

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's PM Kishida On Leftist Anti-Religious Bandwagon

Knut Holdhus
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Isao Tonomi, born in 1935 in Aso City, Kumamoto Prefecture. After graduating from Kumamoto Technical High School, he joined Shukai Construction. He served as a member of the Kumamoto City Council for 28 years over seven terms. He is a former chairman of the Kumamoto City Council and a former chairman of the Kumamoto Prefecture City Council. He is also an advisor to the National Association of Volunteer Probation Officers

Japanese politician points out how the Kishida administration all of a sudden jumped on anti-religious bandwagon



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

A sense of crisis in Japan where faith is declining

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

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"The very basic principle of protecting religious freedom is not being upheld. What is religion? When human beings encounter situations beyond their control, they naturally

put their hands together and pray to [God](#)."



On June 16, 2024, the 'Kumamoto Citizens' Association for the Protection of Basic Human Rights and Freedom of Religion' held a protest march in the arcade district of Kumamoto City against the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's request for a dissolution order for the [Family](#)

[Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)

On 16th June, the followers of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) held a [conference and a street demonstration in Kumamoto City](#) on the theme of religious freedom. In his opening remarks, Isao Tonomi (主海偉佐雄), a former chairman of the Kumamoto City Council, spoke about the importance of having faith. He used the example of prison chaplains (often monks or pastors) who guide criminals in detention centers to atone for their sins and reform themselves. Tonomi emphasized,

"Having faith and being able to guide others is extremely important for human beings."

Following the shooting incident involving former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, criticism was directed at the [Family Federation](#). Lawmakers with "ties" to the [Family Federation](#) or related organizations, such as attending gatherings and events, became the focus of media attention. In Kumamoto Prefecture, Tonomi was the first "former politician with ties" to become a media target.

In an interview with this paper, Tonomi laughed it off, saying, "Perhaps because I said what needed to be said outright, I haven't been interviewed by anyone since." Nevertheless, he lamented that people who had previously participated together in gatherings and events of related organizations, or sent congratulatory messages, "all suddenly distanced themselves".

For Tonomi, who has an unwavering belief in the importance of protecting religious freedom, it was easy to accept the request to become a representative leader of a related organization and the request to become the chairman of the "Kumamoto Citizens' Association for the Protection of Basic Human Rights and Religious Freedom", which was established in conjunction with the conference.



A proposed tunnel project between the Japanese island of Kyushu and South Korea. Illustration: [The International Highway Foundation \(IHF\)](#)

During his time as a city council member, Tonomi was inspired by the Japan-Korea Tunnel Project, which envisioned a tunnel connecting Karatsu City in Saga Prefecture with Korea. He also became sympathetic to activities promoting world peace, such as young people riding bicycles to advocate for the peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula. He not only joined the board of related organizations but also deepened his friendships with the believers.

"Even though we do good things and work hard, people who don't know anything are making a fuss about dissolving the [religious organization](#), and Prime Minister Kishida jumps on that bandwagon. It's ridiculous to raise one's voice without knowing the truth. It makes me think, what a pathetic state Japan is in. I feel that Japanese politics has truly become pitiful."

Lamenting this, Tonomi advises the members of the [Family Federation](#), "The believers should more boldly say what needs to be said." He believes that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's request for a court order to dissolve the [Family Federation](#) was influenced by leftist ideas held by politicians and the media, who lack religious values. Tonomi asserts,

"All the wonderful aspects of the Japanese heart come from religion. If they destroy religious organizations like this, what will become of Japan and the Japanese people?"

Tonomi himself practices Jodo Buddhism and serves as a responsible officer of the Kumamoto Prefecture Gokoku Shrine. Among the twelve officers of the Kumamoto Prefecture Association of Shinto Shrines, he is the only one who is not a Shinto priest. "Religion is important for humanity, but households without Buddhist altars or Shinto shrines are increasing. The number of shrines without priests is also on the rise," he said, expressing his concern about the diminishing presence of religion in communities and homes.

Japan has traditionally been a religious country centered around the Imperial family. Tonomi recalls, "Before the war, there was something called 'moral education'. The Imperial Rescript on Education was taught, and there were statues of Kinjiro Ninomiya (二宮金次郎)." [Editor's note: Japanese sage and agrarian reformer, also called Sontoku Ninomiya (1787-1856).]

