

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: US Government Says Japan Oppresses Unification Church

Knut Holdhus
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On 26th June 2024, USA Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left) holds a press conference regarding the annual report on religious freedom in various countries, published by the U.S. State Department. On the right, US ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom Rashad Hussain

Annual report by US Department of State Features Japanese oppression of Family Federation



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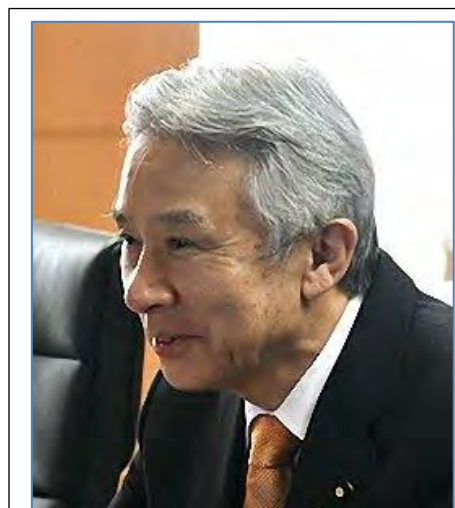
U.S. State Department Annual Report on Religious Freedom Emphasizes Japan's Position on Dissolution Request against the Family Federation

by Yosuke Yamazaki ([山崎洋介](#))

Washington - On 26th June 2024, the U.S. State Department published the 2023 edition of its annual report on religious freedom in various countries. With regard to Japan, the report devotes a large section to the government's request for a court order to dissolve the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)).

The section presents the view of a representative of the [Family Federation](#) that Prime Minister Fumio Kishida prioritizes politics over adhering to the law. The report goes further, saying that the US Embassy in Japan has been in contact with Japanese officials, emphasizing the importance of religious freedom "under all circumstances". This suggests that there are concerns that the Japanese government's actions may constitute an infringement on religious freedom.

The report points out that the request for the dissolution order made on 13th October of last year, "departed from the conventional standard, which had been based on violations of the Criminal Code, and was ordered based on wrongful acts under the Civil Code."



Masahito Moriyama, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

The section on Japan also highlights that the [Family Federation](#) refuted the grounds for dissolution given by Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Masahito Moriyama (盛山正仁), arguing that those grounds "do not comply with the law."

The 2023 report also introduces the claims by [Family Federation](#) followers that they "can no longer publicly practice their faith due to 'biased' and 'hostile' media coverage and pressure from the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (Zenkoku Benren)," and that they have suffered damage such as being cut off from the local community. Furthermore, the report conveys the members' concerns that if the dissolution order is approved, society might perceive the [religious organization](#) as "evil".

In a press conference on 7th November of last year, [Family](#)

[Federation](#) President Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広) pointed out that he "officially apologized for the first time as the representative of the [organization](#) after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe two years ago," and he expressed the intention to "fight the government's dissolution order request from the perspective of freedom of religion and the rule of law."



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

The report also mentions that in September of last year, international lawyer Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹) expressed opposition to the dissolution order request, stating that the Kishida administration "is not adhering to the Religious Corporations Act, enacted in 1951," and appears to be "acting from political motives".



Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama in January 2024

On the other hand, the report notes the response of the U.S. government, stating that "the U.S. Embassy in Japan closely monitored issues surrounding the [Family Federation](#) and Jehovah's Witnesses, maintained contact with members of parliament, government regulatory authorities, individuals affected by [church](#) practices, and [church](#) representatives, and emphasized the importance of religious freedom under all circumstances."

Furthermore, the report clarifies that officials from the U.S. Embassy and the State Department had urged the Japanese government to "continue to cooperate with the United States in respecting religious freedom both domestically and internationally".

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One-Sided Part About Japan In 2023 IRF Report

June 28, 2024 • Knut Holdhus



The 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom contains a really one-sided part about Japan which does it to excuse gross violations by regime

by Knut Holdhus

The 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom was published 26th June 2024 by the U.S. Department of State. Its yearly report on religious liberty is considered the most comprehensive of its kind published internationally. The 2023 report “documents systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom that have occurred in the last year”. It also “provides recommendations to the U.S. government intended to deter religious persecution and promote freedom of religion and belief abroad.”

