

## FFWPU Europe and Middle the East: Japan Shocked - Faith Breakers Treat Unificationists Like Animals

Knut Holdhus  
October 1, 2024



Participants receiving explanation of the panels on 29th September 2024, in Kumamoto City, Kyushu, Japan



[Sekai Nippo](#)

### Exhibition visitors shocked in Japan as they learn how believers of minority religion were treated like animals

Tokyo, 30th September 2024 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#)

"Believers Are Being Treated Like Animals": Panel Exhibition about Abduction and Confinement in Kumamoto

by the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

To raise awareness about reality of coercive faith-breaking against followers of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), the Kumamoto Citizens' Association for the Protection of Basic Human Rights and Freedom of Religion - chaired by Isao Tonomi (主海偉佐雄) - held an exhibition on abduction and confinement in Kumamoto City on 29th September 2024. About 250 people attended.



Toru Goto, member of [Family Federation](#) held captive for 12 years and 5 months by his own family and professional faith-breakers who attempted to break his faith



Masumi Fukuda speaking in Kumamoto 16th June 2024

The exhibition featured around 60 panels explaining the damage caused by forced conversions, including the case of Toru Goto (後藤徹), who was abducted in 1995 and [confined by his relatives](#) for more than 12 years.

Participants, while listening to detailed explanations, expressed their shock, saying things like, "I can't believe such terrible things happened in Japan," and "They treat believers like animals."

In addition to the panels, a video of interviews conducted by non-fiction writer Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ) with victims of abduction and confinement was also shown. In an interview with Toru Goto, he recounted his harrowing experience, describing how he survived by eating seasoning and food scraps from the kitchen sink while being [held captive and starved](#).

The organizers said,

"Kumamoto is the first place in the country to hold this panel exhibition. We hope it will spread across the country and raise awareness about the reality of the suffering of the victims."

The exhibition runs until 30th September.

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# 12 Religious Freedom NGOs Denouncing Japan

• October 15, 2023 • Knut Holdhus

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From Japan's history of religious persecution. Here, scene from a painting depicting the 26 martyrs of Japan, a group of Catholics martyred by crucifixion in Nagasaki 5<sup>th</sup> February 1597. Photo: Abraham / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 3.0 Unp. Cropped

## Heads of 12 religious freedom NGOs appalled by Japan's treatment of Family Federation

In an article published by Bitter Winter, the leading magazine on religious liberty and human rights, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2023, 12 religious freedom NGOs, both religious and secular, protest the Japanese government's recent actions to dissolve the Family Federation.



Logo of Bitter Winter

They all express great concern that the Family Federation, formerly the Unification Church, has been held responsible for the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe last year.

The 12 NGOs point out that after the terror attack on Abe, a network of lawyers and others "hostile to the Family Federation" used the murder of Abe as a pretext to revive an old campaign started by left-wingers mainly for political reasons. For decades, they had been afraid of the Family Federation's "successful sponsorship of anti-Communist initiatives".

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their  
letter,  
it is

From a Victory over Communism campaign in Japan in 1969, supported by the Unification Church. Photo: IFVOC

described how immediately after Abe had been murdered by a terrorist, "press conferences and an unprecedented media campaign of slander followed."

The 12 voice their concern,

"We note, however, that with respect to the [Family Federation](#), they have been reported unfairly and one-sidedly, listening only to the militant lawyers and to 'apostate' ex-members whose stories in some cases have been exposed as false by independent journalists."

The network of activist leftwing lawyers in Japan that is hostile to the [Family Federation](#), calls themselves *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales*. The [letter](#) from the 12 NGOs emphasizes that "spiritual sales" is a concept devised by opponents to describe activities by members of the [Family Federation](#) "that have long since ceased".

Indeed, the [Family Federation](#) advised "over-enthusiastic members" to stop such sales projects and condemned them in a public statement published 14 years ago, in 2009. In the years that followed, there were only a handful of lawsuits against so-called "spiritual sales" by members of the [Family Federation](#). Most cases mentioned in media reports after the Abe assassination, are about occurrences that took place further back than 15 years. There have also been cases when the lawyers from the hostile activist network intentionally have tried to make the sales appear more recent by referring to the date a court case began, years after the alleged "spiritual sale" took place.

In the



Persecution in China: Tibetan Monks arrested in 2008. Photo (5th April 2008): SFT HQ (Students for a Free Tibet) / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 2.0 Gen. Cropped

[protest letter](#) the 12 signatories state bluntly that a dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) will be a step similar to anti-religious measures used in nations like communist China and Putin's Russia, and that do not belong in a democratic country like Japan.

Also, the [letter](#) brings up several important points that must be quite embarrassing for the Japanese government.

1. The dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) is out of proportion with the charges raised against it.
2. The dissolution is not consistent with the [Family Federation's](#) law-abiding behavior.
3. The dissolution will pave the way to similar action against other religious minorities.

The signatories deplore the measure taken by the Japanese government, saying that it may "forever taint the image of Japan "as a country committed to democratic principles, including FoRB" (freedom of religion or belief).

At the end of the [statement](#), there is a quote from a commentary on *RealClearPolitics*, an American website for political news, authored by two religious freedom authorities – Suzan Johnson Cook, who served as the *U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom* from 2011 to 2013, and Katrina Lantos Swett, former chair of the *U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)*. The two compare Japan to totalitarian regimes,

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“where unpopular religious minorities are ‘liquidated’ after the ground has been prepared by slanderous media campaigns.”

The **statement** was signed by

Marco Respinti,  
Director-in-charge,  
**Bitter Winter**, a  
daily magazine on  
freedom of religion  
and human rights



Thierry Valle.  
Photo: **FOREF**



Dr. Massimo  
Introvigne.  
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Eric Roux.  
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Thierry Valle,  
President, CAP-LC  
– Coordination des  
Associations et  
des Particuliers  
pour la Liberté  
de Conscience



Marco Respinti.  
Photo: **FOREF**

Massimo  
Introvigne, Co-  
founder and  
Managing  
Director,  
CESNUR –  
Center for Studies on New Religions

Eric Roux, Chairman, EIFRF – European Inter-Religious Forum for Religious Freedom

Francesco Curto, Co-founder, Fedinsieme [Faiths Together]

Alessandro Amicarelli, President, FOB – European Federation for Freedom of Belief



Alessandro  
Amicarelli.  
Photo:  
Screenshot



Aaron  
Rhodes.  
Photo: **Bitter  
Winter**



Willy Fautré.  
Photo: **FOREF**



Camelia Marin.  
Photo: **FOREF**

Aaron Rhodes,  
President, **FOREF** – Forum for Religious Freedom Europe

Hans Noot, Director, Gerard Noodt Foundation for Freedom of Religion or Belief

Willy Fautré, Co-founder and Director, HRWF – Human Rights Without Frontiers

Raffaella Di Marzio, Managing Director, LIREC – Center for Studies on Freedom of Religion, Belief, and Conscience

Rosita Šorytė, President, ORLIR – International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees

Camelia Marin, Deputy Director, Soteria International

Featured image above: From painting depicting the 26 martyrs of Japan in 1597, Chapel of the Martyrs of Nepi in Katowice Panewniki, Poland. Photo: Abraham / Wikimedia Commons. License: **CC Attr 3.0 Unp. Cropped**

“12 Religious Freedom NGOs Denouncing Japan” – text: Knut Holdhus

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