

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Looming Arbitrary Dissolution Of Any Religion In Japan

Knut Holdhus
June 15, 2024



Tomihiko Tanaka, here at press conference in Tokyo
7th Nov. 2023



From the CESNUR logo



is largely based on our founders' original biblical understanding, it also features a unique integration of elements of the Korean culture and tradition.

It was in 1958, in the midst of the challenges of the post-World War II era, that our founders [sent a missionary to Japan](#). The first worship service was held with a congregation of two members. By the grace of [God](#), the number of members has now grown to over 600,000. It was not easy for a Korean-born religious organization to expand in Japan, where the two countries have had a historically complicated relationship. Furthermore, after we launched the Victory Over Communism movement to defend our nation from communist expansionism, we came under heavy attack from them.

Persecution in Japan follows pattern where arbitrary dissolution of any religion becomes perfectly possible

A video message from Tomihiko Tanaka, President of the [Family Federation](#) (FFWPU) of Japan, on 13th June, the second day of the 2024 CESNUR Conference, during session 8 (plenary, chaired by Dr. Eileen Barker), which had the theme "The Unification Church and Japan: What Is Exactly Happening?"

The 2024 CESNUR Conference was held from 12th to 15th June at the University of Bordeaux Montaigne in Bordeaux, France with the theme: "[The Contribution of Minority Religions to Society](#)". The conference was co-organized by: [Center for Studies on New Religions](#) (CESNUR), Université Bordeaux Montaigne - CLIMAS (Cultures et littératures des mondes Anglophones), and [International Society for the Study of New Religions](#) (ISSNR).

Respected Dr. Massimo Introvigne, Dr. Eileen Barker, distinguished presenters and participants at this [CESNUR](#) Conference,

On behalf of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) in Japan, it is my great honor to greet you on the occasion of this [CESNUR](#) Conference. I have a deep respect and appreciation for the history of the efforts of the Europeans to gain religious freedom, which is now guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. I know that the road to obtaining this has been a long and winding one. I am deeply impressed by the ongoing efforts for this critical issue even to this day.

Now, at this conference, I regret that I must speak on the situation of the violations of religious freedom in Japan, the outlandish social, political, and legal attacks on [our organization](#). As you may know, [our organization](#) was founded by the renowned religious leader couple, Rev. Dr. [Sun Myung Moon](#) and his wife Dr. [Hak Ja Han Moon](#), both of whom were born in what is now North Korea. We were well known by our former name, the [Unification Church](#), which they [founded in 1954](#). Although our faith movement

Lawyers, communist sympathisers, professional faith-breakers, and even Christian pastors began illegally abducting and coercing our members to abandon their faith in our church. To date, there have been more than [4,300 victims](#) of this criminal activity. Yes, it is true that the well-publicized [joint weddings](#) and the enthusiasm of our young members have caused concerns for parents. Our founders, however, never resented them, rather, they encouraged Japanese members to love the world with the heart of a mother. Many female missionaries voluntarily took on missions in countries throughout the world. I am deeply grateful for their contribution to the establishment of a global mission foundation.



The Korean who brought the [Unification Church](#) to Japan: Bong-choon Choi (1936-2023), aka. Sang-ik Choi. Photo (1965)



Assassinated on 8th July 2022. Here, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe some months earlier, in March 2022



Declared the 'final war' against the [Unification Church](#): Kazuo Shii, here 30th March 2023

The murder of the respected former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe greatly shocked our members. Right after the police reported that the murderer's motive was "a strong grudge against the [Family Federation](#) to which his mother belonged", the Japanese media, in collusion with the forces opposed to the [Family Federation](#), launched a relentless attack on us. This is reminiscent of the witch hunts of the European Middle Ages.

Let me make it perfectly clear: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was not our member. Therefore, there was no reason for someone to kill him because of us. It has now been almost two years since the killer was arrested, but the details of his motive, how the homemade gun he used was made, etc, have not been disclosed, and the trial has not even begun.

Nevertheless, since Mr. Abe's murder, [our church](#) members have suffered greatly in their hearts and in their daily life. I have received numerous reports of members not being able to rent flats or find employment. Media attacks have expanded to target associated organizations such as the Universal Peace Federation, the Women's Federation for World Peace and the Youth and Students for Peace. Attacks also soon began against conservative lawmakers who have had relations with UPF and VOC.

The [Family Federation](#) issue thus changed from being a social one to a political one. The Japanese Communist Party chairman even stated publicly that "This is the [final war](#) against the [Unification Church](#)."

In this context, on 19th October 2022, Prime Minister Kishida accelerated the government's attack on the [Family Federation](#) by forcing a change in the interpretation of the law. The secretary-general of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) instructed to his party's parliamentarians to eliminate all ties with us and our related organizations. He then even conducted an investigation into the thought and belief of each and every parliamentarian regarding their association with us.

