

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Outcry Against Japan's Religious Freedom Abuses

Knut Holdhus
April 27, 2025



Meeting of the UN Human Rights Committee - October 2022, Geneva, Switzerland



[Sekai Nippo](#)

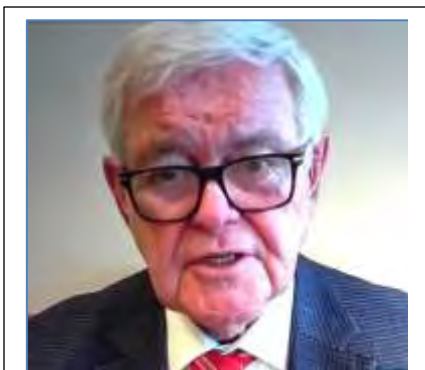
Japan's Crackdown on Religion Sparks Global Outcry. Most of plaintiffs in civil lawsuits at center of dissolution case were forced to sue Family Federation after having been coercively "deprogrammed"

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

Using Coerced Renunciation of Faith as a Means of Dissolution

The Dark World of Deprogramming Spreading Amid the Move to Dissolve the Family Federation (3)

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)



Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives in US Congress 1995-1999, here Feb. 5, 2025

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

"The Japanese government's attempt to destroy religion is extremely dangerous,"

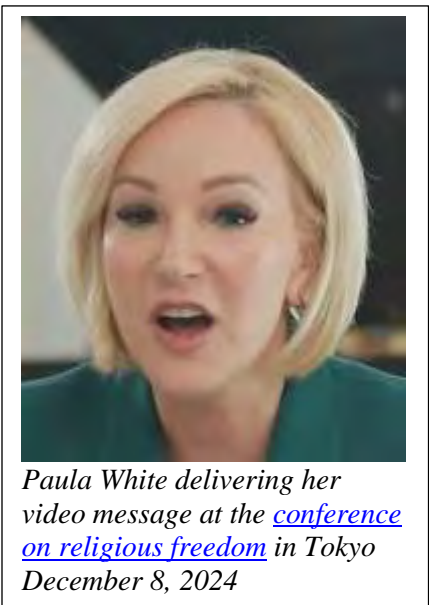
warned former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich at an international conference on religious freedom held in Seoul, South Korea, on 11th April. In an interview with this paper, Gingrich strongly criticized Japan's moves to dissolve the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) as a religious corporation.

Gingrich had also expressed opposition to the dissolution a day before the Tokyo District Court issued its [order](#) on 25th March, posting his views on X (formerly Twitter) on 24th March. Gingrich emphasized,

"The most fundamental human right is the freedom of religion - the freedom to seek God."

Reflecting this belief, the Trump administration had established the Faith and Opportunity Initiative at the White House. Pastor Paula White, who has been appointed as its chief advisor, sent a [video message](#) to a [conference hosted by the Japan Committee of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable](#) (ICRF) in Tokyo 8th December last year.

In her message, White raised the following concerns:



The U.S. State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, in its [2022](#) and [2023](#) reports, expressed serious doubts about Japan's respect for religious freedom. The [2022 report](#) noted that following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍 晋三), the [Family Federation](#) became the target of intolerance, discrimination, and persecution campaigns.

The [2023 report](#) criticized the Japanese government's request to dissolve the [Family Federation](#) even though it had not been found guilty of any criminal offenses, calling this a departure from established legal norms.

On 23rd April 2024, the United Nations issued a [recommendation](#) through its Special Rapporteurs on religious freedom and human rights. It warned that Japan's government guidelines - which could interpret parents urging their children to attend church as potential child abuse - may lead to persecution of religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the [Family Federation](#). The UN [raised](#)

[concerns](#) about Japan's compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which Japan has ratified.

UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Nazila Ghanea, officially requested to visit Japan to investigate potential violations of religious freedom against minority religions, but the [Japanese government refused](#). This refusal has sparked serious [international concern](#) about religious freedom in Japan.

White also voiced worries that parts of Japan's media, government, and Ministry of Justice are withholding information from the public, preventing citizens from understanding the full facts.

Despite these [international concerns](#), the Tokyo District Court's [dissolution ruling](#) made no mention of them.



Moreover, most of the plaintiffs in the civil lawsuits cited by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) as evidence for dissolution were former believers who had left the [religious organization](#) through [deprogramming \(faith-breaking\)](#) - forced to abandon their faith through [abduction and confinement](#).

[Deprogramming](#) (faith-breaking) first gained traction in the United States during the 1970s when members of the [Family Federation](#), pejoratively called "Moonies", were targeted alongside other new religious movements. Many deprogrammers (faith-breakers), often referred to as "exit counselors", ended up facing prison sentences for their involvement in [abduction and confinement](#) cases. By the early 1990s, [deprogramming](#) was widely recognized as illegal in the United States.

Meanwhile, in Japan, the [abduction and confinement](#) of [Family Federation](#) believers peaked during the same period. With police turning a blind eye, [deprogramming](#) (faith-breaking) became rampant, affecting [more than 4,000 believers](#).



In 2013, the international NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers submitted a report titled "Japan: Abductions and Confinement for the Purpose of Forced Apostasy" to the UN Human Rights Committee, calling for reforms.

