

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's PM Kishida's Religious Discrimination Orders

Knut Holdhus
July 11, 2024



Kitakyushu City Hall (left) and City Council



Widespread discrimination from local authorities as a result of Kishida ordering the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to cut ties with minority faith

Tokyo, 10th July 2024 - Published as the seventh article in a series in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#)

Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat - Part 2: Ripples to local assemblies

Adoption of resolutions labeling a religion as "anti-social"

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

See the [first article](#), [second article](#), [third article](#), [fourth article](#), [fifth article](#), [sixth article](#)

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's declaration to sever ties with the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) and related organizations in August 2022, following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, also affected local legislatures.

In a survey of its affiliated members of parliament published by the Liberal Democratic Party on 8th September 2022, the "ties with the [religious organization](#) and related associations" that 179 members had were revealed to be routine interactions such as attending meetings, giving speeches, and sending congratulatory telegrams. However, the Prime Minister instructed the Liberal Democratic Party to revise its governance code to "ensure that we have no relationship whatsoever".



As a result of such a move by the Kishida administration, local legislatures began adopting resolutions to sever ties. On 28th September, the city councils of Tondabayashi (富田林) in Osaka Prefecture and Toyama City adopted such resolutions. On 18th November, the Osaka City Council adopted a resolution to "draw a clear line between itself and the anti-social activities of the former [Unification Church](#) and similar groups." On 15th December, the Kitakyushu City Council adopted a resolution to "confirm non-involvement with the anti-social former [Unification Church](#)." On 20th December, the Osaka Prefectural Assembly adopted a resolution to sever ties.

The Prime Minister's phrase "refrain from associating with organizations that are socially problematic" has been replaced in these resolutions with the term "anti-social organizations", branding the

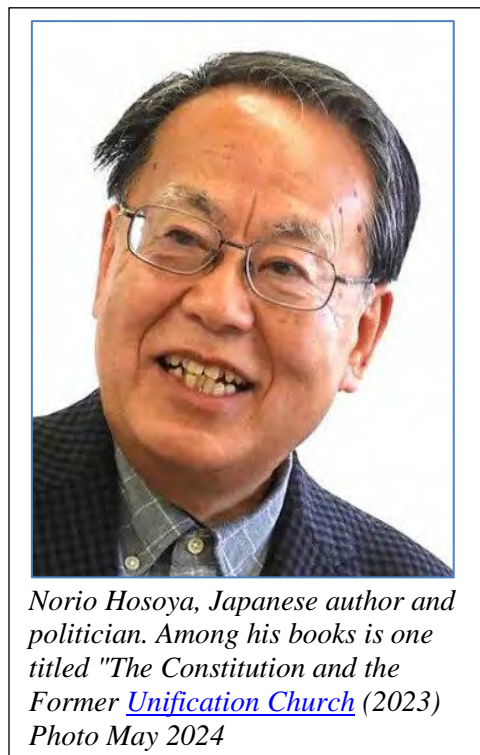
[religious organization](#) and related groups as anti-social forces such as organized crime groups. This risks putting believers and members of related organizations in a socially disadvantaged position, as if they were subject to exclusion clauses in business contracts (clauses for anti-social forces). Even if they are not engaged in "malicious business practices", applications (requests) from citizens who are believers or members may no longer be accepted by legislators.

In fact, applications (requests) were no longer accepted, and several members of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), a related organization, filed lawsuits against Toyama City, Osaka Prefecture, Osaka City, and Tondabayashi City seeking the cancellation of the resolutions. Additionally, the [Family Federation](#) filed a lawsuit against Kitakyushu City.



Widespread discrimination by authorities made situation much worse: Hate Graffiti sprayed on Family Federation properties throughout Japan

On 28th February this year, Osaka District Court dismissed the lawsuit against Osaka Prefecture, Tondabayashi City, and Osaka City seeking the annulment of the resolutions. However, the verdict stated that the resolutions "are merely a de facto expression of the intention of the city council and has no legal effect." The verdict also noted that the resolutions "cannot be recognized as infringing on the plaintiff's right to hand in applications (requests)." In other words, it [the [religious organization](#)] is not legally considered "antisocial".



Norio Hosoya, Japanese author and politician. Among his books is one titled "The Constitution and the Former [Unification Church](#) (2023) Photo May 2024

However, the judgment also stated that the resolution "can be said to have a de facto effect with political implications." This means that the resolution's wording "anti-social" is allowed to have "de facto effects with political implications". It could continue to damage the plaintiff's freedom of religion and right to hand in applications (requests). The plaintiff, a member of the UPF, has appealed, seeking the annulment of the resolutions.

