

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: More Persecuted Believers Raise Voices in Japan

Knut Holdhus
August 19, 2024



Yoshiaki Kawahara sharing his experiences of street preaching at a symposium in March in Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture



[Sekai Nippo](#)

A growing number of religious minority believers have started raising their voices

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Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat - Part 3: Believers Suffering Discrimination and Human Rights Violations

Believers Speak Out

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

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A request for a court order to dissolve the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) was issued in October last year. Many of the [religious organization's](#) followers have been waiting to see how the [organization](#) would respond, but some have independently taken to the streets and begun to make their opinions known to society.

Kazuya Miseki (a pseudonym), a man in his 30s living in Adachi Ward, Tokyo, joined the [religious organization](#) after being approached in Shinjuku [Editor's note: Tokyo's major commercial and administrative center] at the age of 20. Since last October, he has been street preaching at JR Matsudo Station in Chiba Prefecture. He had felt since the shooting incident involving former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,

"There are too few voices from people of faith. Can't someone counter this terrible media coverage?"

He said,

"Some church staff members have been hurt by past critical reports. Church staff are not the only believers, so I thought that if I want to do something, I should speak up without hesitation."



Hiroshi Ogasawara

Naturally, he was worried that if he stood on the street, he would be criticized, his private life might be negatively affected, and he might even be harmed. But once he started, more and more believers joined him, and some even began drawing illustrations for the flyers they distributed. Recently, he has also been talking about how he has matured through his faith.

In January this year, the "Chiba Prefecture Citizens' Association to Protect Freedom of Religion and Human Rights" was established, mainly by believers. Hiroshi Ogasawara (小笠原裕) (61) from Yachiyo City became the representative. He emphasized the social backlash against the religious organization, stating,

"The proposition to socially exclude religion is spreading throughout society. The religious community needs to consciously stand up, and for that to happen, we, the people

involved, must first raise our voices."



From the Chiba Prefectural Convention of the "Symposium to Protect Freedom of Religion and Human Rights", held in Chiba City 20th March 2024. From left: Hiroshi Ogasawara, Yoshiaki Kawahara, Rev. Haruhisa Nakagawa, Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama

In March, they held a [symposium in Chiba City](#). They invited members of parliament, lawyers, and Christian pastors, but what Ogasawara values most is for the believers themselves to take to the streets and directly express their honest feelings to the public.

Yoshiaki Kawahara (川原義昭) (63), a board member of the organization living in Chiba City, also began giving speeches on the street in front of JR Chiba Station last autumn. Kawahara has expanded his street preaching efforts nationwide through connections among believers of the [Family Federation](#) community. The circle is steadily expanding, with the number of locations holding such speeches exceeding 140 in July.

Being active on the streets, however, often led to disruptions. Around May of this year, a passerby repeatedly hurled insult at him. Even someone who initially stepped in to mediate turned against Kawahara and joined in the verbal abuse after learning he was associated with the former [Unification Church](#). Although Kawahara called the police, the officers didn't take the incident seriously and eventually left without resolving the issue.

Kawahara says,

"It is not easy to correct people's prejudices, but it is important to sincerely convey the truth and find people who can empathize."

He also hopes that this street speech activity may bring about internal reforms within the [Family Federation](#).

He explains,

"Believers tend to operate in a top-down manner, which leaves little opportunity to express their own words and opinions. By taking to the streets, we hope to foster individual initiatives and open up new possibilities."

Daichi Ito (伊藤大地) (70) from Fukuoka City shares this sentiment. Feeling the recent media coverage was unjust, he began speaking out about religious freedom through street campaigns after September 2022. When he shared these activities online, he received a flood of responses from believers nationwide, praising his courageous actions. Ito argues, "If the church as an organization isn't going to act, then the believers must rise up."

Furthermore, he enthusiastically states,

"It's not just about asserting our own viewpoints, but also about considering what Japan, in its current national crisis, should be like. We need to send out a strong message with the country's best interests in mind."



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](#)

In June this year, believers formed the "Kumamoto Prefecture Citizens' Association to Protect Basic Human Rights and Freedom of Religion" in Kumamoto City and held a [protest march](#) in the city. These efforts to appeal to the general public are spreading across the country.

End of part 3 (16th - 22nd article).

