

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: FFWPU Japan's new way forward Government dissolution order

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Dialogue between Masaki Nakamasa (right) and Nozomi Kojima in Shinjuku, Tokyo



Engaging in a larger battle - Interview with former and current member brings up new ideas for way ahead after dissolution order verdict

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Voices of Former and Current Believers

Court Order to Dissolve the [Family Federation](#)

by Yasuhiro Uno (宇野 泰弘)

"Learn from other religions" - Masaki Nakamasa (仲正昌樹)

"The religious organization must engage with society" - Nozomi Kojima (小嶋希晶)

Masaki Nakamasa - Born in 1963 in Kure City, Hiroshima Prefecture. Received his PhD from the University of Tokyo in 1996. Currently a professor of law at Kanazawa University specializing in the history of political thought and social philosophy. Major works include Postmodern Nihilism (Sakuhinsha) and Beyond Hegel (Kodansha).

Nozomi Kojima - Born in 1995 in Hokkaido. A second-generation member of the religious group [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)). She is the head of the "Association of Second-Generation Members for the Protection of Believers' Human Rights". Advocates for freedom of religion and the rights of religious minorities, holding symposiums and lectures across Japan.

The trial for the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) has [moved to the Tokyo High Court](#). Regarding the decision by the Tokyo District Court and the issues facing the [organization](#), we spoke with Masaki Nakamasa (仲正昌樹), a former member and professor at Kanazawa University, and Nozomi Kojima (小嶋希晶), a second-generation member and representative of the Association of Second-Generation Members for the Protection of Believers' Human Rights.



A second-generation believer answers a reporter's question at a press conference led by Nozomi Kojima - March 26, 2025, Shibuya Ward, Tokyo

Interviewer: Yasuhiro Uno (宇野 泰弘)

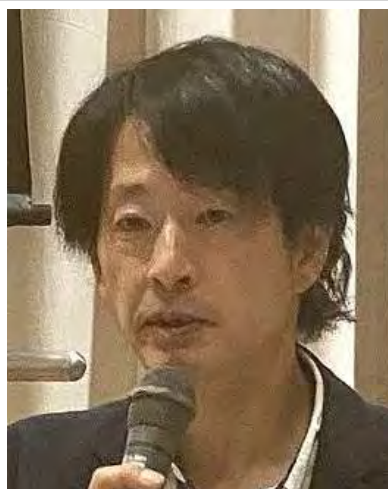
- The District Court's [decision](#) is quite harsh for the [religious organization](#).

Kojima: I couldn't accept it at all - it was shocking. From the perspective of current believers, the [religious organization](#) has clearly improved. However, in today's Japan, it's become harder for people of faith to live freely. While we must take the [decision](#) seriously, I also wonder if the trial was conducted fairly.

- The [dissolution order](#) includes cases that were already settled. What are the problems with this?

Nakamasa: Even people with no connection to the [religious organization](#) are saying it's strange to include settled cases as grounds for dissolution. It's common sense that once a case is resolved, it shouldn't be re-litigated or used later by a judge to say, "Actually, this side was at fault."

- Your media appearances have decreased since the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Why is that?



Militantly campaigning against the [Family Federation](#): Activist journalist Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka

Nakamasa: Public interest in the [Unification Church](#) issue has gradually waned. Also, from the media's perspective, people like Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト) - who make stronger statements - might be more convenient.

- The [religious organization](#) now focuses on [abduction and confinement](#) issues and appeals for religious freedom. How do you see that?

Nakamasa: There's no doubt that [deprogramming](#) through [abduction and confinement](#) is a problem. But it's important to communicate how the everyday lives of believers are not that unusual. They should ask, "Is it really necessary to dismantle us?" There's an impression they want to solve the issue by "taking down the central enemy," but that's not how reality works.

- There's a public perception that believers blindly follow the [religious organization](#)'s leadership.

Nakamasa: People see the [religious organization](#) and its members as unconditionally obeying [Hak Ja Han Moon](#), but that's not entirely true. Like how Catholics don't necessarily obey the Pope blindly, that nuance should be conveyed.

There's also a strong lingering belief in Japan that the Japanese [church](#) should shoulder the financial burden of the global organization. Even if that's no longer the case, admitting it once was could add credibility. They should clearly explain that they no longer siphon off believers' assets to send to Korea. Veteran

leaders could say, "We overextended ourselves in the past, but we wouldn't let our children do that now."

- You've also said the [religious organization](#) is too obsessed with "defeating communism", leading to further isolation.

Kojima: The [religious organization](#) is trying hard to adopt a victim narrative now, but I find that a bit off. While it's true the [organization](#) and its members have suffered - from things like being [abducted and held captive](#) - it's also true that, over its 60+ year history and nearly 290 churches, our immaturity and overly strong faith have hurt former members.



Demonstration against the court order to dissolve the [Family Federation](#), Shinjuku, Tokyo 11th May 2025

Nakamasa: Thriving religions often adopt the stance: "Even if we disappear, it's okay - as long as our ideals survive." I remember in my time, the [religious organization](#) used to say things like, "There are people in real pain. We fight to protect them. It doesn't matter what happens to us." That spirit seems lost. Now they're just focused on self-preservation, which is not a good reason to keep going.

- You've mentioned arrogant comments by believers on social media.

Kojima: I often hear members of the [religious organization](#) say, "Japanese people don't understand religion." But the general public's resentment is not toward religion per se - it's toward the [Family Federation](#). Most Japanese people respect traditional religions. Blaming the [dissolution order](#) on "Japan's lack of religious understanding" comes across as arrogant. Some might even say the [Family Federation](#) is the very reason Japanese people misunderstand religion.