The fierce persecution of the Family Federation in Japan is given considerable space in this report. It also “provides recommendations to the U.S. government intended to deter religious persecution and promote freedom of religion and belief abroad.”

The fierce persecution of the Family Federation in Japan is given considerable space in this year's report on Japan. To give readers an idea of the extent of the persecution, the report mentions the size of the movement in the land of the rising sun,

“The Family Federation officially says it has 560,000 followers in the country (approximately 0.45 percent of the population). In a September 22 press conference, Family Federation director general for promoting the reform of the Church Teshigawara Hideyuki stated the church has nearly 100,000 active followers in Japan (approximately 0.08 percent of the population).” (Section I. Religious Demography)



The headline of the part on Japan

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A large part of the 2023 report's section on Japan is devoted to the [Family Federation](#). That section opens with an "Executive Summary". About 50 % of the text there is about the Family Federation, and it is the first religious freedom case that is being described. But unfortunately the long paragraph that introduces the persecution of the [Family Federation](#) does it in a way that is really soft on the Kishida administration. Exactly like in the 2022 report, which briefly mentioned that the [Unification Church](#) had become a victim of 'a campaign of intolerance, discrimination, and persecution' in Japan since Abe's assassination.

The fact that Prime Minister Fumio Kishida deliberately changed the law in order to be able to dissolve the [Family Federation](#), is **simply described in the 2023 Report as "a deviation from the norm"**. The **"deviation" referred to is in fact a major change that could have far-reaching implications**. Previous dissolutions of registered religious corporations have until now only been ordered following violations of criminal law, while this dissolution requested by Kishida now is on the basis of violation of civil law.

Tomihiko Tanaka, President of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, warned against this in a [speech 13th June](#), saying,

"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**."



Tomihiko Tanaka. Here at press conference in Tokyo 7th Nov 2023. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by FFWPU

And what makes Kishida's deliberate move of changing the law overnight, all the worse is the fact that a network of activist left-wing lawyers has for almost 40 years worked to produce civil lawsuits against the [Family Federation](#). And the Japanese government bases to a large extent its case on advice from and "evidence" produced by those hostile lawyers.

Rev. Haruhisa Nakagawa, a leading Christian pastor, points this out,



Rev. Haruhisa Nakagawa 25th May 2024. Photo by Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀) / Sekai Nippo.

"[...] the request for dissolution uses a lot of evidence, court documents, and findings gathered by the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (全国霊感商法対策弁護士連絡会). Some may say, 'The evidence is true, so there is no problem about who supplied it,' but it is almost as if the **government is endorsing and relying on the claims and information of a private organization that has long been hostile and antagonistic to the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification**. This is **highly questionable** in terms of the neutrality of the procedure." (December 2023 issue of the

Japanese monthly opinion magazine Seiron (正論). See [article in News and Insights](#).

Also professor emeritus Seishiro Sugihara points out the problematic nature of the advisors the Japanese government has chosen in the case against the [Family Federation](#). See [Maverick Minister Lets "3 Foxes in the Henhouse"](#).



Professor emeritus Seishiro Sugihara. Photo: Sekai Nippo

Above-mentioned Tomihiko Tanaka stated on 22nd February 2024, at the first day of hearings in the current court case in *Tokyo District Court*,

"Our [church](#) and its affiliated group, the *International Federation for Victory Over Communism* (IFVOC), have advocated against the threat of communism, worked to prevent the leftward shift in Japan, and actively promoted the enactment of spy prevention legislation. NNLASS aimed to thwart these activities. They **adopted the principle of 'any means justifying the end' and closely collaborated with deprogrammers behind the scenes**. They utilized former believers who had lost their faith through **deprogramming by means of abduction and confinement** as plaintiffs in legal battles against our [church](#)."

Moreover, **the courts adopted a policy of admitting the claims of NNLASS and testimonies of apostates as truthful unless our church could prove the falseness**. Consequently, our church faced a series of defeat judgments over an extended period.