On 25th October 2022, the Liberal Democratic Party decided on a revised governance code stating,

"Party members of the National Diet shall strictly refrain from actions that could be perceived as receiving undue political influence from organizations or groups whose social appropriateness of activities is in question, or that could be misunderstood as promoting their activities."

They also notified local organizations about cutting ties with the [Family Federation](#) and related groups.

Local assembly members affiliated with the Liberal Democratic Party who hold the beliefs of the [Family](#)

[Federation](#) were forced to decide whether or not to seek the party's official endorsement. In the case of a city councilor in the Kanto region, he left the party and became an independent. The Prime Minister's declaration of severance of ties gave him the push he needed. The city councilor found it tough being treated as subordinates in party elections. He was re-elected in the city council election last April. This indicates that there were members who left the party for religious reasons rather than policy differences.

On the other hand, there have been cases where local assemblies rejected resolutions to sever ties. On 5th October 2022, the Kyoto Prefectural Assembly, and on 14th October, the Kochi Prefectural Assembly, voted against such resolutions.

In September, the Toride City Council in Ibaraki Prefecture also rejected a similar resolution. Council member Norio Hosoya (細谷典男) and others voiced opposition, stating that it

"infringes on the basic human rights of persons who fulfill their duty to pay taxes as citizens and have not committed any crimes."

Could there be problems with the Kishida administration's push for "severing ties" and seeking a dissolution order against the [religious organization](#)? In the next part, we will hear from local assembly members who have doubts.

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Protests: Japan's Measures Seen As Totalitarian

July 10, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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More protests are being held in Japan against measures seen as totalitarian taken by the Kishida administration against minority faith

Tokyo, 8th July 2024 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article*

“We’ve been labeled,” say second-generation believers with agitated voices at a rally calling for religious freedom

by the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

Rallies were held in various places to **protest the unfairness of the government’s request for a court order to dissolve the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** (formerly known as the Unification Church). On 7th July, in Takasaki City, Gunma Prefecture, the second “Gunma Rally to Protect Basic Human Rights and Freedom of



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Religion”, following the first one in March of this year, was held, attracting about 400 believers.



Location of the cities mentioned. Illustration: Maximilian Dörrbecker (Chumhwa) / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp

A second-generation believer, a woman who said her heart had been hurt by the bashing of the **religious organization**, spoke with an agitated voice, saying, “Second-generation believers have been labeled as pitiable.” Nevertheless, she expressed her resolve, saying, “I received the church’s **blessing of marriage** of my own will. I am happy now. I will continue to live in a way that contributes to the nation.”

Fumiya Sako (酒生文弥), head priest of *Jodo Shinshu Shinjōji Temple* (浄土真宗真照寺) [Editor’s note: part of *Shin Buddhism* or *True Pure Land Buddhism*], pointed out that the separation of religion and state in Japan was imposed by the former Allied Powers after the war, and he viewed this as problematic. He preached that the core of religion is “love for one’s neighbour” and emphasized the importance of “protecting the freedom of the soul”.

In Sapporo, the “*Hokkaido Rally to Protect Basic Human Rights and Freedom of Religion*” was held on 6th July, with about 200 believers gathering. Masayuki Kudō (工藤雅之), a resident of Sapporo and one of the current believers who gave a speech, reported **his experience as a victim of abduction and confinement aimed at forcibly breaking his faith**. Criticizing the methods used in abductions and confinement and the bias of the media, he said,

“For over 40 years, lawyers opposing the Family Federation and Christian ministers known as faith-breakers have collaborated, using violent methods to abduct and confine people. The media has never reported any truth that is inconvenient to them.”

Norio Hosoya (細谷典男), a city council member from Toride City (取手市), Ibaraki Prefecture, who took the stage as one of the speakers, criticized the process behind the request for a dissolution order. He stated,

“The government’s approach of filing a request for a dissolution order based solely on one-sided claims cannot be considered democratic and has extremely strong totalitarian overtones.”



Norio Hosoya (細谷典男), Japanese author and politician. Among his books is one titled “*The Constitution and the Former Unification Church*” (憲法と『旧統一教会』) (2023). Photo (May 2024): *Sekai Nippo*

Featured image above: Masayuki Kudo (工藤雅之) speaking on 6th July 2024 in Sapporo about his experience of being abducted and held captive. Photo: Hajime Yuasa (湯朝肇)

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