

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: New Laws Lets Lawyers Pose as Victims

Knut Holdhus  
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*Pastor Ryuichi Sunagawa, Tsukishiro Christian Church, Nanjo City, Okinawa, Japan*

Christian leader points out that new laws in Japan let lawyers assist many to exploit the laws, pose as victim, and extort money from religious minority in a way that resembles a "form of organized crime"



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Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat - Part 6: Voices of Religious Leaders

Tsukishiro Christian Church - Pastor Ryuichi Sunagawa

Evaluating Anti-Communist Activities

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

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In front of the Okinawa Prefectural Office, there is a man who alone regularly delivers street speeches. He is Pastor Ryuichi Sunagawa (砂川竜一) of Tsukishiro Christian Church in Nanjo City, located in the southern part of Okinawa's main island.

Pastor Sunagawa is known for his outspoken views, calling for the resignation of Governor Denny Tamaki (玉城デニ), whom he criticizes for failing to uphold a Supreme Court ruling regarding the relocation of a U.S. military base. Additionally, he identifies parental gambling addiction as the greatest factor contributing to children's unhappiness. This concern led him to run for the Nanjo City Council election for the first time in April 2022. Despite being a pastor, Sunagawa stands out for his strong interest and active engagement in politics.

Pastor Ryuichi Sunagawa has expressed strong anger over the government's request for a disbandment order against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)). He questions why the media is so hostile toward the organization. Regarding its connections with former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), Sunagawa stated,

"Based on the facts I have seen and heard, there was nothing inappropriate about their relationship."

He was of the opinion that

"the public has been misled into accepting the narrative that 'Prime Minister Abe was assassinated because the [Unification Church](#) was evil'."



*[Sun Myung Moon](#) and Nobusuke Kishi, Prime Minister of Japan 1957-1960, shaking hands in Tokyo*

Sunagawa pointed out that it was only natural for the former [Unification Church](#) to have close ties with former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi (岸信介元) and members of the Liberal Democratic Party, considering that the [church's](#) founder, Reverend [Sun Myung Moon](#), was a frontrunner in the fight against communism. He praised the [Family Federation](#) as "the only religious organization that has stood squarely against a demonic communism that denies [God](#)."

During a symposium on religious freedom held in Naha City on 3rd November 2024, Sunagawa quoted from John 8:44 to emphasize,

"The devil is a liar. The devil is a murderer. And the devil is the father of lies."

He argued,

"The International Federation for Victory over Communism (IFVOC) and the former [Unification Church](#), which supports it, are enemies of the devil. Therefore, we must stand with them."

Sunagawa praised the reforms undertaken by the [Family Federation](#) and said,

"There may have been issues in the past, such as large donations and 'spiritual sales' practices, but the attitude of reform and transformation is what truly matters."

Referring to the [organization's](#) rebranding as the [Family Federation](#), he expressed hope that it would continue evolving into "a group that brings joy to [God](#)."

Since its compliance declaration in 2009, the [Family Federation](#) has reportedly restrained excessive donations that conflict with donors' financial situations. However, Sunagawa criticized the media's failure to acknowledge these changes, remarking,

"Despite becoming an [organization](#) that values family, the public discourse continues to condemn it based solely on past scandals, without recognizing its progress. This is a dangerous tendency."

Nevertheless, the government enacted a [special law for victim relief](#) in December last year (2023). Sunagawa expressed concerns about potential repercussions for other religious groups. He warned that donation refund demands could arise from other religious organizations' members or their families. He noted,

"I can understand the psychology of former members who, due to a change of heart, demand the return of past donations. However, it is alarming that families or relatives who have not suffered any harm team up

with lawyers and pose as victims to sue and extort money, exploiting these laws for financial gain. This 'victim business' is becoming a form of organized crime."



*On advice from hostile activist lawyers, the Japanese government changed the law to make it easy for many to exploit new laws and pose as victim to sue the [Family Federation](#)*

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Sunagawa also critiqued Japan's religious corporation system. While acknowledging that religious entities enjoy strong protections, such as tax benefits, he highlighted abuses within the system, stating, "Many religious organizations exist primarily to evade taxes."