In its 2014 final review of Japan's human rights record, the UN committee explicitly stated that "abduction and forced apostasy

activities against believers of new religions" violate the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and expressed formal concern.



Patricia Duval - Member of the Paris Bar Association, specializing in international human rights law. Has defended the rights of religious and faith minorities both in France and internationally (2025)

Regarding MEXT's request for the [Family Federation's](#) dissolution, international human rights attorney Patricia Duval pointed out that the civil lawsuits used as grounds for dissolution were brought by former believers who had left the [church](#) through "abduction and forcible deprogramming".

In September of last year, Duval submitted a [report to the United Nations](#), arguing that Japan's moves to dissolve the [Family Federation](#) constitute a "violation of international law".

That the Tokyo District Court issued the [dissolution order](#) without properly investigating these matters is deeply troubling. In effect, the [court's decision](#) uses [deprogramming](#) (faith-breaking) - a practice internationally recognized as a [human rights violation](#) - as a means to dissolve the [Family Federation](#).

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Dehumanizing Abuse Enabled By “Mind Control” Myth

• April 26, 2025

• Knut Holdhus

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Abduction disguised as rescue: Tokyo paper exposes dehumanizing abuse as “mind control” pretext is used by faith-breakers and anti-religious lawyers

Tokyo, 25th April 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article.*


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
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It's based on "mind control"

"Parents are told that their children are under mind control, and that it's difficult for them to escape solo."

said Toru Goto (後藤徹), representative of the "National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced De-Conversion", during a commemorative lecture on 10th February 2025, for the release of his autobiography *Shitō* (Deadly Struggle), published by Sogei-sha. Goto himself was confined in an apartment for 12 years and 5 months by his family members who opposed his faith in the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (formerly the Unification Church).



Toru Goto, here at the official launch 10th February 2025, of his book "Deadly Struggle: Surviving 4,536 Days of Confinement". Photo: Screenshot from videorecording of the event.

Christian pastors and activists known as "deprogrammers" (faith-breakers) are often involved in the confinement of *Family Federation* believers, acting on requests from families to forcibly make the believers renounce their faith.

Parents are told that only specialists can help and, under the guise of "protection", end up resorting to abduction and confinement. Goto explained this, describing such actions as "faith-breaking" [See editor's note below] and "psychological lynching".

One of the reasons why parents commit these acts, Goto says, is the belief in the "mind control theory". This theory not only justifies abductions but is also used as a defense in court by those who carried out such acts.

In July 2014, a couple in Hiroshima Prefecture who were members of the *Family Federation* were abducted on the same day and separated from their children. The husband was tied up with ropes and had a black cloth bag placed over his head when he was forced into a vehicle. The wife, while visiting her parents, was tied by her wrists and ankles, shoved head-first into a sleeping bag, and transported by car to an apartment used for confinement.

The couple was released within a few days after managing to report the incident to the police. In May 2016, they filed a civil lawsuit in Hiroshima District Court seeking damages from the relatives and Christian associates involved in their confinement.

The defendants, represented by attorney Masaki Goro (郷路征記) from the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales*, argued based on mind control theory. They claimed the couple had been through a "transformation of personality" due to their faith in the *Family Federation* and always ran away from discussions. There, a minimal physical force was used to "give them a chance to think for themselves." Goro (Gouro) argued that without isolating them from the religious organization, escaping mind control was impossible.



Arguing in court based on mind control theory: Attorney Masaki Goro (Gouro). Illustration: Grok xAI, 26th April 2025

The lawyer also claimed the religious organization violated the couple's rights to freedom of thought, religion, property, and the pursuit of happiness, asserting these conditions would persist for life unless the couple left the organization. Thus, Goro (Gouro) justified the abduction and confinement as lawful.

However, none of these claims were accepted by the court. In 2020, the Hiroshima High Court ruled that the confinement was a "malicious criminal act that posed a serious threat to life and physical safety." It concluded that the act could by no means be called "minimal physical force" and was not justifiable. The court ordered the defendants to pay approximately 1.7 million yen in damages. The mind control theory was completely disregarded in court.

Though relatives claimed

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though, relatives claimed the couple was “constantly running away”, the wife, Yukie Kanamori (pseudonym, in her 50s), said they had been in frequent contact before the **abduction**. She said,

“The discussion just went nowhere because our parents wanted us to leave the **church**, and we absolutely didn’t.”



Location of **Hiroshima**, on the main island of Honshu. Image: Maximilian Dörrbecker (Chumhwa) / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#)

She also recalled feeling a deep fear from her parents **during confinement** – as if they believed they had to make her leave the **religious organization** before they themselves became “criminals”.

If the prejudiced view that “the **Family Federation** is evil” is being stoked by mind control theory and used to justify **deprogramming** (faith-breaking) [[See editor's note below](#)], then one might ask,

“Who is really being ‘controlled’?”

See [article 1](#), [article 3](#)

Featured image above: A reenactment of Yukie Kanamori (pseudonym) having been forced into a sleeping bag and abducted into a van by several men. Image provided by the person involved, partially edited.

[Editor's note: Coercive faith-breaking (“deprogramming”) in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the **Family Federation** or Jehovah’s Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of **Soka Gakkai**. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to “rescue” the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about “mental health” or alleged “exploitation” as mitigating factors.]

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