substantial evidence, yet they're labeling them as such an anti-social group. Something is definitely not right."

I didn't fully understand everything yet, but I felt strongly, "This level of bashing is abnormal. A situation where there isn't even anyone defending the Family Federation is strange."

So, I decided to email them. I remember the wording vaguely. I wrote a brief email saying, "The situation is very difficult right now, but are you okay? This feels like a witch hunt. I think this is fascism. I'm thinking of writing something."

So, I sent that email, and I received a reply from him immediately. He wrote something like, "I was so happy that tears came to my eyes." I'm not sure if it was in that email or a subsequent one, but he wrote, "The current situation is dire, threatening even our right to exist. I'm fine for now, but I have a daughter. If anything were to happen to her too, it would truly be unbearable."

This made me think, "Wow, this is really a terrible time. Is the Family Federation really such a bad organization?"

It was as if there were a dark secret society within Japan, or so everyone was saying. I thought, "And this person is a member of that society, and yet he is such a good person."



Masaki Kito, leading activist leftwing lawyer of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS)

Within myself, I couldn't reconcile this inconsistency. Also, when I asked the editor from the Monthly Hanada magazine whether all the employees of Sekai Nippo are believers, he said he didn't really know.

I vaguely remembered hearing from somewhere that believers don't drink alcohol. So, I mentioned this, and the young editor from Monthly Hanada said, "Huh? The people at Sekai Nippo drink alcohol like crazy." (laughs) So I thought, "Maybe they're not believers after all?" However, later on, it turned out that almost everyone is a believer. Anyway, we had a lively conversation between the two of us. In the end, I thought, "Let's write something anyway."

Another reason I decided to start covering the Family Federation was when I saw Masaki Kito [leading member of left-wing activist lawyers' network hostile to the Family Federation] frequently appearing on TV programs like "Miyane-ya". What Kito was saying

seemed quite extreme to me - things like prostitution for high donations, connections to organized crime, and claiming that all believers in Japan are victims. I wondered if a lawyer should really be saying such things. Also, I didn't even know that the name had changed from the Unification Church to the Family Federation. Hearing Kito speak, I felt he harboured an extraordinary hatred towards the former Unification Church.

So, I thought to myself, "National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (Zenkoku-benren) claims it was established to help victims of spiritual scams, but is that really all there is to it? Is there some other purpose?"

At the time, I started thinking, "I wonder how that network came to be? Something seems strange." So, I decided, "Let's investigate it! Let's look into the network of lawyers!"

First, I checked magazines and articles from around the time of its establishment in May 1987. There was a monthly magazine called Zenbo (全貌 - The Full Picture) back then, associated with what was considered a far-right publishing house called Zenbo-sha. I wondered if it had some connections to the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office and provided independent information.

Other newspapers and magazines all featured stories from anonymous victims of so-called "spiritual sales". There was such an article in "Asahi Journal". Anyway, it was all about people being tricked out of their money by sweet talk, or being made to buy a really expensive vase, or something like that.



Hiroshi Yamaguchi, activist leftwing lawyer and founder and leading member of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS)

Among those publications, the one called Zenbo revealed that almost all the lawyers in National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales were connected to the Communist Party (JCP). Back then, some of them were also associated with the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) [existed 1945-1996], now referred to as the former Socialist Party. [JSP was re-founded in 1996 as the Social Democratic Party]. Lawyers like Hiroshi Yamaguchi were affiliated with the Socialist Party, particularly with its far-left wing, the Socialist Association. They were all leftist lawyers.

It was also written that the true purpose of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales was not to combat spiritual scams but to undermine the Anti-Espionage Law. Reading this, I somewhat understood it, but it was only covered in that one magazine. There wasn't much written about the true nature of the network of lawyers.

Additionally, there is the ideological struggle between theism (有心論) and atheism (無心論). Since the network of lawyers is connected to the Communist Party, of course they don't believe in God, and there are many ideological struggles. Of course, the Federation for Victory over Communism (勝共連合) and the Unification Church (統一教会) are organizations that are closely and inseparably linked. As the Federation for Victory over Communism criticizes communism, I thought it made sense that there were various relationships there, but I was a little unsure about what to make of it being reported in just that one magazine.

Then, just after that, I read a little about Toru Goto (後藤 徹) and the issue of abduction and detention in "Our Unpleasant Neighbour" (我らの不快な隣人) written by Kazuhiro Yonemoto (米本 和弘). So I was a little aware that it was members of the former Unification Church who had been abducted and detained.

So, I thought that the issue of abduction and confinement was probably important, and I asked Toru Goto to interview him. After all, he was held captive for 12 years and five months. That's a terrible thing. I was really shocked.

When I met with Toru Goto and asked him about abduction and confinement, he mentioned that there are over 4,300 victims of abduction and confinement. It was shocking news to me. It seems there exists a systematic structure for abduction and confinement. It has even become a business. I thought that the presence of apostates in post-war Japan is truly a matter of great concern which is deeply rooted and has been vicious.

Listening to Toru Goto's story, I could hardly believe it. In Japan, where freedom of religion is guaranteed, how could there be more than 4,300 people abducted and confined? A pastor who specialized in making individuals leave religious organisations, said himself that there were more than 5,000 such victims. Why did something like this happen? Why couldn't it be prevented or stopped? That was my simple question.

