

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: The Hate That Happened in Japan Can Happen Anywhere

Knut Holdhus
January 1, 2025



Hate Graffiti sprayed on [Family Federation](#) property in Japan in 2022 as part of vicious persecution

Investigative reporter shows what now happens in Japan - vicious persecution of the Family Federation - "is an attack on all religious freedom" and could happen to other faiths anywhere



World Religion News

World Religion News - an online platform that offers news focusing on different religions - published on 12th December 2024 an article

headlined "[Persecution of the Unification Church in Japan Is an Attack on All Religious Freedom](#)".

It is authored by investigative reporter Logan H. Merrill and delves into the ongoing persecution of the [Family Federation](#) - formerly the [Unification Church](#) - in Japan. According to Merrill, the attacks on the religious minority are sparking global concern about the government's involvement in religious affairs. This controversy ignited after the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on 8th July 2022, and has since escalated into a broader attack on religious freedom.



Steven Hassan at anti-cult conference in March 2000

The accused assassin claimed dissatisfaction with Abe's alleged support for the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#). Steven Hassan, a self-proclaimed "cult expert", quickly capitalized on the tragedy. Within a day, he suggested via social media that the alleged shooter's motives stemmed from grievances against the [Family Federation](#). Hassan, an American who has long been involved in anti-religious activities, used the incident to disseminate misinformation about the [federation](#), labeling it a "scam" and promoting his own agenda.

Logan H. Merrill, who specializes in covering media and ethics, human rights and psychiatric abuse, explains how this anti-[Family Federation](#) sentiment quickly gained traction. By September 2022, under public and media pressure fueled by Hassan's campaign, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida pledged to sever political ties with the [federation](#), framing it as a "controversial organization". This decision marked a troubling shift: rather than condemning the assassin's actions, the focus turned to vilifying the alleged motivation behind them. The blame was misdirected at the [Family Federation](#) itself, leading to

heightened scrutiny and investigations.

By October 2022, the Japanese government launched an official inquiry into the [federation](#)'s activities. In December, legislation was passed to restrict religious entities from soliciting funds by exploiting members' anxieties or spiritual beliefs. While seemingly targeting unethical practices, the law's implications were seen as disproportionately aimed at the [Family Federation](#), raising concerns about religious discrimination.



Tomihiro Tanaka during an interview Nov. 15, 2024

Rev. Tomihiro Tanaka, the head of the Japanese branch of the [Family Federation](#), condemned these actions as "religious persecution". He highlighted the [minority religion](#)'s plight, which included threats, harassment, and disruption of its activities. Tanaka accused the media and lawmakers of fostering a hostile environment, leading to public unrest against members of the [Family Federation](#).

A Broader Pattern of Persecution

World Religion News describes that the campaign against the [Family Federation](#) in Japan is not an isolated incident but part of a broader strategy orchestrated by figures like Steven Hassan. Trained by Ted Patrick, the infamous "father" of deprogramming, Hassan has a long history of using coercive tactics against religious groups. Reprogramming often involves physical abuse, sleep

deprivation, and psychological manipulation - practices that have caused immense harm to individuals and families.



One of the many critics of faith-breaking, Masumi Fukuda, investigative journalist and author, says, "Abduction and confinement are the [greatest human rights violations](#) since the war. Even though opponents exploit such cases as a business, the media does not report it at all." Here, speaking in Tokyo Jan. 20, 2024

Hassan's anti-religious rhetoric is not confined to Japan. In recent years, he has collaborated with anti-religion initiatives in China, a nation notorious for its systematic suppression of religious freedoms. In 2017, Hassan contributed to the Chinese government's anti-religion website, aligning himself with a regime accused of genocide and crimes against humanity. By engaging with pro-China activists, Hassan further demonstrated his willingness to support oppressive regimes in their efforts to undermine religious liberty.

The Financial Motive Behind Persecution

The World Religion News piece also mentions investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda uncovered troubling details about the motivations behind Japan's actions against the [Family Federation](#). Over 4,300 members have reportedly been abducted and forced to renounce their faith, often through torture or deception. Once deprogrammed, these individuals were encouraged to sue the [federation](#) for damages, creating a lucrative cycle for lawyers and deprogrammers involved in the process.

Fukuda compared these methods to Japan's historical persecution of Christians during the 17th century. Back then, authorities demanded that Christians trample on religious images to prove their abandonment of faith. Today, former members of the [Family Federation](#) are similarly pressured to file lawsuits to demonstrate

their disassociation from the [religious organization](#). Fukuda's findings implicate the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, a group with ties to Communist ideologies, in orchestrating these campaigns.



Global Implications

In his article, Logan H. Merrill emphasizes that the persecution of the [Family Federation](#) has drawn international attention. Organizations like the United Nations Human Rights Committee criticizes Japan for its failure to protect religious freedoms. Since 2014, the committee has repeatedly urged Japan to address forced abductions and faith-breaking targeting new religious movements. These actions set a dangerous precedent, raising questions about the universal right to freedom of

belief.

