

**FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Calling for End to Japan's Faith-Breaking Silent Complicity**

Knut Holdhus  
May 6, 2025



*Haruhisa Nakagawa, Secretary of the Tokyo Christian Theological Institute*



**Religious leader takes close look at Japan's silent complicity in huge "deprogramming" scandal: How faith-breaking was allowed to flourish**  
Tokyo, 5th May 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

**Influence on Court Rulings by Deprogrammers (Faith-Breakers)**  
**The Dark World of Deprogramming Spreading Amid the Move to Dissolve the Family Federation (8)**

Contributed by Haruhisa Nakagawa (中川晴久), Executive Secretary, Tokyo Institute for Christian Theology (Part 2)

See [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#), [article 7](#)

**Family Federation Believers Are Victims of Prejudice**

The issue of deprogramming (faith-breaking) [See editor's note 1 below] is deeply tied to the structural distortions of Japan's mental health care system. We have sources such as

The Dark Side of Mental Health Care by Mitsunobu Sato (佐藤光展) published in Japanese on Kodansha Gendai Shinsho, and

The Dark Side of the Mental Health Business by Noriyasu Yoneda (米田倫康), published in Japanese on Kitashinjuku Publishing.

According to such sources, the practice of [abducting, detaining, and confining](#) individuals deemed "problematic" by society has long been tacitly permitted due to a lack of legal oversight.

This structural gap created an environment where deprogrammers (faith-breakers) could justify forcibly "reforming" the thoughts of religious believers. There are cases where privately run detention facilities, such as Busshō-in, owned by the Buddhist sect Butsuren-shū (佛蓮宗), served as the stage for such acts.



*The reality of faith-breaking: Toru Goto, a member of the [Family Federation](#), in 2008, barely able to move after being held in forcible detention by his own family in league with professional faith-breakers for more than 12 years*

Even more concerning is how the media, police, prosecutors, and courts turned a blind eye to deprogramming (faith-breaking) [See editor's note 1 below] while regarding Aum Shinrikyo as a terrorist group. As the Aum case was given status of a national crisis, those involved in [abductions and confinement](#) faced no legal or ethical accountability. This tacit approval likely emboldened practitioners by giving them a sort of "license to act". It is also possible that there were unspoken cooperative ties with public security authorities.

Aum Shinrikyo's publication Ideal Society No. 12 (released 5th November 1992) included numerous claims of victimization by deprogramming [See editor's note 1 below] and also accused lawyers and media outlets of supporting illegal actions.

Chronologically, it appears that deprogramming [See editor's note 1 below] networks initially targeting the [Unification Church](#) applied the same methods to Aum followers. Amid rising public anxiety over Aum, propaganda began equating the [Family Federation](#) with Aum, which exacerbated prejudice against the [Family Federation](#).

While Aum Shinrikyo committed destructive acts such as the 1989 murder of lawyer Tsutsumi Sakamoto (坂本堤) [See editor's note 2 below] and the sarin gas attacks, the [Family Federation](#) has not been involved in any criminal cases over the past 60 years and has responded peacefully despite facing persecution.

Since its "Compliance Declaration" in 2009 [See editor's note 3 below], the [Family Federation](#) has actively sought to improve. Despite the essential differences between Aum and the [Family Federation](#), deprogrammers (faith-breakers) have continued to spread the narrative that "Aum and the [Family Federation](#) are the same," using this to justify their actions. This propaganda leans on the illogical reasoning that "the [Unification Church](#) is even worse than Aum because they are skilled at avoiding arrest." Believers of the [Family Federation](#) have suffered unjust persecution as victims of such prejudice. It is suspected that this kind of widespread propaganda may have influenced court decisions as well.



*Professional faith-breaker Takashi Miyamura, responsible for hundreds of deprogrammings based on abduction and forcible detention. He is said to have been advisor to the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP)*

Those who practiced deprogramming (faith-breaking) [See editor's note 1 below] should have reflected, especially after witnessing the Tokyo subway sarin attack, on whether their actions might have provoked extreme responses from the groups they targeted. [Abduction, confinement](#), and forced ideological re-education (思想改造) [See editor's note 4 below] can cause deep trauma and trigger unpredictable backlash. Recognizing this risk, there should have been an ethical decision to renounce such methods as unacceptable. However, with tacit approval in the wake of the Aum incident, deprogrammers continued their activities without reflection, justifying actions that overstepped legal and ethical boundaries.