A request for the dissolution order of the [Family Federation](#) was made to the Court in October 2023. Court hearings then [began on 22nd February](#) this year. You will hear more detailed information about this from our lawyer Tatsuki Nakayama. A dissolution order is a death sentence for a religious corporation as an organization. If it were to be issued, all corporate assets would be forfeited to the State following the dissolution. Such a dissolution order would be a major setback for freedom of religion in Japan and would increase State control and pressure on all religious activities.

Furthermore, because all religious organizations find themselves in some kind of civil trouble, a dissolution order could be arbitrarily applied by the government to any religious corporation. Recently, several religious organizations have become aware of this issue and have expressed their opposition to the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#).

You may be aware of the charitable status case in England in 1984, which the [Unification Church](#) won. The result highlighted the balanced and reasoned approach of European courts of law. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the Japanese court will make such a well-reasoned decision. This is because historically we do not

have such a presumption of religious freedom in Japan. I like the words of Gamaliel, the leader of the Pharisees in Acts 5, during a trial of early Christians. He said,



In danger of being grabbed by the state: Tokyo headquarters of the [Family Federation](#) of Japan

"[...] Leave these men alone! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is from [God](#), you will only find yourselves fighting against [God](#)!"

Dear participants, the loss of religious freedom will surely bring us an intolerant and hostile society. I am very concerned that this could come about not only in Japan but also throughout the world. Just as particular flowers express their own unique beauty, I hope that Japan and the world will embrace diversity and create a society where people live together with mutual understanding and respect. How wonderful it will be if kindness, beyond differences of faith, prevails in the world!

May you have a fruitful conference. Thank you very much for listening.

(Slightly edited version of the speech)

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Japanese government in collusion with group hostile to Family Federation

Third of six parts of Seiron report – More on [part 1](#), [part 2](#), [part 4](#), [part 5](#), [part 6](#)

The Japanese monthly opinion magazine Seiron (正論) published in its December 2023 issue a feature article on the **outrageous**



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persecution of the [Family Federation](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) in Japan.

One part of the report by Makiko Takita, well known journalist and editor-in-chief of the magazine, is an interview with Dr. Massimo Introvigne, Italian sociologist of religion and editor-in-chief of [Bitter Winter](#), the leading international online magazine on religious freedom and human rights.



The cover front page of *Monthly Seiron* December 2023.

BITTER WINTER [Bitter Winter](#) published this part of the report of *Seiron* on 19th January 2024, as the **third of six parts** of the English version of the original Japanese article. Read the [whole Bitter Winter article](#). Read more on [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#).

In the interview with Dr. Introvigne, he says he is concerned about the legal actions taken against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), formerly the [Unification Church](#), in Japan.

The sociologist of religion, famous globally for his work, expresses his worry about the Japanese government's request for a dissolution order against the [Unification Church](#), citing that the organization has not committed any crimes in Japan, a democratic country that guarantees freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). He emphasizes that, in his experience working globally to defend freedom of religion or belief, this is the **first time he has seen such a request for dissolution in a democratic country**.

"[...] and it is a great shock to me," the scholar says, expressing his concern about what he perceives as an **unusual and concerning legal action** against the [Unification Church](#) in Japan.

Introvigne draws comparisons with other countries, mentioning that even in countries where there is criticism of the [Unification Church](#), such as the United States and Italy, there is no government action to legally regulate or dissolve the organization. He also contrasts the situation with Russia and China, where religious organizations, including the [Unification Church](#), face persecution and dissolution by the government. However, he notes that China and Russia are not democratic regimes, and the criteria for what constitutes a crime differ from those in Japan.



Front page of 2018 English version of *Religious Corporations Act of Japan*.

Massimo Introvigne further discusses the situation in Japan where the government is pursuing the dissolution of the [Unification Church](#) under the [Religious Corporations Act](#). He compares this to the dissolution of an organization called *Artgemeinschaft* in Germany in September 2023.

Introvigne points out that even in democracies, systems for dissolving organizations exist, but their application is typically limited to cases where a crime, punishable under the penal code, has been committed. He provides an example of the dissolution of *Artgemeinschaft* in Germany, which he describes as a political organization rooted in Nazism rather than a religious movement. The dissolution of *Artgemeinschaft* was requested based on criminal activities, aligning with the general principle that **dissolutions in democracies are tied to criminal conduct**.

Introvigne emphasizes that the situation in Japan, where the government is seeking to dissolve the [Unification Church](#) without it having committed any criminal acts, is unique and

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unusual in a democratic country that upholds freedom of religion. He points out that the current events in Japan are being highlighted in Chinese and Russian media as a form of propaganda, drawing parallels between Japan's actions and those of China in suppressing religious groups. Introvigne explains how the **situation in Japan is being used for propaganda purposes by China and Russia,**



Persecution in China: Tibetan Monks arrested in 2008. Photo (5th April 2008): SFT HQ (Students for a Free Tibet) / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 2.0 Gen. Cropped

"I am the editor-in-chief of a daily web magazine called '[Bitter Winter](#),' which covers news about religious freedom violations around the world. I carefully watch the Chinese media, and every week an article about the dissolution of the [Unification Church](#) in Japan always catches my eye. The articles are full of claims that 'Japan is doing the same thing as China' 'We have been proven right,' 'Cults should be suppressed,' and so on. Similar arguments can be read in the Russian government-affiliated media, and the **current events in Japan are being used for propaganda purposes by China and Russia.** We would do well to keep this in mind."