However, our [church](#) finally **succeeded in proving the falsehood of their claims and testimonies, achieving complete victories in two civil cases in 2021**. In one of these cases, our [church](#) proved not only the falseness of the plaintiffs' claims and testimonies, but also the fact that the **evidence submitted by the plaintiffs to the court was fabricated**. On July 7, 2022, the *Tokyo High Court* delivered a complete victory judgment for our [church](#) in one of the two cases. It seemed that this brought an end to the history of legal battles orchestrated by the **NNLASS using false claims and testimonies**." See [full speech](#))

Norishige Kondo (近藤徳茂), author and Deputy Director of the Legal Affairs Department of the [Family Federation of Japan](#), describes the Kishida administration's attacks on the [Family Federation](#) as an "outrageous human rights violation",

"More than half of the ex-members who filed lawsuits against the [Unification Church](#), or who wrote the testimonies against it, were victims of deprogramming."

The courts basically issue judgments in accordance



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with apostates' narratives.

As for the **deprogramming issue**, in 2014, the UN Human Rights Committee issued a **recommendation to the Japanese government to resolve the situation of deprogramming in Japan**.

Originally, the government should have addressed this issue, but **instead** the Kishida administration now tries to dissolve the **Unification Church using testimonies from deprogrammed apostates**. This is an **outrageous human rights violation**.

I also am a victim of kidnapping [...]" (From article in [News and Insights](#))

Section II.

Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Headline of section II in part on Japan

Section 2 in the part on Japan in the 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom is titled "**Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**". More than half of it is devoted to an explanation of the **legal framework** for religious corporations in Japan. The rest of section 2 is subtitled

"**Government practices**" and goes into detail about the persecution of the **Family Federation**.

And here we see most clearly how the US report is soft on the Kishida administration. Much in this part is written about the **Family Federation**, but is mainly stating the claims of a government determined to dissolve the religious organization. One easily gets the impression that the report is not in defense of religious freedom, but rather does its best to shut its eyes to the Kishida administration's gross violations of religious liberty.

The report mentions,

"Children of certain **Family Federation** and Jehovah's Witnesses members stated at 2022 Diet hearings that the **Family Federation** and Jehovah's Witnesses violated religious freedom by using force to compel minors (younger children and teenagers of their members) to participate in **Family Federation** and Jehovah's Witnesses practices."

This is a **completely one-sided version of what happened**. Nowhere does the report mention that those are not children, but adult sons and daughters of members. And on top of it those are apostates working in league with the hostile network of lawyers whose aim is to to destroy the **Family Federation**.

Scholars of religious studies agree that **statements by apostates are most unreliable**.



Trampling on the religious freedom of the Family Federation: Some of Fumio Kishida's cabinet on 13th September 2023. Kishida on the left and Taro Kono on the right. Kono, Minister for Digital Transformation and Minister for Consumer Affairs and Food Safety, is known to have lobbied Kishida to get the Family Federation investigated. In August 2022 Kono appointed Masaki Kito as expert advisor in a study group Kono established in the Consumer Affairs Agency for the issue of the Family Federation. Kito is an activist radical leftwing lawyer who has been campaigning against the Family Federation / Unification Church for decades. Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int. Cropped

And nowhere does the report mention that a **delegation of second-generation members who actively support the Family Federation were not received by the same authorities who received the hostile apostates**. Even though a meeting was requested by the young believers.

Conclusion

The authors of the part on Japan have only to a small degree included the views of the Family Federation. That makes the whole report one-sided and biased. The report gives a detailed overview of the Kishida administration's case, but does only to a small extent present the views of the side that is having its religious freedom trampled upon by the same administration. Often, the US report merely states that the religious organization will fight or is opposed to the government's request for a dissolution order.

And **one serious flaw** of the report is the fact that it **does not point out that there have been virtually no civil cases against the Family Federation the last 15 years**. The government bases its arguments on old material, most of it produced by the hostile network of lawyers.

The 2023 report completely fails to mention that the Japanese government has embraced the views of activist left-wing lawyers hostile to the Family Federation. And even more shocking is the fact that the US Department of State in a religious freedom report embraces those same viewpoints.

The report is meant to defend religious freedom. Much of it does the opposite.

Text: Knut Holdhus

See also: [Japanese Oppression in Religious Freedom Report](#)

Featured image above: Front cover of U.S. Department of State's 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom, published 26th June 2024.

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