

FFWPU Europe and East: Mud-Slinging Journalist Chastised at Conference

Knut Holdhus
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The panel at the conference on 30th September 2024 in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo. From left: Toru Goto, representative of the [Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Coerced Faith-Breaking](#); Shunsuke Uotani, Secretary General of UPF Japan; Attorney Shinichi Tokunaga; Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama



Mud-slinging maverick journalist campaigning against religious minority was rebuked at Tokyo conference

Tokyo, 1st October 2024 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#)

Conference on Lawsuits Against Eito Suzuki Held by Organization Related to the Former Unification Church

by the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

Challenging the "Deterioration of the Media" - UPF Japan



Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka

The Universal Peace Federation (UPF) Japan, an organization related to [Editor's note: with same founders as] the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), held a rally in Tokyo on 30th September 2024, regarding three lawsuits against journalist Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト). The event was attended by Shunsuke Uotani (魚谷俊輔), Secretary General of UPF Japan, that is suing Suzuki for defamation, Toru Goto (後藤徹), representative of the [Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Coerced Faith-Breaking](#), and Mr. X, a male believer who [sued Suzuki](#) for invasion of privacy in September.

According to Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹), the lawyer representing the plaintiff in the privacy invasion lawsuit, Suzuki leaked Mr. X's personal information to a Weekly Bunshun reporter in 2022 to highlight the relationship between Liberal Democratic Party members and the [Family Federation](#). Mr. X's faith was exposed in a September 2022 issue of Weekly Bunshun. Subsequently, Suzuki revealed Mr. X's real name and photo on X (formerly Twitter) and during lectures.



Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama, here in Tokyo in 2023

Mr. A, who had been actively involved in volunteer activities such as operating local children's cafeterias, can no longer participate in these activities. He tearfully asked,

"Is it wrong for a [Unification Church](#) member to engage in volunteer work?"

His other lawyer, Shinichi Tokunaga (徳永信一), criticized Suzuki, saying,

"Leaking private information unnecessarily disqualifies him as a journalist."

Eito Suzuki had made a claim that the lawsuit against him is a "SLAPP lawsuit" (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) [Editor's note: SLAPP lawsuits represent a misuse of the legal system and refer to cases brought by individuals or entities to dissuade their critics from continuing to produce negative publicity.] Secretary-General Uotani referred to this claim and emphasized, "This is not a lawsuit to harass." He pointed out that the media's coverage of the [Family Federation](#) has not included the voices of its followers and criticized the situation in which the media incites the government as "deterioration of the media". He further stated,



Attorney Shinichi Tokunaga

"I want to challenge the current situation where it seems acceptable to defame or publicly shame someone just because they are a member of the [Family Federation](#)."



Shinzo Abe delivering a video message on 12th September 2021 at a UPF event

Regarding the defamation lawsuit, Suzuki claimed that former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) received 50 million yen from UPF as a reward for sending a video message to an international conference hosted by UPF. UPF denied this and filed a lawsuit last year, claiming their reputation was damaged.



Toru Goto, member of [Family Federation](#) held [captive for 12 years and 5 months](#) by his own family and professional faith-breakers who attempted to break his faith

Additionally, on his blog Suzuki criticized Toru Goto, who was a [victim of abduction and confinement](#) aimed at coerced faith-breaking. Suzuki called Goto a "recluse" (引きこもり - hikikomori) and accused him of "playing victim". Goto is suing Suzuki for the mental distress caused.

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Collusion To Rob Minority Of Its Rights

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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 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, international online magazine on religious freedom and human rights.



The cover front page of Monthly Seiron December 2023.



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

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2021, 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 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

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... 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**. The scholar mentions similar cases in South Korea and Germany where so-called anti-cult movements attempted to **shift blame** onto religious organizations,



Kingdom Hall in Hamburg-Alsterdorf, ten days after the killing spree on 9th March 2023: damaged door, flowers and candles. Photo: NordNordWest / Wikimedia Commons. Licence: CC ASA 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 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,**



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](#)

"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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