

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Kyodo News - Japanese Government Violated Unificationists Rights 100s of Times

Knut Holdhus
June 24, 2024



Shidome Media Tower, located in Shiodome, Minato, Tokyo, Japan. Floors 1 - 24 are the headquarters of Kyodo News, Japan's largest news agency

Large Japanese news agency reports on hundreds of rights violations suffered by minority faith

by Knut Holdhus



After Kyodo News, the leading news agency of Japan, issued its report on 23rd June 2024, dozens of Japanese newspapers, including large ones like the Sankei Shimbun and Tokyo Shimbun, have reported on hundreds of human rights violations and other damages suffered by members of the [Family Federation](#), formerly the [Unification Church](#) throughout Japan.



According to the Kyodo News report, the [Family Federation](#) had received a number of inquiries from various news outlets, and in response to those, it released a statement on 22nd June claiming that since 8th July 2022, there had been "a total of 337 cases of human rights violations and other damages had been reported by believers and churches nationwide up to December of last year". 8th July 2022 is the day former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was killed by assassin Tetsuya Yamagami, who claimed grudges against the [Family Federation](#).

The huge number of open hostilities against the [Family Federation](#) include graffiti sprayed on cars, and windows of church facilities being broken during prayer sessions.

According to the large news agency, the [Family Federation](#) also alleged that contracts to purchase cars under the church's name were signed at used car dealerships affiliated with Toyota and Nissan, but the purchases were later refused. Toyota denied these claims, stating, "There is no truth to it," while Nissan commented, "We do not disclose individual transactions and have not issued any directives regarding sales to the church."



Graffiti sprayed on [Family Federation](#) facilities in Japan after the Abe assassination in July 2022

The [Family Federation](#) announced that it will present these details in writing to Tokyo District Court during the hearings for the dissolution order requested by the Kishida administration. The religious organization also reported recurring incidents of graffiti with messages like "Traitor cult" and "Cult, get out," along with nuisance phone calls at churches in various locations across the nation.



Graffiti sprayed on [Family Federation](#) facilities in Japan after the Abe assassination in July 2022

Kyodo News also reported that conflicts within families belonging to the [Family Federation](#) regarding faith and donations have intensified. For example, a woman in her 70s from the Tokyo metropolitan area sustained a fracture after being assaulted by her husband, who acquired negative views of the [religious organization](#) following the assassination of the popular former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. In another case, a woman in her 60s from the same region reported that her relationship with her daughter rapidly deteriorated after the media linked the cold-blooded murder of Abe to the [Family Federation](#). It culminated in the daughter's suicide in July 2022, soon after the assassination.

The statement issued by the [Family Federation](#) on 22nd June gives a detailed overview of the human rights violations and other damages suffered by the [religious organization](#) and its members since the huge number of sensationalist biased media articles that turned truth on its head, claiming it was the [Family Federation](#) that was the perpetrator and the assassin a victim.

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Norishige Kondo (近藤徳茂), author and Deputy Director of



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the Legal Affairs Department of the *Family Federation of Japan*, spoke at a special symposium on the theme "Abduction and Confinement – Who Destroys Families?" 10th September 2023 at the Shibuya, Tokyo headquarters of the *Family Federation of Japan*. It was organised by the *Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion*. His speech was titled, "Response of Public Institutions to the Abduction and Confinement Issue".



Norishige Kondo speaking in Tokyo 10th Sep. 2023. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by *Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion*

Next I would like to talk about the abduction and confinement case of a male believer named K.S. He was kidnapped and held captive on a 10th floor apartment rented on a weekly basis in November 1992.

The police were called because K.S. caused a big commotion, and riot police rushed to the scene. However, they only listened to the parents' side, and told K.S. that the *Unification Church* issue was a parent-child issue. The police left the scene, telling him not to cause any more trouble.

In the end, K.S. was released after causing a commotion for 10 days. He was abducted and held captive for a second time, and then a third time in April 1997.

That time, he was abducted by relatives near the police station, put in a van, and taken away. However, they were immediately followed by a police patrol car. The police wanted to take him to the police station.

However, 20 relatives got out of their vehicles and confronted the police, shouting, "The *Unification Church* is an evil group. This is a parent-child issue." In the end, the police officers were overwhelmed by this and asked the relatives to tell K.S. that because it was a parent-child problem, the police left it alone.

K.S. was able to escape from the place he was forcibly detained on 18th September 1997, when a gap suddenly opened up. He was however eventually brought back there by his parents. A police car later arrived as a result of a report from a witness, but after listening to both sides, the police ended up leaving K.S. in the apartment where he was held by his relatives.

Next, I would like to talk about cases in which the Public Prosecutor's Office did not prosecute. All of the cases listed here were cases that were filed with the Public Prosecutor's Office for kidnapping and forcible detention or attacks on churches. In the end, all those cases were dismissed by the prosecutor despite having been reported to the police.

There was an incident called the Tottori (鳥取) church attack, in which about 20 men carrying weapons abducted a female church member. And the female believer herself filed criminal charges on the grounds that she had been forcibly detained for one year and three months.

There was also a case where a woman was attacked and abducted in a parking lot after a meal at a restaurant in Kawasaki (川崎). Then, there was a case where a woman from Yamagata (山形), who returned from her and her husband's home in Korea, was attacked and pressured by her relatives that night. There was also a case where a woman from Kochi (高知) was abducted when she returned from her and her husband's home in Korea to visit her mother.