Ryuichi Sunagawa also pointed out the need to review the system surrounding religious corporations,

"Faith should inherently benefit believers, their families, and the community, and should not be a membership club for the benefit of specific organizations or political groups. To prevent illegal activities within these corporations, it may be necessary for the government to have some degree of oversight over all religious corporations in the future."

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# Japan's Dehumanizing View Shocks Young Members

• November 7, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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*Dehumanizing view sold by hostile activist lawyers to Japanese authorities frightens young members of religious minority*



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

Tokyo, 6th November 2024 – Published as the **38th article** in a series in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article*

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by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial

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## Have second-generation followers of religions been deprived of their freedom?

"The  
so-



*Dictating Japan's hostile dehumanizing policy against new religious movements and maximising their profits: 3 leading activist leftwing lawyers from National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales – from left: Masaki Kito, Hiroshi Watanabe, Hiroshi Yamaguchi. Photo: Screenshot / Bitter Winter*

called 'second-generation followers' of religious organizations have been deprived of freedom to choose their religion, the freedom to date and marry, the freedom to continue their education and find employment. as a result, they have been deprived of their entire personality in all stages of life, including adulthood."

This paragraph, from a statement issued by the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (Zenkoku Benren) on 21st September 2024, calling for legal measures to aid victims of the former **Unification Church**, can be said to succinctly capture the image of "second-generation followers" commonly portrayed in the media. But when parents of faith practice their beliefs together with their children, does it necessarily mean they are depriving their children of freedom and taking away their entire personality?

In his paper "*The Rights of Children and 'Second-Generation Followers of Religions'*" published in the academic journal *Religious Studies* (宗教研究 – September 2024), Professor Nobuyuki Kojima (小島伸之) of Joetsu University of Education [[Editor's note: located in Joetsu, Niigata](#)] notes that it would be "excessive if all such struggles, suffering, and hardships are viewed without qualification as 'human rights issues' or 'social issues'."

He warns that such an approach may "lead to serious conflicts between freedom of religion and parental rights" and "could also disrupt the delicate nuances of parent-child relationships and the process of human development."

He also touched on the media and political response to issues related to the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** (formerly the **Unification Church**). Kojima expresses concern that "fundamental discussions about how to draw the limits of religious freedom and to what extent and how the state should mediate conflicts over religious freedom between parents and children have been obscured by the assumption that there must be a quick response to individual **Unification Church** issues."

How do current second-generation followers perceive these issues?



*Yasumori Ikeda. Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)*

Yasumori Ikeda (池田泰盛), a 26-year-old **church** staff member living in *Saitama Prefecture*, dropped out of vocational school six years ago. He says his current work was his own choice, with no one influencing him. He recalls,

"I originally liked training, so while I was in vocational school, I thought about becoming a sports trainer to help people with weight loss and fitness."

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It was a career that offered economic stability and respect from clients if one was skilled. However, he shares,

"Part of me wanted to live for something bigger, not just for what I personally liked."

While he also had an interest in politics, he felt his faith could help improve a "distorted society" and serve as a guiding principle for his life. This belief ultimately influenced his choice of career.

There are other perspectives on the issues faced by second-generation believers.

Koji Maki (牧孝治), a 28-year-old second-generation believer and [church](#) staff member living in Tokyo, often interacts with various second-generation believers due to his position.



Koji Maki. Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)

In one case, a second-generation follower resented being pressured into faith by his parents. Although he is already an adult, he continues to rely on his parents financially. The parents, having experienced salvation through their faith, are eager to pass it on to their children. The children, however, even while complaining, end up becoming more and more dependent.

In such cases, Maki encourages parents to allow their children the freedom to decide for themselves whether to attend [church](#), saying,

"Faith is not something to be forced. If all they can do is criticize, maybe they should try experiencing freedom first."

However, he notes that there are cases where someone will threaten the parents, "If I live on my own, I'll stop going to church." That way the person makes faith a "weapon" to extract parental support, a situation Maki finds troubling.

In many cases, religious beliefs are passed down from parents to children, but in many cases they are not. The inner conflicts that arise are part of the parent-child relationship and can vary widely. Viewing second-generation followers purely as victims, as implied by the statement from the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales*, is an extreme view that is harmful.

*End of part 5: The Distorted Image of the "Second-Generation" (29th – 38th article)*

**Featured image** above: Yasumori Ikeda (left) and Koji Maki on 22nd October 2024, in Tokyo. Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀).

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