Thirty years after the Aum incident, the problem of deprogramming [See editor's note 1 below] remains buried in darkness. While some tolerance for actions taken during a national crisis may be understandable, the continued tolerance of lawless conduct afterward is inexcusable. Deprogramming [See editor's note 1 below] not only violates individual freedom and dignity but also has grave consequences for society as a whole. The unfair propaganda against the [Family Federation](#) is an extension of this broader issue.

To prevent a repeat of the tragedies of 30 years ago, we must have the courage to shine a light on the dark world of deprogramming [See editor's note 1 below]. Silent complicity without scrutiny breeds further injustice. Now is the time to take action, drawing on the lessons of the past for the sake of the future.

(End)

See [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#), [article 7](#)

**[Editor's note 1:** 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*

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.]

**[Editor's note 2:** Tsutsumi Sakamoto (坂本堤, 1956 - 1989) was a Japanese lawyer and a key member of the notorious "anti-cult" organization National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (全国靈感商法対策弁護士連絡会, Zenkoku Reikan Shōhō Taisaku Bengoshi Renraku-kai). He was especially known for his work against the Aum Shinrikyo group, which later carried out the 1995 Tokyo subway sarin gas attack.

Sakamoto's legal efforts were seen as a significant threat to Aum Shinrikyo. This led its leader, Shoko Asahara, to order Sakamoto's assassination in 1989. In November 1989, Sakamoto, his wife Satoko, and their one-year-old son Tatsuhiko were murdered by Aum Shinrikyo members. The attackers entered the Sakamoto's home in Yokohama at night, drugged the family, and strangled them before disposing of their bodies in three different prefectures.

The case remained unsolved until 1995, when Aum Shinrikyo members confessed after being arrested for the sarin gas attack. The murders shocked Japan.

Tsutsumi Sakamoto is known for his activism pursuing legal action against Aum Shinrikyo based on the use of consumer protection law to reclaim donations to the organization. He represented so-called apostates, members who had left the group and become hostile to it. Sakamoto claimed that the Aum Shinrikyo were involved in unlawful activities years before the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway.]

[Editor's note 3: The 2009 compliance declaration of the [Unification Church](#) of Japan (now the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)) was a formal commitment by the [organization](#) to reform its practices in response to longstanding public criticism and legal challenges.