In light of the loss of the Japanese spirit, Tonomi reflects on the case of Tetsuya Yamagami, who killed former Prime Minister Abe:

"We're creating heinous criminals who easily kill people they hate."



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Politician Warns: Any Faith Could Be Targeted

July 18, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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Japanese politician warns that any religious organization could become target of current persecution of minority faith.



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

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

“The prime minister’s methods are unfair,” says Toride City Council Member Norio Hosoya (細谷 典男)

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In the Toride City Council election in Ibaraki Prefecture held in January this year Norio Hosoya (細谷典男) raised human rights issues related to the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the Unification Church) and was re-elected. Despite opposition from his supporters, who disagreed with including the [Family Federation](#) in his campaign promises, he remained steadfast in his beliefs. In the previous election four years ago, he was ranked 18th out of 24 candidates, so "although I felt a sense of crisis, I delivered my views on the [Family Federation](#) to the voters without hiding anything."



Hosoya was elected in second place this time, with 1.9 times the number of votes he received previously.

"It's challenging to increase votes by even 100 in local elections," he said. "My views were not rejected, and I gained considerable support. I believe the citizens of Toride have shown that a dissolution order is unnecessary."

Hosoya had no prior involvement with the [Family Federation](#). His stance against discrimination towards the [Family Federation](#) began in September 2022, when a citizen submitted a petition requesting an investigation into the relationship between the [Family Federation](#) and council members. The petition was introduced by a Communist Party member.

"I personally had no 'connections' as the media claims. In my legislative activities, I made it a principle to listen to both sides of an issue. However, I struggled to hear opposing views to the petition. Through an acquaintance, I was able to hear the [Family Federation's](#) side. When I listened, the people from the [Family Federation](#) did not seem like the 'anti-social' or 'fraudulent group' described in the petition."

Hosoya felt uneasy about the media coverage because they labeled the [Family Federation](#) without any specific evidence of harm. When he asked the petitioner, "Has there been any harm or are there people in trouble in Toride?" the answer was, "No confirmed cases."

"If you look at the principle of criminal legality in Article 31 of the Constitution, the Japanese authorities are to punish those who have committed a crime. It is against the Constitution to try to exclude those who have not committed a specific crime."



Debate in a Japanese city council meeting.
Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator 18th July 2024.

After debating this in the city council, the overwhelming majority agreed with Hosoya's view. After much discussion, only the four members of the Communist Party supported the petition. Hosoya is confident that "if proper discussions are held in other local councils, they will reach the same

conclusion as Toride."

Toride is a hilly area that often experiences flooding. Hosoya argues,

"When flooding occurs, can we say, 'We won't help here because it's a [Family Federation](#) home'?" In the council, he questioned whether there would be any differential treatment of citizens based on their affiliation with the [Family Federation](#)

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of citizens based on their affiliation with the [Family Federation](#) at any public service counters. The authorities responded that "such a thing is impossible."



Student volunteers from the [Family Federation](#) ready to clear snow. Illustration by Microsoft Designer Image Creator 18th July 2024.

Regarding the incident in Kanazawa City where student volunteers from the [Family Federation](#) who wanted to remove snow were turned away by the authorities, Hosoya declared,

"This is a significant loss for the administration. The government cannot function without the cooperation of its citizens. Since it is clear that affiliated groups of the [Family Federation](#) are beneficial to the administration, dissolving them would be a loss."

He criticized the government for submitting and passing a victim relief bill in the Diet based on one-sided opinions, and for exercising its right to question the [organization](#) and requesting its dissolution. Hosoya emphasized, "It may be presumptuous, but I want to say from the local level that Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's approach is unfair. It labels people as 'anti-social' and removes them from society, which is akin to totalitarianism. This method is truly dangerous. It must be nipped in the bud."

Hosoya intends to continue sounding the alarm, as he believes that any group could potentially be targeted, not just the [Family Federation](#).

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Featured image above: 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](#)

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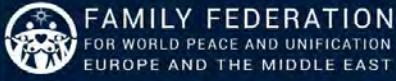
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