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Discrimination: Denied Contracts Due To Religion

August 16, 2024 • Knut Holdhus



Members of religious minority denied contracts because of their faith



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 news coverage surrounding the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe became a major sensation when police information emerged shortly after the incident. This information stated that Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), the accused, harbored resentment toward the high monetary donations made by his mother, a member of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (formerly known as the *Unification Church*). The criticism of the *Family Federation* became so intense and frequent that it overshadowed the heinous nature of the crime itself.



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

Amidst this, members of the *Family Federation* began to experience various forms of victimization, including discrimination, verbal and physical abuse, and damage to property.

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Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama. Photo: Sekai Nippo

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the *Family Federation's* registration as a religious corporation. At an international symposium held in France in June, international lawyer Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹) emphasized that “during this period, the *Family Federation* has never been involved in any criminal activities.”

However, the Kishida administration, without going through the Cabinet, changed the interpretation of the *Religious Corporations Act* overnight. They decided to include “acts that are unlawful according to civil law” as a condition for exercising the right to question religious organizations. Consequently, the government petitioned the courts to issue a dissolution order against the *Family Federation* based on the *Religious Corporations Act*. As a result, many members are concerned that discrimination and harm will increase even further.

However, the Kishida administration, without going through the Cabinet, changed the interpretation of the *Religious Corporations Act* overnight. They decided to

There are also problems affecting daily life, such as difficulties in making purchases. At a press conference on 7th November last year, *Family Federation* Chairman Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広) cited cases such as “being refused real estate contracts”, “being denied the purchase of flowers or catered lunch boxes”, and “a famous automobile manufacturer banning the sale of cars, making it impossible to buy one”.



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


One such case occurred in March at a Nissan-affiliated used car dealership in Aichi Prefecture, where an employee of the *Family Federation* in the same prefecture attempted to purchase a car under the *organization's* name but was refused.

Although there was no issue when the employee initially expressed the intention to purchase under the *organization's* name, they were later contacted by the dealership's representative, who informed them that the sale could not proceed despite the contract (under the *organization's* name) having already been stamped.

When the representative was contacted by phone for confirmation, he explained that the refusal was because the *Family Federation* was “a group that has caused public concern” and was “facing a request for a dissolution order from the *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology*”, making it “socially inappropriate, and not suitable for the company to engage with”.



In Tokyo, a Toyota-affiliated used car dealership also canceled a vehicle purchase contract after the payment had been made and the delivery date set. In September last year, a church employee visited the dealership, requested a quote, and expressed the intention to purchase under the *organization's* name. While exchanging documents and setting

 Signing contract at used-car dealership.
Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image
Creator, 17th August 2024.

documents and setting the delivery date, the dealership contacted them on 10th October of the same year, stating

they wanted to cancel the vehicle sale contract. The reason given was again "a decision based on public opinion".

The church employee in charge said,

"This clearly feels like discrimination to us. We had paid the money and set the delivery date, but the unilateral cancellation left us very depressed."

The [Family Federation](#) has sent letters of protest to both companies through their lawyer, demanding the sales refusal be retracted, citing unfair discrimination and prejudice.

There have also been difficulties with real estate contracts. Yoshihiro Tsuda (pseudonym), an employee of the [Family Federation](#) living in Ibaraki Prefecture, faced rejection from a guarantor company when he tried to rent a property under his name for his parents to relocate to last year.

Tsuda recalls,

"Because my elderly parents had to quit their jobs, they needed to move out of the house they lived in. Since my parents and my sister's family all lived in Saitama, I was looking for a property within Saitama Prefecture."

In September of last year, Tsuda found a suitable property, and after consulting with the real estate company, he filled out the contract on behalf of his parents, including his name, occupation, and income. He explains,

"The real estate company seemed to think it would probably be okay, as they were only focused on the income aspect, but later, I received a notification that the application had been halted during the review process."

He was not given a detailed reason for the rejection. Tsuda was left with an uneasy feeling, suspecting that his religious beliefs may have negatively impacted the contract.

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Featured image above: Yoshihiro Tsuda (pseudonym), who was refused a real estate contract, in the morning of the 10th August 2024 in Ibaraki Prefecture. Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀) / [Sekai Nippo](#)

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