Then there was the incident where Toru Goto (後藤徹) was abducted and held captive for 12 years and five months. There was also an incident in which a Hiroshima (広島) couple was



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separated from their young children, abducted and held in an Osaka (大阪) apartment. However, the prosecutor's office decided not to prosecute in all those cases.

On the one hand, the **U.S. State Department** has addressed the **issue of abduction and confinement** of **Unification Church** believers in its International Religious Freedom Report and Country Reports on Human Rights Practices since 1999.



Cover of year 2000 issue of Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. *Public domain image*



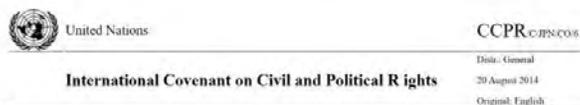
Hitoshi Hida (検田 仁), member of the House of Representatives in Japan. Photo: Family Forum / FFWPU

Also, on 20th April 2000, Hitoshi Hida (検田 仁), a member of the House of Representatives, asked questions about the abduction and confinement issue in the Diet.

In response to this, the Commissioner General of the National Police Agency stated, "If there is any act that violates the criminal law, even if it is committed by a parent, child or relative, we will take strict action against them in light of the evidence we respond to." That's what he said clearly.

Additionally, in June 2014, a **United Nations recommendation** was issued to the Japanese government.

In this section, under the heading "Abduction and forced de-conversion", it states:



Human Rights Committee
Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Japan*
From header of UN document with United Nations' recommendations to Japan on human rights of believers.

"The Committee is concerned at reports of abductions and forced confinement of converts to new religious movements by members of their families in an effort to de-convert them (articles 2, 9, 18, 26). The State party should take effective measures to guarantee the right of every person not to be subject to coercion that would impair his or her freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief." [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Human Rights Committee: Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Japan, 20th August 2014]

This (pointing to slide) is about civil cases. The cases written in blue are cases which were won. We were able to

CIVIL CASES

- Tottori church, assault case: won case
- Tottori, female believer abducted and confined: won case
- Akishima, woman abducted and confined: lost case
- Fujisawa, woman abducted and confined: half settled / half lost
- Machida, female believer abducted and confined: won case settled
- Kochi, married woman abducted and confined: won case
- Toru Goto abducted and confined 12 years, 5 months: won case
- Hiroshima, husband and wife abducted and confined: won case

English version of slide in Japanese used by Norishige Kondo 10th Sep. 2023 about civil cases. Photo: K. Holdhus

win the majority of cases. The UN recommendation mentioned earlier was issued around this belt line (blue line in slide), but after the UN recommendation, the scope of liability for tortious acts and the amount of compensation for alleged harm have increased considerably.

And this year, on 14th June, **prominent human rights defenders** from Western Europe prepared and sent a written opinion to the Japanese government. The written opinion included a request for an end to the current religious persecution of the **Family Federation**. The issue of abduction and confinement was also mentioned.

“The enormous amount of violence and suffering involved in deprogramming should always be considered when trying to understand the harsh relationships between the **Unification Church / Family Federation** (FFWPU) and its opponents in Japan.” (“**Why Japan Should Guarantee Religious Liberty to the Unification Church/Family Federation: A Letter to the Government**”, *Bitter Winter* 3rd July 2023

Incidentally, there is a lot of talk these days about filing a request for the dissolution of the **Family Federation**. The main purpose of this written statement of opinion document [by the European scholars] is however that religious persecution such as requesting the dissolution of the **Family Federation** must not be carried out.

Therefore, although this content may be a little different from the theme of this symposium, I would like to read out some excerpts.

The section of the article is subtitled, “The liquidation of the **FFWPU** would expose Japan to international condemnation, and legitimate attacks on religious freedom in nondemocratic countries”.

“The international Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) community is watching what is happening in Japan, which represents the most serious FoRB crisis in a democratic country of our century. We hope that all organizations that support and defend FoRB in Japan and internationally would support our appeal.



Massimo Introvigne.
Photo: [FOREF](#)



Aaron Rhodes.
Screenshot
January 2023



Willy Fautré.
Photo: [FOREF](#)



Jan Figel. Photo: Elekes Andor.
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The liquidation of the **Family Federation** as a religious corporation would be a measure comparable to the actions taken against several religious minorities in China and Russia, and unprecedented in a democratic country. It would also expose Japan to considerable international criticism. What is more, should the Japanese government proceed with this action, it will give cover to assaults on religious groups by authoritarian and totalitarian states around the world, undermining efforts by international human rights institutions to protect religious liberty.

We urge the Japanese government to protect the FoRB of all religious and spiritual groups operating in Japan, including those that have powerful, well-financed, and politically motivated opponents, to withdraw all measures threatening FoRB, and to guarantee to the **Family Federation** as a religious corporation the peaceful exercise of its right to religious liberty.” (From “**Why Japan Should Guarantee Religious Liberty to the Unification**

Church / Family Federation: A Letter to the Government", by four European academics and human rights activists (Willy Fautré, Jan Figel, Massimo Introvigne, Aaron Rhodes), published in [Bitter Winter](#) 3rd July 2023).

That's all. Thank you for your attention.

Featured image above: Illustration of Toru Goto being abducted in 1995. Photo: [Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion](#)

"Japan Criticized for Glaring Rights Violations" – text: Norishige Kondo

See [part 1](#), [part 2](#)

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