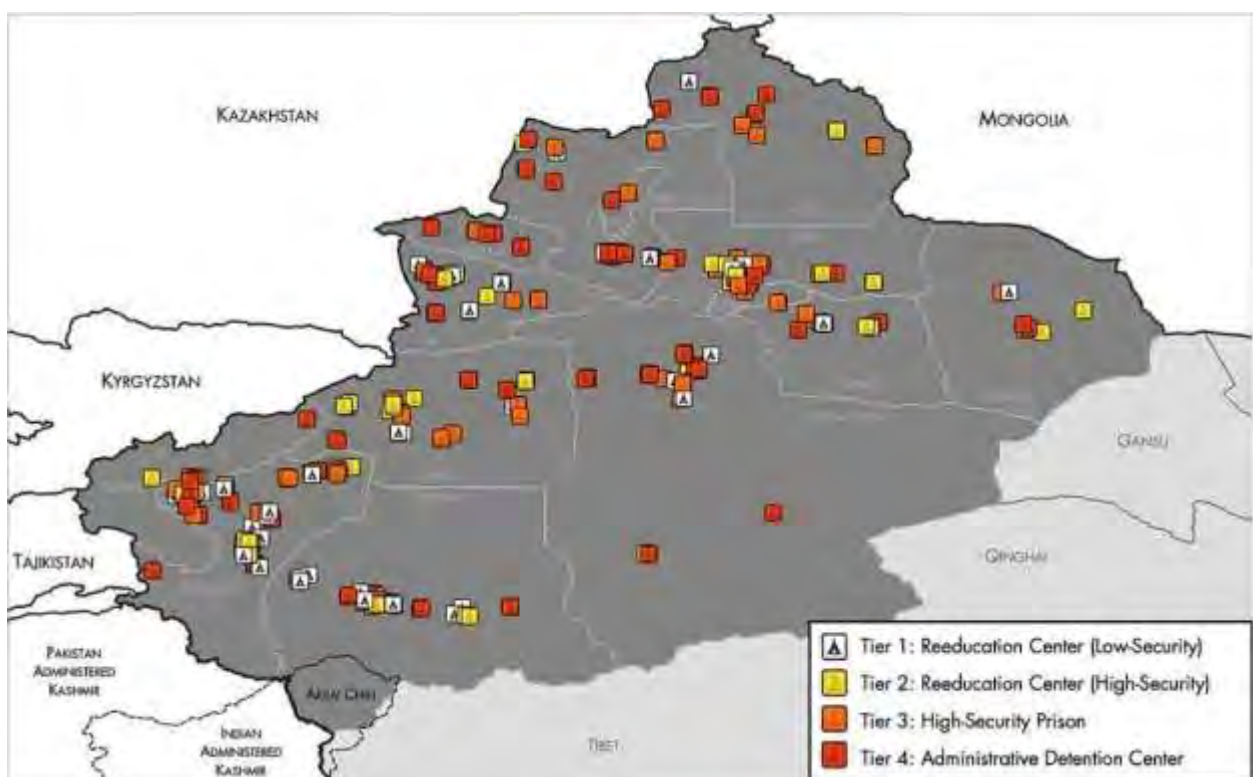
The [Unification Church](#) in Japan had faced numerous allegations related to recruitment tactics and donation solicitation, termed "spiritual sales" (靈感商法) by a hostile network of activist lawyers who had declared the [religious organization](#) an enemy. These issues led to multiple lawsuits orchestrated by the activist lawyers and significant media backlash. This prompted the [organization](#) to take measures to restore its reputation and demonstrate compliance with legal and ethical standards.

The [religious organization](#) pledged to stop possibly unethical donation practices, including what the hostile network of lawyers claimed amounted to "pressuring members into making large financial contributions under spiritual pretexts."

This was in response to accusations from the same activist lawyers that followers "were being manipulated into giving away substantial amounts of money or property."

The [Unification Church](#) stated it would enhance internal oversight to ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards. Measures included better training for leaders and stricter guidelines for evangelization and solicitation of donations.

After this compliance declaration, there was a significant decrease in the number of lawsuits against the [Unification Church](#) - since 2015 called the [Family Federation](#). The [religious organization](#) has used this as evidence that it has improved its practices and should not be subject to [dissolution](#).]



*Ideological re-education on large scale in the Chinese province of Xinjiang: Map of the Xinjiang Internment Camps created by the RAND Corporation based on data collected by the US National Geospatial Intelligence Agency and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute*

[Editor's note 4: Ideological re-education. The Japanese term 思想改造 (shisō kaizō) is best translated as "thought reform" or "ideological re-education".

It refers to the deliberate effort to change someone's beliefs, ideology, or worldview - often through coercive or manipulative means. The term has strong historical and political connotations, especially associated with authoritarian regimes (e.g., Communist China under Mao or Xi Jinping), where it has been used to describe systematic campaigns to reshape people's thinking to align with state ideology.]

Related to Japan's silent complicity: [Japan Following the Way of China](#)

Also related to Japan's silent complicity: [Japan's Dissolution Case Echoes China's Playbook](#)

And also related to Japan's silent complicity: ["Lawyers Lying and Shaming Japan" for 50 Years](#)

More, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Lawfare: State Uses Legal System in War on Faith](#)

Also related to Japan's silent complicity: [Media/Legal Expert: Communism Behind Persecution](#)

And more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Militant Lawyers Dictate Government Policy](#)

And more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Media Helping Terrorist Reach His Goal](#)

Related to Japan's silent complicity: [Kishida Administration Giving in to Terrorism](#)

