

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's Dissolve FFWPU Order Condemned

Knut Holdhus
December 7, 2024



Marco Respinti highlights the importance of religious freedom in Hiroshima on December 6, 2024



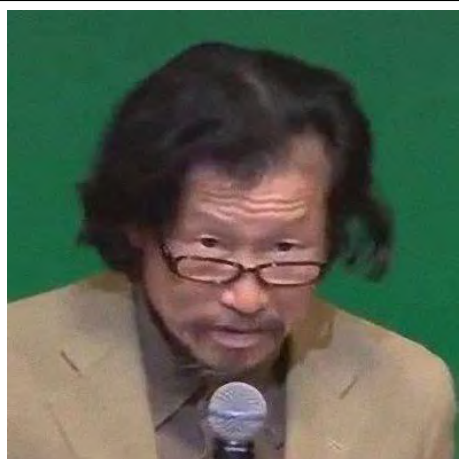
Hiroshima conference on freedom of religion highlights state's oppression of minority faith as scholars condemn court order to dissolve it

Tokyo, 7th December 2024 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

"Infringement on Freedom of Religion Is an Attack on Democracy"

ICRF Hosts Nationwide Lecture Tour - Kicking Off in Hiroshima, Heading to Tokyo, Nagoya, and Further

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



Dr. Shoichi Ito (2022)

As part of a lecture tour, the Japan Committee of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom (ICRF), led by Shoichi Ito (伊藤正一), Professor Emeritus at Kyushu University, held a conference titled "The Crisis of Religious Freedom and Democracy in Japan" on 6th December 2024 in Hiroshima. Co-hosted with the Hiroshima Prefecture Peace Ambassadors Council, the event emphasized the importance of religious freedom for advancing democracy. It cited reports from a [conference of scholars of religious studies](#) in Bordeaux, France, which stated that the government's request to dissolve the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) poses a threat to religious freedom. The declaration warned that such actions could undermine Japan's standing in the international community.

The keynote speech was delivered by Katsumi Otsuka (大塚克己), Chair of UPF-Japan (Universal Peace Federation), who criticized the media for spreading false information about the [Family Federation](#). He noted,

"I heard that less than 100 members have left the organization, which speaks to its true nature."

Otsuka emphasized the growing rejection of one-sided reporting by mainstream media, urging believers to disseminate accurate information themselves.



Katsumi Otsuka July 3, 2019 in Oslo

Marco Respinti, director of the Italian online religious magazine [Bitter Winter](#), which monitors religious persecution with a focus on China, also spoke. Respinti argued that

"freedom of religion and belief is not only a fundamental human right but also the first political human right."

He stressed that violations of religious freedom are "among the gravest issues" and condemned the Japanese government's dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#) as a severe human rights violation and an attack on democracy.

The lecture series, starting in Hiroshima, will continue in Tokyo (8th December), Nagoya (9th December), and Fukuoka (10th December).

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In report from international conference on minority religions, Tokyo paper sums up key issues at stake in situation with horrendous persecution in Japan

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Calls to make the Japanese dissolution request an international issue

Family Federation and others concerned about the situation in Japan at a religious symposium in Bordeaux, France

by the Religious and Political Reporting Team of the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

The 2024 CESNIP Conference, an international symposium on minority



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The 2024 CESNUR Conference, an international symposium on minority religions was held in Bordeaux, western France. The focus was on the issue in Japan where the religious corporation the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) faces a dissolution order.

The media created a sensation by criticizing the [religious organisation](#) following the shocking gun attack on former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe two years ago. That led the government to plan the dissolution of the [religious corporation](#), an act which severely restricts the religious freedom of all members of the [organisation](#), who have nothing to do with the incident. The symposium raised awareness that "the Japanese government's attack on the [Family Federation](#) represents a **serious crisis for religious freedom in the democratic world.**"

The symposium, co-hosted by the [Center for Studies on New Religions \(CESNUR\)](#), [Université Bordeaux Montaigne – CLIMAS \(Cultures and literature of the Anglophone World\)](#), and [International Society for the Study of New Religions \(ISSNR\)](#), is being held from the 12th to the 15th June 2024. The theme is "[The Contribution of Minority Religions to Society](#)". Discussions were being held in 23 sessions on the social situations of minority religions around the world.