As I listened to Goto's story and learned more about what happened in Japan, his brother and sister had also been former believers. They were abducted and held captive by Takashi Miyamura (宮村 峻) and forced to leave the Unification Church. Toru Goto's older brother, who was also a victim, and his wife, also a former believer, and his sister, who had also been abducted and held captive, then locked Goto up in an attempt to "rescue" him, and held him captive for 12 years and five months. Those who were once considered victims, had now become perpetrators, harming their own relative Toru Goto.

I was deeply shocked to hear that, and so I asked Goto, "Did this really happen here on this Earth? Isn't

this really something that happens on another planet?" That's what I was saying, and he laughed a little because of that.

Then I mentioned about National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales.

I showed Goto a copy of the article in the magazine called Zenbo (全貌 - The Full Picture). At that time, Sato, the Public Relations Director who assisted with the interview, was there too. When I asked them if it was true, they both looked as if they already knew about it.

To a certain extent, it is common knowledge within the Family Federation. The believers know the true nature of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (Zenkoku Benren). I was surprised by that too. The general public has no idea about it at all.

The true nature of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, and the abduction and confinement cases, have recently started to be reported on TV and elsewhere due to Toru Goto's lawsuit against Eito Suzuki [journalist hostile to the Family Federation], but I think the general public still doesn't understand much about it.

In any case, the network of lawyers is still perceived as being on the side of justice in society, but various flaws are beginning to emerge. In fact, National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales is not primarily an organization for provide relief to victims of spiritual scams. Regarding this inconvenient truth about the network of lawyers, no media outlet besides Zenbo has covered it at all. I think this gap is also a problem.

It's amazing that ordinary people like us are completely unaware of or aren't informed of things that are pretty common knowledge among Family Federation believers. It's just as amazing that the media doesn't inform us about those things, exercising their "right not to report" to such an extent.

That is because the media, probably many media outlets and television, and the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales are aiming in the same direction. They are anti-religious. The general public in Japan also has no understanding of religion. That was true for me personally as well. The media amplifies this anti-religious sentiment, especially magazines like Bungei Shunju (Bunshun) are completely anti-religious. They are all like that, including the Shukan Shincho.



Media campaign against Family Federation in Japan

The media basically regards religion, especially new religions, as something suspicious. Moreover, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification fights against communism and has tried to enact an anti-espionage law. This is completely different from the direction the media aims for. The media and the network of lawyers are heading in exactly the same direction, so they will never report any inconvenient truths about the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales.

As a result, under the Kishida administration, the state itself has become anti-Family Federation. Essentially, the Kishida administration has given official approval to the persecution of the Family Federation. Starting from last year, or even before that, with the severing of ties and ultimately the filing of a dissolution order, the Japanese state has

effectively sanctioned the persecution and destruction of the Family Federation. National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales has given its full endorsement of it, so to speak.

However, as I mentioned earlier, ordinary people know that religious persecution is wrong. They understand the importance of protecting freedom of religion. But they have come to see the Family Federation not as a religion, but as a money-collecting organization. Therefore, there are misunderstandings and malice among the general public, heavily influenced by the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales.

And then there's the state. I was a conservative journalist, but it's like, how should I put it, it's like fighting against the state. This is something liberals often talk about, right? "Fighting against state power" or "not tolerating the tyranny of state power". Since I am conservative, I thought I was distanced from such things, but now I find myself fighting against state power. I never dreamed I would end up in such a

situation, but the current government policy against the Family Federation, including the request for dissolution, is clearly wrong.

This is complete religious persecution by the state, and there are no excuses for it. This is outright religious persecution. In the future, Prime Minister Kishida might be seen as a figure like Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. According to lawyer Fukumoto, he's even worse than Pilate.

In any case, there are no excuses. It is complete religious persecution and an infringement on religious freedom. I wonder if there are any media representatives here today. I hope they report on what has not been reported until now. It's no good if only people like me speak out. We wonder why they are reporting the news in such a premeditated manner, and why various incidents of discrimination and persecution occur against members of the Family Federation.

Why is Japan heading in this direction? I heard from Shunsuke Uotani (魚谷俊輔) of the Universal Peace Federation about how this persecution of the Family Federation is being evaluated overseas. It is being equated with Russia and China.



Tibetan Monks arrested in Communist China 5th April 2008

However, what I find even worse in this context is that it is well-known that new religions are being persecuted in Russia and China. Of course, this is very bad. I know a little about China and Russia. In Russia, I once heard a very sad nurse who is a Jehovah's Witness say that Putin is persecuting them. This is indeed a very serious situation. However, in Japan's case, Japan is recognized in the world as a member of the G7, an advanced democratic country where religious freedom is fully recognized.

Such religious persecution, in the same league as Russia and China, is happening here. This is an even worse situation. In a sense, Russia and China are very predictable; they are countries where one might expect this kind of behavior, unfortunately. But Japan is not expected to do such things by the international community.

Therefore, I want everyone to raise your voices about this situation. Overseas, this is seen as a crisis of democracy in Japan. A crisis of religious freedom is equivalent to a crisis of democracy. I wonder if the current Kishida administration is doing this without realizing it. That is the most serious aspect of this situation.

Honestly, I feel that this lack of awareness is extremely malicious. Overseas, the current situation in Japan is seen as a crisis of democracy. It's not just a matter of religious freedom. Religious freedom is fundamentally an issue of human rights, established first and foremost alongside freedom of speech, freedom of association, and individual rights. This is being neglected in Japan. Religious freedom is essentially about the freedom of one's mind.

I want the media to consider this more carefully. The biased reporting by the media really needs to be corrected.

Thank you very much.