And more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [12 Religious Freedom NGOs Denouncing Japan](#)

Yet more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Japanese Communists' Final War](#)

Still more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Political and Social Activism behind Oppression](#)

And yet more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Opposition Inciting Regime to Excessive Steps](#)

And still more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Journalist Reveals Ugly Leftwing Conspiracy](#)

And even more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Gingrich: Kishida Joining Communist Campaign](#)

Yet more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [The 3 Enemies of Religious Liberty](#)

Still more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Lawyer Exposes Dirty Leftwing Plot](#)

And yet more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Inhuman Government-Supported Mass Deprogramming](#)

And still more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Bias: No Right to Respond for Religious Minority](#)

And even more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Collusion to Rob Minority of Its Rights](#)

Yet more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [State and Media Creating "Today's Non-Citizens"](#)

Still more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Japan Criticized for Glaring Rights Violations](#)

And yet more, related to Japan's silent complicity: [Two European Scholars Warning Japan](#)

# Opaque Process Erodes Trust In Japan's Judiciary

• May 4, 2025  
• Knut Holdhus



*Raising alarms over fairness in Japan's judiciary, religious leader questions troubling dissolution verdict reached through opaque process behind closed doors against the Family Federation*

Tokyo, 2nd May 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article.*

## Instilling Hatred and Trauma Through "Deprogramming"


The Dark World of  
Deprogramming Spreading Amid  
the Move to Dissolve the Family



Logo of the  
*Sekai Nippo*


Share:

More Posts




Calling For End To Japan's Silent Complicity

May 6, 2025




Scholar On Image, Idealism, Donations, Mistrust

May 5, 2025




Talk: "Silencing Religious Voices Aids CCP Goals"

May 3, 2025




Escapee Details Harrowing Faith-Breaking Trauma

May 2, 2025




Press Release Disclosing Key Court Documents

May 1, 2025



Healing Bonds After Dehumanizing Faith-Breaking

April 30, 2025



Scholar: Government Mishandling Dissolution Case

April 29, 2025

Search...

Categories

Contributed by Haruhisa Nakagawa (中川晴久), Executive Secretary, Tokyo Institute for Christian Theology (Part 1)

See [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#), [article 8](#)

## What triggered the Tokyo subway sarin attack

The process from the request to the [court ruling for the dissolution](#) of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) was astoundingly opaque. Serious issues – such as [evidence fabrication](#) by the [Ministry of Education](#), the reality of [harm caused by deprogramming](#) (anti-brainwashing programs), and the impact of political pressure – were all disregarded as the court delivered its [verdict](#). Such a closed process infringes upon the public’s right to know and undermines trust in the judiciary.



**Did the court apply the law objectively?** Here, judges issuing their verdict. Illustration: Grok xAI, 4th May 2025.

The [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#) is more than just a matter concerning a single religious group – it is a litmus test for the transparency and fairness of Japan’s legal and political systems. As a constitutional state, Japan must apply the law objectively and fairly, not respond emotionally by targeting specific groups.

The [Tokyo District Court’s decision](#) to dissolve the [Family Federation](#) was highly unusual, involving political pressure, [falsified evidence](#), neglect of [harm caused by deprogramming](#) (faith-breaking) [[See editor’s note below](#)], and non-public hearings. Ignoring these issues not only erodes judicial trust but also has serious implications for religious freedom and human rights.

Although the doctrines and nature of Aum Shinrikyo (オウム真理教) and the [Family Federation](#) are completely different, both have been labeled as “cults” and targeted by the “deprogramming (faith-breaking) network”.

The 1995 Tokyo subway sarin attack is remembered as a terrorist act by Aum Shinrikyo that has left deep scars on Japanese society. However, one of the complex factors believed to be involved in the background of this incident is the role of deprogramming (faith-breaking) [[See editor’s note below](#)].



