

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Conference On Religious Freedom Violations

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From Special International Religious Freedom Roundtable conference in Tokyo, Japan 1st October 2023



Tokyo conference on religious freedom denounces Japanese state persecution

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Former Unification Church: Domestic and foreign experts appeal for protection of religious freedom

Sekai Nippo Editorial Department
Tokyo International Religious Freedom Roundtable

Amid growing prospects for the government to demand a dissolution order for the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), a "Special International Religious Freedom Roundtable" was held in Tokyo on 1st October to appeal for the protection of religious freedom. Domestic and foreign experts in attendance expressed their strong opposition to the request for dissolution.



Massimo Introvigne in April 2023

Italian sociologist of religion Massimo Introvigne called concepts such as "cult" and "brainwashing" used to criticize the [Family Federation](#) "pseudoscience". "It is surprising that theories that have been rejected by scholars and courts in the United States and most European countries since the 1990s, are still uncritically accepted in Japan," he said, expressing the view that the attack on the [Family Federation](#) is even an anomaly internationally.

Holly Folk, a professor at Western Washington University in the USA, pointed out that the Japan Communist Party played a major role in the fight against the [Family Federation](#), and it is likely that anti-cult movements in Europe and the Chinese Communist Party were involved. She said the movement for dissolution was part of an international anti-religious campaign, claiming, "the short-term target is the [Family Federation](#), but the larger target is religious freedom and the right of freedom of conscience itself. They are trying to make the anti-[Family Federation](#) movement in Japan a precedent for other constitutional democracies."

Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama emphasized, "The [Family Federation](#) does not meet any of the three requirements for a dissolution request: violation of laws and regulations must be of a systematic nature, malicious, and continuous. Therefore, the [Family Federation](#) should not be disbanded." He also held that the Religious Corporations Law did not give religious groups the right to a fair trial and was "unconstitutional".



Masumi Fukuda in April 2023



Nadine Maenza



USCIRF Chair Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett in Oslo 8th Nov. 2014

Journalist Masumi Fukuda criticized the Agency for Cultural Affairs for cooperating when exercising the right to pose questions to the [Family Federation](#), with the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (National Benren), which had been demanding the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) since its formation in 1987. "The National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales teamed up with the Agency for Cultural Affairs and gave them instructions on what to do. It is highly questionable whether the Agency for Cultural Affairs, with a hostile organisation as a collaborator, was able to make a neutral and fair decision. The claims of the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales are being passed on without being checked."

At the conference, Nadine Maenza, former commissioner of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), which is a bipartisan government advisory body that advises the President, Secretary of State, and Congress on overseas religious freedom issues, and Katrina Lantos Swett, former chair of the same organisation, sent video messages expressing their strong concerns about the move to request a dissolution.

"Conference on Religious Freedom Violations" - text: Editorial Department Sekai Nippo

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Tokyo headquarters of the [Family Federation of Japan](#). Photo. Asanagi / Wikimedia Commons. *Public domain image. Cropped*

September 2023 announcement by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) that the [Family Federation](#) of Japan would be fined for not answering properly to questions from the ministry, the [Family Federation](#) held a press conference the day after, 8th September, at the national headquarters in Shibuya, Tokyo.

The press conference was attended by major Japanese news outlets like the Asahi Shimbun, NHK, Kyodo News, the Yomiuri Shimbun, Jiji Press, and many others.

Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto representing the [Family Federation](#) of Japan, opened the conference. He explained the Family Federation's stance and how it will respond, stating,

"The exercise of the right to ask questions was carried out by the Government, by changing the interpretation of the law overnight. It does not comply with the guidelines for the exercise of the implementation of the right of questioning written in the Religious Institutions Act, article 78,2. We consider this to be illegal.

Therefore, we consider that we are justified in not answering such illegally made questions, whether in part or in full. A fine for refusing to answer is not admissible. We intend to contest the fine in court and fight the case all the way in order to seek a dismissal."

Activist leftwing lawyers, particularly opposed to the [Family Federation's](#) severe critique of totalitarian communism, have for decades waged a hate campaign against the faith society.

Investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda, present at the press conference, describes the hate campaign,

"The Network would not hesitate to use all means to destroy the former [Unification Church](#). They are willing to tell all sort of stories, including lies, to achieve what they believe is a righteous purpose. They often throw the words 'anti-social' and 'cult' at the former [Unification Church](#), but

considering their involvement in the abduction and confinement of believers, one may wonder whether they are not more deserving of these labels themselves." (*'Sayuri Ogawa': When 'Apostates' Slander the Unification Church. 5. Why the Story Is Not Believable, Bitter Winter* 6th March 2023)



Masumi Fukuda in April 2023. Photo: FOREF

The Japanese media has often uncritically echoed claims made by the activist lawyers, especially after the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe 8th July last year. The activist lawyers succeeded in blaming the Family Federation for the act of terror soon after it happened.

Fukuda writes about the current situation,

"Last October, bowing to pressure from the media and public opinion, Prime Minister Kishida reversed his previous cautious stance and announced his intention to exercise the right to ask questions to the

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intention to exercise the right to ask questions to the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) [a move that under Japanese law is preliminary to seeking the dissolution of a religious organization].

In response, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) exercised its first right to ask questions on November 22. And in December, approximately 200,000 online signatures were submitted to the Division of Religious Affairs of the Agency for Cultural Affairs in the MEXT, demanding that an order to dissolve the [Family Federation](#) should be sought and obtained as soon as possible." (*The Plot to Destroy the Unification Church in Japan. 1. Why the Church Should Not Be Dissolved, Bitter Winter 23rd June 2023*)

Two registered religious movements have previously been dissolved, both after their leaders had committed criminal acts. The activist lawyers campaigning against the [Family Federation](#), have long claimed that it has committed acts deemed to be "detrimental to the public welfare, in violation of laws and regulations." Such claims are part of the lawyers' strategy to get the [Family Federation](#) dissolved.

