

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Government Witch Hunt for Unificationists in Japan

Knut Holdhus  
August 8, 2024



Graffiti damage at Ichinomiya Family Church



[Sekai Nippo](#)

### Safety for believers seriously compromised by Kishida administration's campaign against religious minority

Tokyo, 8th August 2024 - Published as the 17th 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 3: Believers Suffering Discrimination and Human Rights Violations

Graffiti perpetrator shows no remorse

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

[Nippo](#)

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"I think many followers felt outraged when they heard that the perpetrator considered himself a hero fighting against evil."



Meijo Family Church of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)

Those are the words of a male staff member of the Meijo Family Church (Meijo Church) of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) in Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture. Two years ago, on the night of 15th August 2022, the Meijo Church suffered vandalism, with graffiti spray-painted on its entrance doors, with words like "cult" and "danger". This was a month after the shooting incident of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, during a period when media's bashing of the [Family Federation](#) was intensifying.

The Meijo Church was not the only one affected by graffiti. On the night of 14th August 2022, the Ichinomiya Family Church (Ichinomiya Church) in Ichinomiya City, Aichi Prefecture, about a 20-minute drive from the Meijo Church, also suffered graffiti damage on its walls with spray-painted messages like "Cult, get out!", "Yamagami,

Banzai!", and "Traitors". A male staff member of the Ichinomiya Church, who happened to arrive early to prepare for the meeting on the 15th, discovered the graffiti.

The Ichinomiya Police Station, which investigated the incident, arrested a man in his 40s who works for a company in Aichi Prefecture, based on footage from nearby security cameras. The man also admitted to the charges.

According to the man's statement, his motives for the graffiti were "anger towards the Liberal Democratic Party's connection with a quasi-criminal religious organization" and "to make people aware of the malicious nature of the former [Unification Church](#)." However, he also admitted that it was "a pastime during the Obon holiday" and that he thought "he might get attention by doing such things."

The man had researched the [religious organization](#) through online searches and magazine articles, concluding that it was "nothing but a group of traitors sending large donations to Korea." He felt a compulsion to take "action with a message".

He looked up the location of the nearby Ichinomiya Church and, using the spray paint he had, he hid his face with sunglasses and graffitied words like "cult" on the wall of the place of worship late at night on the 14th August 2022. He also painted over the nameplate of the church with black spray paint.



Feeling that he had managed to damage the [religious organization](#), he decided to graffiti another place of worship. Using a map app, he drove to the Meijo Church in Nagoya City. He painted over the mailbox with black spray paint and left similar graffiti.

During the interrogation, the man expressed satisfaction with his graffiti acts, saying, "I am very pleased because I managed to challenge the corrupt relationship between politics and religion." Judging by the content of his statement, he showed no sign of remorse. In September of the same year, he was fined 200,000 yen by a summary order from the Ichinomiya Summary Court for property damage and insult.

In February 2023, the [Family Federation](#) filed a civil lawsuit in the Tokyo District Court seeking damages. On 25th January of this year, Judge Chieko Shimizu (清水知恵子) recognized defamation, stating that the expression "cult" lowered the social evaluation of the plaintiff, and ordered the man to pay approximately 590,000 yen, including repair costs for the two facilities.

The [religious organization](#) appreciates that the court recognized the expression "cult" as something that lowers social credibility. However, they are concerned that if a dissolution order is issued against the [corporation](#), the situation could spiral out of control, and even worse damage is expected to occur.

After the graffiti incident, the Meijo Church instructed its members,

"Graffiti can be fixed, but if you encounter the perpetrator, anything could happen. If you find the perpetrator, do not make contact under any circumstances."

Hatred towards the [religious organization](#) casts a dark shadow over the safety of its believers.

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# Believers Facing Discrimination, Insults, Threats

August 7, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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**Damage suffered by members of Family Federation and its places of worship**

Damage to members	• Physical harm (incl. violence, outpatient treatment, suicide, etc.)	12
	• Property damage (incl. vandalism, destruction of belongings, etc.)	10
	• Discrimination (real estate contracts, speech and conduct at school/work, etc.)	25
	• Insults, threats, and harassment (from relatives, work mates, school mates, etc.)	107
	• Others	10
Damage to places of worship	• Property damage (incl. vandalism, destruction of possessions, etc.)	7
	• Discrimination (real estate contracts, speech and conduct at school/work, etc.)	46
	• Insults, threats, and harassment (from relatives and acquaintances, etc.)	116
	• Others	18
<b>Total</b>		<b>351</b>

(According to the records of the HQ of Family Federation of Japan for Nov. 2023 – 20<sup>th</sup> July 2024)

