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March 26, 2025



Controversial verdict in Tokyo District Court raises concerns over religious freedom as Family Federation condemns ruling as state persecution

Tokyo, 26th March 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

First Civil Code-Based Dissolution Order Issued Against Family Federation

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

On 25th March, the Tokyo District Court - with Kenya Suzuki (鈴木謙也) as Presiding Judge - issued a dissolution order for the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) in response to a dissolution request filed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The [Family Federation](#) plans to file an immediate appeal with the Tokyo High Court. This marks the first case of a religious organization being dissolved based on civil law violations. However, concerns remain about the expedited legal process, and as previously reported, suspicions of false testimony in key evidence raise fears that dissolving a religious corporation as a non-contentious case [See editor's note below] could excessively infringe upon religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution.

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Evidence fabrication allegations kept behind closed doors

Religious organization plans to immediately appeal Tokyo District Court decision

Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), the suspect in the July 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), allegedly told police that his motive stemmed from resentment toward the [religious organization](#) due to his mother's substantial financial donations. Following this, the media scrutinized the [organization](#)'s ties with politicians. Amid opposition party criticism of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the Diet, Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄), Prime Minister at the time, declared a severance of ties with the [organization](#). Without cabinet approval, in response to questions in the Parliament, he had reinterpreted the Religious Corporations Act's dissolution requirements. This led

MEXT to invoke its reporting and inquiry rights seven times, culminating in the dissolution request in October 2023.

In the legal precedent set by the Aum Shinrikyo dissolution case, courts were cautious in dissolving the religious corporation, emphasizing that the Constitution protects religious freedom. The dissolution was interpreted as applying only in cases of criminal law violations. However, the courts later expanded this interpretation to include civil law violations, as seen in the appeal decision regarding fines imposed on the [religious organization](#) for refusing to respond to inquiries. The Supreme Court [finalized this ruling](#) on 3rd March, fueling concerns that the dissolution decision was politically driven.

MEXT justified the dissolution by claiming that since around 1980, the group had engaged in deceptive recruitment tactics and pressured members into making large donations through fear-based tactics, constituting repeated civil law violations. The ministry estimated the number of victims at approximately 1,550, with financial damages amounting to 20.4 billion yen (approximately \$135 million), including settlements.

The [religious organization](#) countered by arguing that donations are part of religious activities and not a conduit for illicit financial gain. The Tokyo District Court held four closed-door hearings, examining testimonies from both current and former members. During these proceedings, it was revealed that an ex-member who testified for MEXT was unaware of the contents of their own written testimony, raising concerns about the [reliability of the evidence](#). In February, the [religious organization](#) released a report titled "[Fabricated Evidence by MEXT](#) - The Government's Grave Crime Exposed in the Dissolution Lawsuit."



Tomihiko Tanaka on March 25, 2025



Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto, here at press conference on September 8, 2023

International concerns over Japan's ruling

Concerns over the dissolution order have spread internationally. On March 24, former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich posted on X (formerly Twitter), warning,

"The current attack on the [Family Federation](#) in Japan is an attempt to weaken the U.S.-Japan alliance and facilitate reconciliation between Japan and the Chinese Communist Party."

"A crisis for religion as a

whole"

Family Federation President Tanaka holds press conference

Following the Tokyo District Court's dissolution order, [Family Federation](#) President Tomihiko Tanaka (田中富広) held a press conference on 25th March at the [religious organization](#)'s headquarters in Shibuya, Tokyo. He criticized the decision as "clearly unjust" and argued that "the state persecutes religion, posing a crisis for all religious organizations."

Tanaka emphasized that the ruling relied entirely on claims made by former members who were allegedly forced to renounce their faith through abduction and confinement, calling it "completely unacceptable". He warned,

"If our assets are confiscated, our activities will be severely restricted." He vowed to "put forth maximum effort in the appeal process to overturn the decision."

The [organization](#) plans to file an immediate appeal with the Tokyo High Court within two weeks.

The [religious organization](#)'s legal counsel, Nobuya Fukumoto (福本修也), criticized the ruling, arguing that it could lead to the breakdown of families and promote discrimination against believers and staff. "Did the judges consider these consequences? This is an absolutely outrageous verdict," he said. He further warned,

"Very few religious organizations exist without some disputes with members. This is a threat to the entire

religious landscape."

Additionally, he accused MEXT of submitting "[fabricated testimonies](#)" in its case against the [Family Federation](#).

[Editor's note: A non-contentious case refers to a legal matter where there is no dispute between parties. These cases typically involve administrative, procedural, or uncontested legal actions, such as probate (handling a deceased person's estate), uncontested divorces, adoption, or registering a trademark. Since there are no opposing parties or legal conflicts, these cases usually proceed smoothly through the legal system without litigation.]