Attorney Fukumoto explained at the press conference 8th September that leaders of the [Family Federation](#) had never committed such criminal acts. He stated,

"The conclusion is that 'violation of the law, extremely prejudicial to the public welfare' is interpreted as referring to acts that fall under criminal cases. On the flip side, this means that civil law torts do not enter the case. In fact, the interpretation that it is limited to criminal cases is an interpretation that the Government itself has repeatedly confirmed and expressed since the decision of the Tokyo Supreme Court was issued.



Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto at press conference 8th Sep. 2023. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU Japan](#).

Prime Minister Kishida still followed this interpretation at the Budget Committee of the House of Representatives on 18th October [2022], the day after he instructed the Ministry (MEXT) to exercise its right to ask questions, and clearly stated that civil case acts do not enter the case. Since the shooting incident, the Government has repeatedly stated that since there is no criminal case against the former [Unification Church](#), there is no grounds for dissolution and the right to ask questions cannot be exercised.

Since on 18th October still he repeated the same statement saying that civil case acts do not enter the case, then the opposition parties voiced severe criticism, saying, "Then we can't exercise our right to ask questions and we can't order the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#)."

Fukumoto points that Prime Minister suddenly made a complete U-turn,



"In response to this criticism, the Prime Minister changed his previous interpretation of the law at the Budget Committee of the House of Councillors on 19th



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida 16th April 2023.
Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons.
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October, stating that if the law is clearly defined as 'organised, malicious and continuous' and falls under the requirements of the Religious Institutions Law, it may also include civil law tort actions."

The attorney representing the [Family Federation](#) made it clear that only courts may make such a change of interpretation of the law,

"However, the authority to interpret the law rests with the courts, and not with the head of the executive government. This changed interpretation of the law is merely a new interpretation of the law, which the executive government claims unilaterally."

Attorney Fukumoto presented an overview of the time after the assassination of Abe,

"8th July, shooting of former Prime Minister Abe.

On 12th September, at an opposition party hearing, the Agency of Cultural Affairs (in charge) declared that the requirements for requesting a dissolution order from the court were not met.

On 20th September, the same Agency of Cultural Affairs officially replied that it would be difficult for the court to issue a dissolution order while the church leaders and others had not been criminally punished. (Explanation: exactly what I have explained,)

14th October, the Cabinet's written answer to a written question: "With regard to the former [Unification Church](#), based on the relevant interpretation (the higher decision in the case of the request for a dissolution order for Aum Shinrikyo), we have decided that it does not fall under items (81) 1 and 2 of the same paragraph, and therefore the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the competent authority, has so far not requested a dissolution order against the former [Unification Church](#). The government has not made a request for a dissolution order against the former Unification Church."

On 15th October, Nagaoka, Minister for MEXT, told a press conference, "Based on precedents, we are cautious. At the moment, it is difficult to order a dissolution request."



Keiko Nagaoka, government minister for education, culture, sports, science and technology (MEXT). Photo (May 2023): U.S. Department of State. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

On 17th October, Prime Minister Kishida instructed Nagaoka, Minister of MEXT to exercise her right to ask questions.

On 18th October, Prime Minister Kishida declared in the Diet that the term 'in violation of laws and regulations' does not include torts under the Civil Code.

Overnight, the interpretation changed.

On 19th October, Prime Minister Kishida stated in the Diet that the statute 'in violation of the law' could include civil law torts."

Fukumoto pointed out,

“Here, the right to ask questions cannot be exercised if there are no important material reasons for dissolution, which amounts to dissolution if there is no doubt.

In exercising the first right to ask questions, the Minister for MEXT even said at a press conference, ‘I would like to consider requesting a dissolution order as soon as possible.’ Is such a thing permissible in a country governed by the rule of law?”

During his presentation, attorney Fukumoto emphasized that previously when religious movements have been dissolved by the Japanese authorities, it was because of fraudulent acts committed by leaders of those movements.

He explained why there are no reasons for dissolution,



Sign at the entrance of the Family Federation's national HQ in Tokyo. Photo: Asanagi. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

“However, in the civil trials in which the [Family Federation](#) was the defendant, there has not been a single case in which a representative officer of the faith society, currently President Tanaka, or a senior officer of the faith society gave the order and used the personnel, material and organisation of the faith society to carry it out. [...]

Naturally, the Agency of Cultural Affairs was from the very beginning aware of its decision to exercise the right to ask questions. It must have been aware of it, because it must have checked all the precedents that it knew at that time. There was not a single corresponding case, and yet they exercised the right to ask questions. That was a completely illegal act. [...]

The [Family Federation](#) could have refused to answer any of the questions in the exercise of its right to ask illegal questions. However, in view of the boiling media coverage and public opinion, we had the option of refusing to answer all the questions, but we avoided this and answered as many as possible in relation to questions on illegal activities. This was also because we judged that it would be effective in explaining the actual situation of the Family Federation to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and in clearing up misunderstandings.

However, despite these efforts, we are very disappointed that the MEXT now has decided to seek a sanction in the form of a fine against the Family Federation.”

More about the questions from the government: [Impossible Questions Reveal Kishida Bias](#)

Featured image above: From the press conference 8th September, at the [Family Federation](#) national headquarters in Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU Japan](#).

“Claims: Government Acting Illegally” – Text: Knut Holdhus

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