

**Second-Generation Unification Church Believers Discriminated in Japan. 1. A Tale of Two Petitions**

Masumi Fukuda  
March 10, 2025



*"Career apostate" Sayuri Ogawa denouncing the Unification Church*

**An award-winning investigative journalist from the "Hanada" magazine explains how the government favored anti-Unification-Church petitioners against those who defended the church.**  
[Original Story](#)

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*Anti-cult journalist Eight Suzuki*

On that day, angry second-generation ex-members of the former Unification Church, including [Sayuri Ogawa](#) (a pseudonym) and Keiko Kaburaki (another pseudonym), freelance journalist Eight Suzuki (a pen name), and a group supporting the disgruntled ex-members visited the Agency for Cultural Affairs. On behalf of them, Ogawa handed the petition with the signatures and a letter addressed to Hiroaki Ishizaki,

the Director of the Religious Affairs Division of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, which is part of the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

The meeting was widely broadcast on TV news that evening. As Ishizaki solemnly received the petition from Ogawa, probably in a room of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, in the presence of several media, dozens of camera shutters sounded and flash lights flashed all at once. It was a great ceremony. According to Eight Suzuki, Director Ishizaki promised everyone, "I would make sure to gather enough evidence to avoid that the request [for legally dissolving the former Unification Church] will be overturned in court."



*Keiko Nagaoka, Japan's Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology*

Twelve days later, on December 21, another petition concerning the former Unification Church was submitted to the Agency for Cultural Affairs. In this case, signatures had not been collected online, but the petition had been hand-signed by 23,486 current believers of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification. However, this petition was sent by postal mail rather than being hand-delivered. Why?

The Family Federation wanted to hand it directly to the person in charge at the Agency for Cultural Affairs. A representative of the legal division of the Family Federation, who has a good relationship with the Agency, asked them to arrange a visit. At first, they were told that the Agency would prepare a meeting room quietly, because the Family Federation delegation would cause a fuss if they would enter the Agency for Cultural Affairs through the main entrance.

Later, however, when the Family Federation's representative called again his contact at the Agency for Cultural Affairs, the attitude of the bureaucrat hardened. He said that, "Journalists are always around the Prime Minister's official residence [which is located near the Agency]. To avoid trouble, please send the petition to us by mail." The Family Federation's spokesperson insisted, "We want to submit it in person," but the Agency officer would not allow this.

The Family Federation's representative was upset and ashamed, but he would not insist further because he had been instructed by the senior leadership of his religious movement that, "We do not want to get into trouble with the Agency for Cultural Affairs."

This was a clear case of discrimination. Moreover, it was discrimination by the government.

Online petitions have recently become quite popular. Traditionally, petitions were hand-signed by each individual petitioner. In the case of online petitions, the same person can sign more than once by creating multiple email accounts. It is also possible to sign anonymously or use pseudonyms. It is thus clear that online petitions are less reliable than traditional hand-signed petitions. In an online petition, petitioners are not requested to disclose personal data, nor can these be verified.

The petitions from the Family Federation are different. They include a standard part and one each individual petitioner compiled differently, although the style differs slightly from one local church to the other. At the top of the A4-size form, the names of the recipients are pre-printed: "Mr. Fumio Kishida, Prime Minister of Japan, and Ms. Keiko Nagaoka, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology." The first sentence is also pre-printed: "Our faith is the basis of our lives, and the Family Federation is the heart of our faith. We hope that a fair decision will be made and that our [religious] corporation will not be dissolved..." In the remaining parts of the petitions, believers described with their personal words their thoughts and feelings, adding the date and each petitioner's name and address.

"After this way of proceeding was disclosed on the Internet, explained Susumu Sato, a spokesperson for the Family Federation, some commented that the Family Federation had coached its members to repeat all the same stories. In fact, apart from the first standard sentence, the believers were free to write what they wanted and candidly express their personal feelings.

What happened was that, around last summer, the media coverage of the Family Federation became more and more biased, and the second-generation believers started to criticize our church for not answering. We received an increasing number of letters from believers concerned that our church may disappear if

the situation would continue, and asking us to react and prevent the possible dissolution of our religious corporation."

"Some twenty to thirty believers, Sato continued, wrote letters to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and the government on their own, but most of them did not know where or to whom to address this correspondence. So, we prepared a template and told them that if they completed the petition and sent it to the head office, we would deliver it to the government, once we had collected a certain number of messages. Then, we received a great number of petitions. We indicated December 15 as the deadline, and by then we had received 23,486 petitions. It was not an expression of anger or protest, but a sincere plea not to have what for them is most precious taken away from them. More believers wanted to sign, but gave up after much hesitation, because they were afraid their children would be bullied at school if their families' association with the Family Federation would be disclosed."

The former Unification Church had chosen three representatives of the petitioners in advance. These three were to hand over the petitions in person and read out excerpts from them evidencing their main content. The three representatives, Yuri Saito (26), Kiaki Kojima (27), and Yoko Ueda (pseudonym, 26), were all second-generation female believers. They had obtained permission from their parents and relatives, were willing to show their real names and faces, and were ready for their difficult mission (only Ueda used a pseudonym, but was willing to show her face).

Kojima said, "I was so happy when they asked me to take on this case, and the three of us were discussing how we would like to read out excerpts from the petitions, which contained the earnest feelings of more than 20,000 believers. Having watched [apostate ex-member] Sayuri Ogawa's performance on YouTube, we knew we would not get as much attention as she did. Still, we were hoping for a little media coverage, so it was a huge shock when the meeting did not happen."

"I read all the petitions that they had written one by one, Kojima added, and I was almost in tears. These were the truly earnest voices and a glimpse of these believers' lives. I was prepared to represent the thoughts and feelings they had been unable to express because they were overwhelmed by the opposition - to express emotions that had been piling up over the years. So when I heard that the meeting would be cancelled, I felt a terrible sense of rejection, and wondered why it was called off."



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03/14/2023 MASUMI FUKUDA

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An award-winning investigative journalist from the "Hanada" magazine explains how the government favored anti-Unification-Church petitioners against those who defended the church.

by Masumi Fukuda

Article 1 of 4



"Career apostate" Sayuri Ogawa denouncing the Unification Church. Screenshot.

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*Anti-cult journalist EIGHT Suzuki. From Twitter.*

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Keiko Nagaoka, Japan's Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. *Credits.*

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Ueda was also disappointed.

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TAGGED WITH: JAPAN, UNIFICATION CHURCH



Masumi Fukuda

**Masumi Fukuda** was born in Yokohama in 1956. She graduated from the Department of Sociology of Rikkyo University. After working for a specialty magazine and a magazine production company, she became a freelance journalist. She has reported and written about crime, Russia, and other topics. Her books include "Stalin: A Portrait of His Family" (Bungei Shunju), "Russia, an Assassination State: In Search of a Missing Journalist" (Shinchosha), "The True Nature of Political Correctness" (Hojosha), and others. In 2007, she won the 6th Shincho Documentary Award for "Fabrication: The Truth About the 'Murder Teacher' in Fukuoka" (Shinchosha).

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鈴木エイトは、欧州反カルト主義者の典型的な態度に倣い、敗訴した事件で「ほぼ勝利した」と主張している。この記事では、鈴木を敗北させた弁護士がその理由を説明する。



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驚くべきことに、彼らは安倍氏暗殺後に導入された「カルト」に対する厳しい措置では不十分だと主張している。

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