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"Poorly Compiled Evidence Including Falsehoods"

• February 10, 2025 • Knut Holdhus

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Experienced legal expert claims evidence containing falsehoods, and hearings behind closed doors infringe on rights of religious minority and are unconstitutional

Tokyo, 3rd February 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).


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Seishiro Sugihara, professor of the former Musashino Women’s University

Dissolution Request to Become a Major Issue

by the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

Part 1 of the article

See *part 2, part 3*

See also *Flawed, Deceptive Evidence Gathering by State*

See also *Alleged Evidence Tampering in Dissolution Case*

This paper reported about fabrications in the statements submitted as evidence by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to the Tokyo District Court in its request for a dissolution order against the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (formerly the *Unification Church*). We spoke regarding the issue with professor Seishiro Sugihara (杉原誠四郎) of the former *Musashino Women’s University*.



文部科学省

Symbol of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) of Japan. Photo: 文部科学省 (MEXT Japan) / Wikimedia Commons. License: *CC Attr 4.0 Int*

Q: As reported by this paper on 21st January, there are multiple pieces of information suggesting that the statements submitted as evidence by MEXT in its dissolution request were not actually written by the individuals identified as “victims”, and that they contain falsehoods contrary to fact. What do you think about this?

This was entirely predictable from the beginning.

Originally, when MEXT submitted the dissolution request to the Tokyo District Court, it announced the number of “victims” and the total “financial damage”. However, this total was merely the sum of the amounts claimed by individuals who identified themselves as “victims”.



Imbalanced scale of justice. Photo: 99lJoseph / Wikimedia Commons. *Public domain image*

To understand this, one can compare it to an ordinary criminal case. In criminal cases, prosecutors collect evidence to prove a crime, but not everything collected is immediately treated as evidence. Prosecutors assess the evidentiary value and credibility before determining which materials can serve as valid evidence.

However, in this dissolution request by MEXT, the evidence submitted to the court was merely a **collection of “victim” reports, without any means of verifying their evidentiary validity.** MEXT simply **compiled the claimed damages and submitted them as they were.**

Given this, it is entirely foreseeable that statements could exist where the supposed “victims” themselves did not write them, or where falsehoods contradicting the facts were included. This is not surprising at all.

Using such materials as grounds for dissolution and requesting a dissolution order is clearly an overreach as an administrative act. If a dissolution request can be made based on such unfairly collected evidence, **then any “harm” reported by former believers who left their faith or by associates of believers could serve as grounds for dissolution.**

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Reinterpreted: The Religious Corporations Act of Japan. here, front page of 2018 English version.

fact-checking regarding this newspaper's report, but MEXT did not respond. What do you think about the fact that the proceedings are being conducted in a closed, non-public manner?

The Tokyo District Court is handling MEXT's dissolution request as a "non-contentious case" proceeding. Since this is not a trial in the usual sense, it is understandable that the process is not public. The secrecy of the proceedings is stipulated under the "Non-Contentious Case Procedures Act".

However, **if a religious organization is dissolved through such a non-public process, it means that its right to a public trial under Article 32 of the Constitution is not guaranteed, making this clearly unconstitutional.**

Regarding [Senator Hamada's inquiry](#), while MEXT did not respond, it is generally permissible for the deliberations of MEXT's *Religious Affairs Council* to be non-public due to the sensitive nature of the issues discussed. However, if the evidence that formed the basis of their conclusion includes falsehoods, this will inevitably become a major issue in the future.

What is particularly concerning is the **Religious Affairs Council** itself. Despite having multiple religious representatives as members, it **approved the dissolution request based on such poorly compiled materials** – this is a serious problem.

Continued in [part 2, part 3](#).

See also [Flawed, Deceptive Evidence Gathering by State](#)

See also [Alleged Evidence Tampering in Dissolution Case](#)

Featured image above: **Seishiro Sugihara**, born in 1941 in Hiroshima Prefecture. Completed a master's degree in education at the University of Tokyo Graduate School in 1967. Served as a professor at Josai University and Musashino Women's University (now Musashino University).

Notable publications include *The Ideal Separation of Religion and State and Constitutional Revision* (Jiyusha, 2015). Co-authored *The Disease Called Shigeru Yoshida* (Jiyusha, 2021). Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

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If that is the case, **how many existing religious corporations could be subjected to dissolution requests?** In short, the procedure used by MEXT to collect evidence for the dissolution request of the [Family Federation](#) is something that the *Religious Corporations Act* never originally intended.

Q: Senator Satoshi Hamada (浜田聡) submitted a written inquiry to MEXT requesting



Senator Satoshi Hamada (浜田聡, House of Councillors, NHK Party) speaking on 26th January 2025, in Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan. Photo: Yasuhiro Uno (宇野泰弘)

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