The [Family Federation](#)'s membership includes prominent individuals such as David Eaton, music director of the New York City Symphony, and Jonathan Wells (1942-2024), a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute. Notable supporters of the [federation](#) have included figures like Newt Gingrich and Ralph Abernathy (1926-1990), who worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1928-1969). These affiliations underscore the [Family Federation](#)'s diverse and influential network, further highlighting the broader implications of its persecution.

A Call to Defend Religious Freedom



Martin Luther King, Jr.

The situation in Japan serves as a stark reminder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." The assault on the [Family Federation](#) is not just an attack on one faith but a challenge to the principle of religious freedom itself. If such persecution can occur in Japan, a democratic nation, it raises concerns about the safety of religious practices worldwide.

Defending the rights of the [Family Federation](#) is about more than protecting a single organization. It is a stand for the fundamental freedoms that underpin democratic societies. Religious liberty must remain an inalienable right, safeguarded against the forces of discrimination and oppression. The fate of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan serves as a cautionary tale: what happens there could happen anywhere, threatening the freedoms we all hold dear.

Text: Knut Holdhus

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Persecution of the Unification Church in Japan Is an Attack on All Religious Freedom

By WRN Guest -- 12 Dec 2024 --

Spurred by a religious “deprogrammer”—code word for bigoted brainwasher—Japan’s attacks make millions wonder: Why does the government have any role in religion at all?

The spark was the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8, 2022.

Within 24 hours, Steve Hassan, self-described “cult expert” and professional dehumanizer by trade, tweeted that, according to “trustworthy sources,” the alleged assassin was angry about Abe’s support for the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification**, better known as the Unification Church (UC), a global faith of about 10 million members worldwide, 600,000 of whom reside in Japan.

Within days, Hassan—an American citizen who has spent **two generations** bloodying that nation’s most cherished right, freedom of religion, through the unlawful practice of violent deprogramming—was posting on social media, stirring a soup of lies about the UC, accusing the church of instigating “the biggest scam in Japanese history” while incidentally peddling his own printed drivel.

By September, Hassan’s handiwork of hate—which was picked up by media eagerly fanning the flames and kindling public resentment of the UC—contributed to Japan’s Prime Minister Kishida Fumio promising to sever all party links to the “controversial organization.” (Wait. This is a church, yes? So how did it morph into a “controversial organization”?)

So, instead of outrage against the assassin, the public’s spleen was directed against his *motive*. Attacking that which provoked the crime rather than the criminal is like putting Ulysses S. Grant and the Union Army behind bars for what **John Wilkes Booth** did.

Finding that too many people in America believed in the First Amendment for him to maintain his lifestyle, Hassan turned his attention eastward.

But logic had long since fled, and the angry villagers were already on the march with their torches and pitchforks. By October 2022, the prime minister had launched an investigation into the church’s activities. By December, Japan passed a bill, clearly with the UC in mind, banning religious entities from soliciting money by exploiting the anxieties or spiritual obligations of parishioners.

Church officials fought back, accusing the media of “biased news coverage” including “hate speech” that “encourages religious discrimination against the UC.” Rev. Tomihiro Tanaka, who heads the Japanese branch of the church, called a spade a spade, rightly labeling the attacks by media and lawmakers “religious persecution.” “Our churches in Japan have been subject to death threats and threatening phone calls, abusive language blasting out of sound trucks and obstruction of assemblies, with some members of the media harassing ordinary members,” he said.

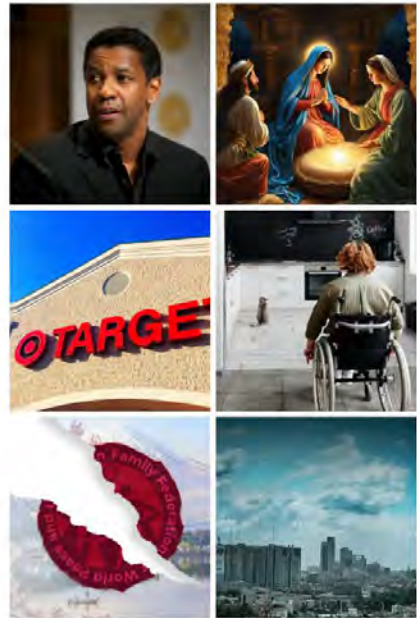
By early October of the following year, 2023, Japanese lawmakers, in what the UC called a politically motivated attack, filed a request in a Tokyo district court to disband the church.

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Steve Hassan has learned his craft well. A follower of Ted Patrick, the thrice-convicted thug and "father" of deprogramming who once described freedom of religion as "one of the biggest rackets the world has ever known," Hassan labels all new religions "cults," feels that the entire American populace should be deprogrammed and has been described by sociologist and author Massimo Introvigne as "one of the most fanatical international anti-cultists."