The Seiron report provides an overview of events surrounding the [Unification Church](#) in Japan, particularly in the aftermath of the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe by an individual with a grudge against the [Unification Church](#). Introvigne expresses concerns about the way the government and certain groups have been handling the situation. Certain **important facts about the assassin seem to have been ignored completely by the media.** The general public appears to have been given a **slanted picture of the situation.** The Italian scholar points out,

"I noted that **the man [the assassin] had been interacting with journalists and other opponents of the [Unification Church](#) on social media before the incident.** Obviously, I do not believe that they encouraged him to kill Abe, but I wonder if they might have **excited his hostility** to punish the [Unification Church](#). Why did the man commit such a heinous act? I do not believe that this has been fully clarified."

And straightaway after the assassination on 8th July 2022, the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (全国霊感商法対策弁護士連絡会), a group of largely leftwing activist lawyers who have been fierce opponents of the [Unification Church](#) for decades, called a press conference where they **blamed the church** for what had happened.

Dr. Introvigne describes the tactic of the network of lawyers as a **"reversal phenomenon". The perceived victim becomes the perpetrator, and the alleged perpetrator is treated as a victim.**



Kingdom Hall in Hamburg-Alsterdorf, ten days after the killing spree on 9th March 2023: damaged door, flowers

The scholar mentions similar cases in South

Korea and Germany

where so-called

anti-cult movements attempted to **shift blame** onto religious organizations,

and candles. Photo: NordNordWest / Wikimedia Commons. Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0 Germany

“Last March [2023] in Germany, a former member of the Jehovah’s Witnesses broke into a place of worship of this religion, called Kingdom Hall, and killed eight people with a gun. Then, some members of the anti-cult movement, which opposes Jehovah’s Witnesses, came forward and criticized the religion, saying that the cause of the incident was that ‘the Jehovah’s Witnesses have continued to abuse this man,’ and called for the religious organization to bear the brunt of the blame. The anti-cult movement deflected the blame from the mistakes of the authorities [who had given a license to carry weapons to a mentally disturbed man] and tried to create a campaign against the Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

Introvigne **criticizes the Japanese government for joining forces with the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales** (全国霊感商法対策弁護士連絡会) in various procedures related to a dissolution order against the **Unification Church**. He argues that such collaboration between the government and a so-called anti-cult movement is ideologically and politically strange.

The scholar says,

“Only in Japan has the **government totally jumped on the bandwagon**. In Korea and Germany, the media reports on the voices of anti-cult movements, and this can cause a lot of commotion. Sometimes there are campaigns to condemn these groups as ‘cults.’ However, there is no example of a democratic government reacting to such a campaign and moving toward the dissolution of the organization.”

Dr. Massimo Introvigne **denounces the Japanese government for all of a sudden changing its policy** and allowing cases of tortious conduct to be sufficient ground for dissolving a religious organization. He explains,

“If religious corporations can be dissolved for torts under civil law, there is **no such thing as a safe organization**. This shows that this **was not a legal decision, but a political decision**. What the Japanese government has done is a **clear violation of the principle of religious freedom**. It is a move that should be strongly condemned.”

Introvigne contends that the Japanese



*Blatant discrimination: “Colored” drinking fountain from mid-20th century with African-American drinking from water cooler in streetcar terminal, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA. Photo (1939): Russell Lee (1903-1986) / Wikimedia Commons. **Public domain** image*

government’s decision to pursue the dissolution of the **Unification Church** is a violation of the principle of religious freedom. He expresses concern that this move **may have a ripple effect and set a precedent for private entities to discriminate** against the **Unification Church**,

“and start saying, ‘We will have nothing to do with

them.' This is undeniable **religious discrimination**, which is unacceptable in light of international law, which stipulates that there shall be no discrimination based on ideology, creed, religion, or other such grounds."

Introvigne **questions the legitimacy of the government's decision**, stating that it appears to be a political decision rather than a legal one.

In fact, there have already been **instances of discriminatory incidents** in Japan, such as local governments refusing to rent public facilities to independent organizations connected with the [Family Federation](#) or passing resolutions to sever relations with such organizations in local government councils.

And what makes matters worse in Japan, is the fact that there might be **collusion between the Japanese government and the courts**. For more on that particular issue, see [Does Japan Have an Independent Judiciary?](#)

More on [part 2 of the interview](#) (part 4 of the Seiron report).

More on [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#) in the Seiron report.

Featured image above: Dr. Massimo Introvigne in April 2023.
Photo: [FOREF](#)

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