*Ignored by Japanese media: Investigative team exposes how members of religious minority face widespread discrimination, insults, threats, and harassment*



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

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by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

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The [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) has revealed that its members and places of worship have been experiencing various forms of harm since the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

At a press conference on 7<sup>th</sup> November last year, [Family Federation](#) President Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広) stated, "Since the incident, we have been going through truly difficult circumstances:"



*Tomihiro Tanaka, here at press conference in Tokyo 7th Nov. 2023. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by the [Family Federation of Japan](#).*

- "There is a young man who was forced to quit his job,"
- "A student who graduated from a [Family Federation](#)-affiliated university in South Korea had his job offer rescinded,"
- "In social studies classes, teachers have been continuously criticizing the [Family Federation](#), causing children to stop attending school,"
- "In schools, there have been test questions that led to conclusions defaming the [Family Federation](#),"
- "A young man, excessively stressed by media reports, attempted suicide, and there have been suicides as well."



*Widespread discrimination by authorities made situation much worse: Graffiti sprayed on [Family Federation](#) properties throughout Japan. Photo: [FFWPU](#)*

Since November 2023, the [Family](#)

[Federation](#) headquarters has been compiling data, and as of July 20<sup>th</sup>, there have been 351 incidents of harm experienced by members and places of worship nationwide. Of these, 164 incidents involved harm to members, and 187 incidents involved harm to places of worship.

Breaking it down, the harm experienced by members includes 12 cases of physical harm such as violence, hospital outpatient treatment, and suicide; 10 cases of property damage such as vandalism and destruction of belongings; 25 cases of discrimination related to real estate contracts, and speech and conduct at schools and workplaces; 107 cases of insults, threats, and harassment from relatives, work mates and class mates; and 10 other cases.

The damage experienced by places of worship includes 7 cases of property damage such as vandalism and destruction of possessions; 46 cases of discrimination related to real estate contracts, and speech and conduct at schools and workplaces; 116 cases of insults, threats, and harassment from relatives and acquaintances of members; and 18 other cases. However, most of these incidents have not been reported by the media.

This is how Susumu Sato (佐藤進広), the Public Relations Director of the [Family Federation](#), reflects on the situation after the incident [[Editor's note: the assassination of Shinzo Abe on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2022](#)],

**"The media's perspective has been that they have no interest in the harm suffered by the [Family Federation](#). Rather than seeing it as harm, it has been viewed as a deserved consequence for being the party that produced victims."**



*The logo of the [Second-Generation Association for Protecting the Human Rights of Believers](#).*

The 351 cases of harm are those identified by the [Family Federation](#) headquarters, and there is also information collected by groups such as the "[Second Generation Association](#)

[for Protecting the Human Rights of Believers](#)," which was established by young believers. Some of this information is posted on the association's website. For instance, there is a severe case where a parent was denied admission to a hospital after the staff saw "[Family Federation](#)" written on the person's insurance card. Such cases of **discrimination in medical settings, which can sometimes be life-threatening, are particularly serious.**

Send us a message

First Name \* Last Name

Email \*

Email Address

Your Message \*

Submit

**Threatening phone calls such as “I’ll kill you”** have been received nationwide. The Public Relations Department estimates that **the number might well exceed 10,000**, making them too numerous to count.

The believers are persons who have no connection to the assassination of Shinzo Abe. However, following the shocking assassination of the former Prime Minister, the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (Zenkoku Benren), which has a contentious relationship with the [Family Federation](#), issued a statement on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2022, regarding the shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The statement read,

“As an organization that has long been concerned about the suffering, conflicts, and financial difficulties faced by many former believers, their families, and second-generation believers, we can understand the anguish of the suspect Yamagami and his anger towards the [Family Federation](#).”

The *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales*, which expressed **“understanding” of the defendant’s “anger”, in other words, his intent to kill**, became a source of information, leading to an unprecedented amount of media coverage criticizing the [Family Federation](#) and pursuing its “ties” to Shinzo Abe and the *Liberal Democratic Party*. Former believers who claimed to be victims were featured almost daily.

As a result, many gifts and donations have been sent to the detention center where Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), the defendant, is being held. Two years after the assassination, the defendant reportedly told his defense team,

“I did not anticipate the current situation to arise,” and “I don’t know if it has been good or bad for the second-generation believers.”



*Tetsuya Yamagami, the man who killed Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan. Photo: Andrew2592009 / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int*



This was reported by Kyodo News, but some local newspapers, such as the Sanyo

Shimbun on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2024, headlined it as an “unanticipated situation”.

We cannot overlook this “unanticipated” violation of the human rights of those with the faith of the [Family Federation](#).

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