On 13th June, the **8th session titled "The Unification Church and Japan: What Is Exactly Happening?"** addressed the issue surrounding the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, with the B200 lecture hall at the [University of Bordeaux Montaigne](#) nearly full.

Researchers showed interest in the circumstances surrounding the government in "no time at all" using its majority power to request the dissolution of a [religious corporation](#) for reasons other than violation of the criminal law. This is the **first time this has happened** in Japan under its postwar constitution, a country where democracy has taken root, and which has become an advanced nation. **This development could potentially affect many other minority religions and their followers.** The session was moderated by British sociologist of religion Eileen Barker.

As an introduction, co-founder of CESNUR and Italian sociologist of religion **Massimo Introvigne** gave an overview of the circumstances leading to the government's request for a dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#). His presentation was titled "[The Post-Abe Assassination Crisis: An Outline](#)". He discussed the incident caused by Tetsuya Yamagami, the defendant who harboured resentment against the [religious organisation](#) due to his mother's large donations as a believer.



Dr. Massimo Introvigne, april 2023. Photo: [FOREF](#)

Introvigne stated that after the incident, "a parade began of defectors who had become apostates." They criticized the [religious organisation](#) in the media. The Italian scholar indicated that the **statements of those defectors are one-sided and sometimes not factual.** He also expressed concern about the situation surrounding minority religions in Japan, mentioning **abusive criticism against the Jehovah's Witnesses.** Introvigne stated, "The **way forward is to internationalize the issue and bring it to international conferences.** I believe what we are doing today contributes to that."

During the session, there was time to hear voices from officials from the [religious organisation](#). They expressed concerns about the threat to religious freedom posed by the request for a dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#) in Japan. Testimonies were given by Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama; Deputy Director of the [Legal Affairs Bureau](#) of the [Family Federation's](#) Japan Headquarters Norishige Kondo; and Suzuko Hirschmann, who lives in Vienna and whose older sister was **forced to de-convert through abduction and confinement.**

Tatsuki Nakayama spoke on the topic "Why the [Family Federation](#) in Japan Should Not Be Dissolved." He said that the conditions for dissolution under Article 81 of the **Religious Corporations Act** stipulate that an act must be "clearly" recognized as violating the law and "significantly" harming the public welfare, and that this should be interpreted strictly. He argued that the [Family Federation](#) does not meet these criteria and noted that past prime ministers, governments, and courts **have said no to dissolving the organisation.** He mentioned that Prime Minister **Fumio Kishida overnight changed** his parliamentary response, stating that "torts



Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama in Jan. 2024. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission.

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under civil law" could qualify as grounds for dissolution.

Nakayama furthermore emphasized that

- 1) The **Family Federation has been recognized as a religious corporation for 60 years** as of July and has **not been involved in any crime during this time**.
- 2) They lost some civil lawsuits for the return of donation, but
- 3) **behind those lawsuits are apostates who have been forcibly de-converted.**

Norishige Kondo reported that after the Abe incident, media reports criticizing the **organisation** escalated, resulting in threats and harassment against **organisation** facilities and believers. He also criticized Prime Minister Kishida's declaration on August 31, 2022, to sever ties with the **Family Federation**, stating,

"Since most **Family Federation** believers work in general companies, if Liberal Democratic Party members follow Kishida's instructions, they would have to **investigate the beliefs of everyone** they contact, and if they are identified as **Family Federation** believers, sever ties, which is **unconstitutional**."



Norishige Kondo speaking in Tokyo 10th Sep. 2023. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion

In addition, Kondo addressed the civil lawsuits regarding donations, pointing out that

- 1) there is no research in Japan indicating that the testimonies of apostates are unreliable;
- 2) there is no custom in Japan of making large donations to religions;
- 3) since Japanese people, including legal professionals, generally do not believe in **God, judges think that no one would make large donations unless threatened with stories of suffering in hell**; and
- 4) **judges in Japan fear being criticized by the media for helping a "cult"**.

The dissolution of the **religious corporation** means that all believers lose their place to worship and engage in religious activities. The fact that a session was devoted to this issue at an international conference overseas shows the growing interest. During the question-and-answer session, many questions were asked from the audience about the so-called second-generation religious issue, abduction and confinement, and other topics.

Featured image above: The panel during session 8 at the 2024 CESNUR conference in Bordeaux, France. Photo: FOREF

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