

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Activist Lawyers, Media Frenzy, Easily Swayable Kishida

Knut Holdhus
October 5, 2024



Fumio Kishida and Taro Kono in June 2024. Kono, Minister for Digital Transformation and Minister for Consumer Affairs and Food Safety, is known to have lobbied Kishida to get the [Family Federation](#) investigated. In August 2022 Kono appointed Masaki Kito as expert advisor in a [study group](#) Kono established in the Consumer Affairs Agency for the issue of the [Family Federation](#). Kito is an activist radical leftwing lawyer who has been campaigning against the [Family Federation](#) / [Unification Church](#) for decades



Patricia Duval, French attorney and expert on international human rights law. She has defended the rights of minorities of religion or belief in domestic and international fora, and before international institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union, and the United Nations. She has also published numerous scholarly articles on freedom of religion or belief

Activist leftwing lawyers campaigning against religious minority created media frenzy that made swayable Kishida add the power of state to the campaign originating on the far left

BITTER WINTER Patricia Duval, French attorney specialised in international human rights law, sent on 22nd September 2024, a 29-page report titled "Japan: A Witch Hunt to Eradicate the [Unification Church](#)" to several UN offices. [Bitter Winter](#), the leading international magazine on religious freedom and human rights published 3 days later, on 25th September, an [executive summary](#) of the report. The day after, the magazine started publishing a 5-part series where Duval gives a more detailed description of the content.

Part 1 of comments on [second article of Bitter Winter's 5-part series](#)

See [part 1](#), [part 2](#), [part 3](#) of comments on [first article of Bitter Winter's 5-part series](#)

In the [second Bitter Winter article](#) titled "Abe's Assassination and Media Blitz", Patricia Duval writes how hostile activist lawyers used the assassination to attack the [Family Federation](#), formerly the [Unification Church](#). The [religious movement](#) has faced significant controversy in Japan over the years, with accusations of "spiritual sales" being prominent, particularly from the hostile leftwing lawyers group called Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales.

However, the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) on 8th July 8, 2022, reignited media scrutiny

against the [church](#), since 2015 called the [Family Federation](#) in Japan. Abe had shown support for the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), an NGO in General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. UPF has the same founders as the [Family Federation](#), formerly the [Unification Church](#). Abe participated in one of its events via video in 2021 and sent a message twice in 2022.



Tetsuya Yamagami, the man who killed Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan

The assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), claimed he targeted Abe because of his perceived support for the [Unification Church](#). Yamagami's mother is a member of the [church](#) and had made substantial donations more than 20 years ago. Yamagami has claimed that the donations led to her financial ruin. He cited this as his motivation for the assassination, even though half of the donations had been returned in 2009 when the family asked for it.

The reasons for his outrageous reaction 22 years after the mother's large donations and decision to target Abe were never clearly explained, and there was little inquiry into possible influences behind his actions, even though Yamagami was known to have

connections to movements hostile to the [Unification Church](#) and new religious movements in general.

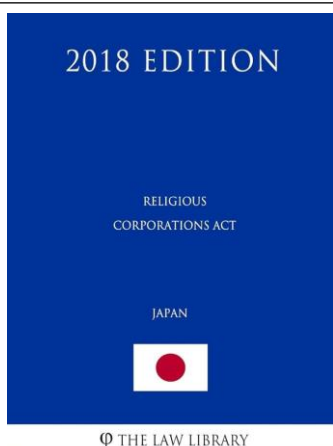


Japanese sound truck of the kind used to drive slowly past [Family Federation](#) properties while blasting out a hostile message

Following Yamagami's arrest, an aggressive media campaign, spearheaded by the network of leftwing activist lawyers, targeted the [Family Federation](#). At a press conference on 12th July 2022, the network's lawyers strongly denounced the religious minority, stating that both Yamagami and his mother were victims, while blaming the [Family Federation](#) entirely for their suffering. They branded the minority faith as a "great evil" and "anti-social", fueling further public outrage.

This media narrative led to [heightened hostility](#) toward the [Family Federation](#), with far-right groups using loudspeaker vans to harass its headquarters in major cities, blasting out messages like "Get out of Japan" Members faced widespread [persecution](#), including death threats, exclusion at school and [work](#), and accusations from other family members. In extreme cases, some women experienced [domestic violence](#) or were forced into divorce

because of their faith.



Front page of 2018 English version of Religious Corporations Act of Japan.

As media pressure mounted, based on such a narrative, the Japanese Government came under increasing scrutiny for its connections to the former [Unification Church](#). The government, particularly under pressure from the leftwing lawyers' network, began exploring ways to sever these ties. The network's accusations and legal battles against the [church](#) in past years played a key role in this push for dissolution. Media coverage further pressured courts to issue unfavorable rulings against the religious minority.

On 19th October 2022, Prime Minister Kishida [made changes](#) to how the Religious Corporations Act (RCA) had traditionally been interpreted concerning dissolution of religious corporations. Article 81 of the RCA allows for the dissolution of a religious corporation if it engages in activities that clearly harm public welfare. Kishida [changed the law overnight](#) so that wrongful acts (torts) under the Civil Code could also be included and would constitute a "violation of laws and regulations". This new interpretation allowed a dissolution procedure to be started against the [Family Federation](#).



The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), which regulates religious entities, took the lead in seeking the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#). MEXT began gathering information from the religious minority, which is the required first step under Japanese law for dissolving a religious organization. Between November 2022 and July 2023, MEXT issued seven [rounds of questions](#) to the [Family Federation](#), covering various issues including organizational operations, legal matters, and the nature of donations.

These inquiries extended to the [federation's](#) religious doctrines and whether they influenced followers to make donations.

Finally, on 13th October 2023, MEXT filed a lawsuit with the Tokyo District Court, seeking the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) based on 32 civil cases it had lost.

Patricia Duval writes that the first court hearing "on the merits of the dissolution claim" is scheduled for December 2024. The stage is set for a lengthy legal battle over the future of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan.

See [part 1](#), [part 2](#), [part 3](#) of comments on [first article of Bitter Winter's 5-part series](#)

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