

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Politician Defends Government Persecuted Minority

Knut Holdhus
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Shingo Inoue, Kitakyushu City Councilor being interviewed 26th June 2024

Japanese politician tells his story to Tokyo paper how he speaks up for discriminated, persecuted, and vilified socially excluded minority religion



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

Politicians have a responsibility to correct their mistakes

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

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"I feel that I am partly responsible for causing a situation in which many of you suffered greatly. However, I believe that if a politician has made a mistake, he also has the responsibility to correct it. If I have the chance, I will do whatever it takes."



From the demo in Kitakyushu City 30th June 2024

In December 2022, the Kitakyushu City Council unanimously passed a resolution confirming that it would not be involved with the anti-social [Unification Church](#). Shingo Inoue (井上真吾), an independent

with progressive views, regrets having supported this resolution.

On 30th June, he took the stage at the "[Kitakyushu Conference to Protect Fundamental Human Rights and Freedom of Religion](#)" held in Kitakyushu City, expressing strong feelings of self-reproach.

The city council resolution, which labeled the [Family Federation](#) as anti-social, stated in strong terms that "we will have no relationship whatsoever with the [organization](#), such as participating in its events, sending messages, or receiving supporters' membership fees." [Editor's note: Most city councilors and members of parliament have support groups or patronage associations.]

Despite consistently opposing opinions and resolutions submitted by the Communist Party, every member, including those from the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito [Editor's note: government coalition partner], supported this resolution. In an interview with this paper, Inoue revealed that he felt pressured by multiple council members who told him, "You are the only one opposing." He confessed,

"I thought it would be inappropriate to stubbornly disrupt the unity by being the only one to oppose, so I reluctantly marked approval."

Then, three months later, in February of last year, a petition, which included a request for consideration of believers' rights along with a statement, was delivered to all members of the Kitakyushu City Council. The only one who responded to this petition was Shingo Inoue. He said,

"Isn't it a personal freedom to associate with whomever one wishes? Being told by others not to associate with someone is unacceptable. It is problematic for political parties or the council to interfere in matters related to the inner lives of individuals, people's way of living, their way of thinking, and their ideological beliefs."

Inoue added,

"It is unacceptable that believers and their children should be bullied at school and in the local community and excluded from social activities."

After the resolution, Shingo Inoue felt uneasy, and the petition request was a much-welcomed opportunity.

"If things stayed as they were, it would have been a regrettable experience for me to have acted against my political will. I am grateful for being given the chance to correct my actions."



Up until that point, Inoue had no connection with the [religious organization](#). The only encounter, if it can be called so, was shortly after he joined the Communist Party, when he received a flyer from a friendly-looking elderly couple in front of a station in Kitakyushu City. Later, he found out they were members of the [Family Federation](#). The thought that the resolution might deprive this couple of their freedom of religion crossed his mind.

Inoue debated against the "Statement of Opinion Calling for an Order to Disband the Former [Unification Church](#)" submitted by the Communist Party (JCP) in the Diet last September. He pointed out that because of the "public opinion of hatred towards the former [Unification Church](#) fueled by media reports", there have been cases of victims, such as persons being forced out of their jobs, being bullied at school, and not being able to rent venues for events. He then appealed,

"Isn't it the duty of politics to listen to the painful stories of those who are still excluded and discriminated against because they have faith, and to make it possible for them to live peacefully as equal citizens?"

Before and after the resolution in December 2022, several statements and resolutions regarding the former [Unification Church](#) were submitted, but they were rejected due to opposition from both the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Komeito [Editor's note: government coalition partner]. Why was the resolution to sever ties the only one to be unanimously approved? Shingo Inoue speculated,

"The LDP, the largest faction, probably didn't want to appear reluctant or pressured into agreement by the opposition, especially with the unified local elections coming up in the spring of the following year."

He expressed his indignation, stating that it is outrageous for the basic human rights of citizens to be sacrificed for political gains.

The day after the resolution, both local and national media extensively reported on the decision to sever ties. This made Inoue "realize the magnitude of the matter".

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Kishida's Orders Cause Widespread Discrimination

July 11, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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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*

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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"**.



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

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.

On 28th February this year, Osaka District Court dismissed the lawsuit against Osaka



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

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".

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.

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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."



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*

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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Featured image above: Kitakyushu City Hall (left) and City Council. Photo: *Sekai Nippo*

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