Deprogrammer Steve Hassan and Ted Patrick, the "father" of deprogramming

Hassan's assault against people of faith includes physical abuse, food and sleep deprivation, imprisonment, harassment, threats and denial of toilet facilities—all ringing up criminal damage assessments in the millions, convictions and a concatenation of broken lives.

But finding that too many people in America believed in the First Amendment for him to maintain his lifestyle, Hassan turned his attention eastward, where he has been a busy bee. In 2017, he began posting hate to the Chinese government's anti-religion website. Last year, he **took to the cyber stage** as a featured speaker, along with two apologists for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), railing against religious liberty in general and newer religions in particular in a virtual gathering of pro-China activists.

China? You mean *the* China that—with its overt aggression against religion, its program of high-tech **persecution** of Christians, Tibetan Buddhists and Falon Gong (among others), coupled with its imprisonment in concentration camps of over a million Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and other Muslims—has earned itself the contempt of free people everywhere and the designation of "Country of Particular Concern" by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom? The China whose treatment of religious minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region was designated by the US Department of State as genocide and crimes against humanity?

Yes, *that* China. He coddled *that* China.

As "proof" that they were now cured, they were told to sue the church for damages.

Steve Hassan also feels warm and fuzzy dissing the Unification Church because he is an ex-member of that church. Apostates, however, are guaranteed to present a distorted and negative view of their former faith. As distinguished Oxford University sociologist of new religions Dr. Bryan R. Wilson **wrote**, "Neither the objective sociological researcher nor the court of law can readily regard the apostate as a creditable or reliable source of evidence. He must always be seen as one whose personal history predisposes him to bias with respect to both his previous religious commitment and affiliations. The suspicion must arise that he acts from a personal motivation to vindicate himself and to regain his self-esteem by showing himself to have been first a victim but subsequently to have become a redeemed crusader."

Steve Hassan is no crusader, nor is he anywhere near redemption.

Respected sociologist and journalist Masumi Fukuda did her own digging and uncovered that the sordid standoff between Japan and religious freedom has less to do with deliverance and more with dollars. After interviewing numerous "deprogrammed" UC members, she asked the Japanese government to drop their dissolution claim.

Here is what she found: Over 4,300 members of the Unification Church in Japan had been abducted, some by torture, others by deception, imprisoned in residences or other places and not freed until they renounced their faith.

As "proof" that they were now cured, they were told to sue the church for damages and were referred to the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, aka "the Network," a pro-Communist group formed in 1987 with the express purpose of destroying the Unification Church when that faith was openly fighting against Communism.

of inclusion in the Eastern
Church



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Ms. Fukuda likened the methods to the 17th-century persecution of Christians in Japan. "To save their life, it was not enough for them to tell the authorities they had abandoned Christianity," she wrote. "They were asked to trample a painting of Jesus underfoot to prove they were no longer Christians. Similarly, now it was not enough for deprogrammed believers to state they were no longer members of the Unification Church. They should prove they had really left the church by filing lawsuits."

"The Network," she concluded, "was thus deeply involved in this abduction and confinement business because they were the attorneys in the subsequent lawsuits filed by former believers against the church. There were lawyers who became rich through these cases, as did deprogrammers and Christian pastors involved in the abductions, who received substantial amounts of money from the relatives of the believers they deprogrammed."

Ms. Fukuda's report is referenced in a larger package sent to the United Nations Human Rights Committee. The committee is well aware of the Japanese government's habit of looking the other way at forced abductions and deconversions from new religious movements. The committee has repeatedly taken Japan to task for these abuses since 2014.

The Unification Church includes among its members the music director of the New York City Symphony, David Eaton, the Executive Director of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom, Dan Fefferman, Nevada state legislator Patrick Hickey, documentary filmmaker Lee Shapiro and senior fellow of the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture Jonathan Wells.

Supporters of the UC have included former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, diplomat Douglas MacArthur II, American Academy of Religion President Ninian Smart, and Ralph Abernathy, a close mentor and friend of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who served on two Unification movement boards of directors.

And while we're on the subject of Dr. King, let us not forget what he wrote in a jail cell, just as true today as it was over 60 years ago: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

The fate of the Unification Church in Japan is our fate. If it can happen there, it can happen here. If it can happen to someone else's religion, it can happen to yours or mine.

And it can happen tomorrow.

By Logan H. Merrill. Originally published by the Freedom Magazine and is reprinted with its permission.

anti-religious movement

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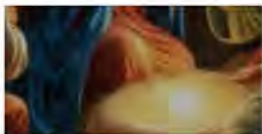
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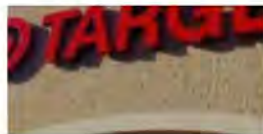




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