- As a second-generation member, what do you think the [religious organization](#) should become?

Kojima: Since the [dissolution order](#) was filed, I've felt keenly the lack of allies. It's painful to be misunderstood. I hope the [religious organization](#) will learn to engage with society and listen to painful criticism.

Nakamasa: That's probably the key point. In times of crisis, an organization must be able to value that kind of engagement, or it won't truly survive.

Kojima: Maybe our role is to engage in dialogue with society and deepen mutual understanding. Regardless of whether the dissolution happens or not, we should focus on communication.

Nakamasa: It's important to identify what ideals members themselves have, aside from the goals handed down from the top. They should ask, "Besides protecting the [religious organization](#), what do we really want to do?" Maybe they could hold open discussion forums to explore this.

- In other words, believers should express their own dreams and ideals in their own words.

Nakamasa: Exactly. It shouldn't be just for the sake of the [religious organization](#). If they could return to the attitude of "fighting for persecuted and suffering religions and cultures," it might resonate more. They need to rethink what "fighting" really means.

- Are there other challenges the [religious organization](#) faces?

Nakamasa: Put simply, religions that restrict thought through rigid rules tend to self-destruct. Instead, they should liberate thought.



Interfaith unity: From the unity ceremony of reconciliation between Christianity and the [Family Federation](#), held in [Gapyeong](#), South Korea August 23, 2024

Kojima: Originally, the [religious organization](#) had a doctrine of "interfaith unity" (超宗教 - cho shukyo - transcending religious boundaries). We aren't reprimanded for attending events held by other religious groups. When you think about it, the way of thinking is supposed to be something open and inclusive. But somewhere along the way, we started trying to force our thoughts into rigid molds of our own making. As a result, each of us may have unintentionally narrowed our own thinking and let things drift in the wrong direction. It was supposed to be more open and free.

Nakamasa: I feel the same way, as a former believer. They should actively go out and learn from other religions - saying, "Please teach us your views."

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Categories



Peter Zoehrer.
Photo: [FOREF](#)

On World Press Freedom Day, on 3rd May, we celebrate journalism's role in holding power to account and amplifying the voices of the vulnerable. Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) enshrines freedom of expression as a pillar of democracy. But this freedom is not without consequence. When media outlets stigmatize religious minorities, they don't just shape narratives – they shape realities.

The right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), protected under Article 18 of the UDHR, is not in tension with press freedom – it is bound to it. When one is compromised, both suffer.

Across democratic societies, peaceful faith communities are increasingly targeted not by the state alone, but by a **media culture that recycles old prejudices in new packaging**. Labels like “Sekte” (in German, and similar expressions in languages other than English) or “cult” – lacking legal or academic definition – are used to delegitimize entire belief systems. These terms carry historical weight and modern danger: they incite fear, provoke hostility, and open the door to discrimination, violence, and even legal erasure.

Austria: When a Broadcaster Crosses the Line

One recent example in Austria reveals how **public broadcasting can blur the line between journalism and defamation**. In a 2-minute-13-second report, ORF Mittagsjournal – Austria's national broadcaster – **used the word “Sekte” (cult) twelve times** to describe the **Unification Church**, a legally recognized faith community under Austrian law with no record of misconduct. Its members contribute to society through peacebuilding, education, and interfaith dialogue.



The logo of Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF) – Austrian national public broadcaster. [Public domain image](#)

ORF justified its language by citing a Japanese court ruling dissolving a related group over alleged civil violations. But it omitted critical facts: that the **Church** is protected under Austrian law; that no wrongdoing has been reported locally; and that the Japanese decision has been condemned by leading international human rights advocates. Among them are participants of the [IRF Roundtable](#), [Human Rights Without Frontiers](#), and speakers at the [IRF Summit 2025](#), all of whom see the ruling as a violation of international FoRB standards.

Austria's 1998 *Recognition Act* guarantees equal protection to recognized religious communities. By ignoring this and **repeating stigmatizing language**, ORF helped **legitimize prejudice**. A **Church** spokesperson formally requested a correction – none was issued. **Such reporting doesn't just misinform; it emboldens hate**. In neighboring Germany, neo-Nazi extremists recently attacked *Hare Krishna* devotees – violence fueled by decades of media framing minority faiths as dangerous “cults”.

A European pattern

Austria is not alone. In Germany, state and media actors have long labeled groups like *Scientology* and others as “anti-democratic” without judicial basis. These designations have **led to surveillance, job loss, and social ostracism**.

In France, the discredited 1995 *Parliamentary Report on Sects* listed 172 groups – from *Christian Scientists* to *Antoinists* – as threats to public order, despite no criminal evidence.

Today, **MIVILUDES, the state's anti-cult task force, continues to issue alerts that the media repeat without question, shaping both public sentiment and policy.**

These terms have no legal precision – yet



In France, considered a threat to public order: Christian Science. Here, one of their reading rooms, this one located downtown in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA. Photo: [Artaxerxes / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

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miviludes

Mission interministérielle de vigilance
et de lutte contre les dérives sectaires

Source of state-sponsored

disinformation about new religious
movements: MIVILUDES. Here, the logo
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they carry devastating
weight. **Despite multiple
rulings by the European
Court of Human Rights
affirming the rights of
minority religions,
stigmatizing labels
remain embedded in
public discourse.**

To be continued. Part 2
coming soon

Featured image above: Facsimile of alarmist article (1982) using the
word "Sekten" (cults) in an Austrian weekly. Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

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