Religious scholar  
Toshihiro Ota (大田俊寛).  
Photo (2025): [Sekai Nippo](#)

Religious scholar Toshihiro Ota (大田俊寛) has emphasized the need to investigate the “possibility” that deprogramming contributed to Aum’s radicalization. Ota is also author of *The Spiritual History of Aum Shinrikyo*. While conducting interviews with people involved after the incident, he was concerned that no one had spoken about the deprogramming factor behind the Aum incident. Now that 30 years have passed since the incident, it is worth paying attention to once again.

Naturally, Aum Shinrikyo’s escalation toward anti-state ideology and sarin

attacks involved multiple intertwined factors. Nevertheless, the psychological trauma inflicted on Aum followers through deprogramming (faith-breaking) may have intensified their paranoia and aggression. This possibility cannot be ignored.

Attorney Yoshinobu Aoyama (青山吉伸), who served as Aum Shinrikyo’s legal



Send us a message

First Name \*Last Name

Email \*

Your Message \*

Submit

advisor, wrote in his books *The Lawyer of Truth Fights On!!* and *Fascism Has Already Begun* (published by Aum Publishing) that Aum followers were severely tormented by abduction, confinement, and forced renunciation of their faith.

These reports reached Aum's leader Shoko Asahara (麻原彰晃). As someone who tended to overreact to external pressure, it is plausible that the forced indoctrination and trauma inflicted on followers planted deep hatred and paranoia in him, which could have worsened his delusions of persecution. This possibility warrants serious investigation.



Front cover page of Yoshinobu Aoyama's book "The Lawyer of Truth Fights On, Part 2". Revised edition published 1991 by Publisher Parrot.

That such a critical factor like deprogramming (faith-breaking) [See editor's note below] is missing from public debate, and the full picture of the incident remains unclear, raises questions about the role of scholars of religious studies. Reactions to deprogramming vary among individuals and don't necessarily lead to anti-social behavior. Therefore, while it is difficult to establish a direct causal link, examining its potential impact is essential.

See [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#), [article 8](#)

**Featured image above:** Haruhisa Nakagawa (中川晴久) – After withdrawing from Waseda University's School of Letters, Arts and Sciences I, Haruhisa Nakagawa (中川晴久) dedicated his life to church service. In 2007, he became the head pastor of the *Christian Church of the Lord's Sheep*. In 2008, he joined the *Tokyo Franciscan Study Group* (now the *Tokyo Institute for Christian Theology*). He is an editorial board member of the Christian opinion site SALTY, and president of the *Japan Christian Theological Seminary*. Photo: Sekai Nippo

**[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.]

**Related to opaque process behind closed doors:** [Japan Following the Way of China](#)

Also related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Japan's Dissolution Case Echoes China's Playbook](#)

And also related to opaque process behind closed doors: [“Lawyers Lying and Shaming Japan” for 50 Years](#)

More, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Lawfare: State Uses Legal System in War on Faith](#)

Also related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Media/Legal Expert: Communism Behind Persecution](#)

And more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Militant Lawyers Dictate Government Policy](#)

And more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Media Helping Terrorist Reach His Goal](#)

Related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Kishida Administration Giving in to Terrorism](#)

And more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [12 Religious Freedom NGOs Denouncing Japan](#)

Yet more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Japanese Communists' Final War](#)

Still more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Political and Social Activism behind Oppression](#)

And yet more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Opposition Inciting Regime to Excessive Steps](#)

And still more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Journalist Reveals Ugly Leftwing Conspiracy](#)

And even more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Gingrich: Kishida Joining Communist Campaign](#)

Yet more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [The 3 Enemies of Religious Liberty](#)

Still more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Lawyer Exposes Dirty Leftwing Plot](#)

And yet more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Inhuman Government-Supported Mass Deprogramming](#)

And still more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Bias: No Right to Respond for Religious Minority](#)

And even more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Collusion to Rob Minority of Its Rights](#)

Yet more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [State and Media Creating “Today's Non-Citizens”](#)

Still more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Japan Criticized for Glaring Rights Violations](#)

And yet more, related to opaque process behind closed doors: [Two European Scholars Warning Japan](#)

First Name

Last Name

Your Email Address

Subscribe

☐ I consent to make available my data to the site and agree that my data will be used for the purposes of the newsletter.

Follow us

