

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Tomihiro Tanaka on Crimes of Professional Faith-Breakers

Knut Holdhus
December 13, 2024



Tomihiro Tanaka, President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), during the interview conducted November 15, 2024



Spotlight on professional faith-breaking and the inhuman treatment of more than 4,300 members of minority faith left with permanent emotional scars after having been through abduction, confinement, and coercive manipulation to abandon their religion

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[Original article](#)

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

Abduction and Confinement of Believers Is "Inhumane"

Part 2 of interview with Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広), President of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in Japan

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

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Sekai Nippo: Members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) have been confined in locked rooms for extended periods and forcibly [coerced into leaving](#) the faith. This is commonly referred to as the issue of [abduction, confinement, and forced renunciation](#). Many members have been affected by these actions. What are your thoughts on this, and what measures are being taken?



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

Tomihiko Tanaka: When I assumed the role of president, I was shocked to learn how many people had been coerced into renouncing their faith while being abducted and confined. There are several of them at the [Family Federation](#) headquarters. To hear their stories and develop countermeasures, I have been engaging directly with prominent victims, such as Toru Goto (後藤 徹). He was held captive by his family for [12 years and 5 months](#) and won a civil lawsuit after his release.

Of approximately [4,300 victims](#), 30% have returned to the [church](#), but 70% have left. Those who returned still bear deep emotional scars, including strained relationships with their family, and suffering from ongoing PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). They are far from being restored to their state before they were abducted and held captive.

Among those who have returned, some feel sympathy for others who were victimized and maintain contact with those who did not come back. These individuals do not necessarily harbor resentment toward the [religious organization](#) itself. However, they have

endured separation and estrangement from their families, and in their life today they strive to repair these relationships. The effort required for such reconciliation has been immense.

Yet, because of this, and even if they were the ones harmed, many victims cannot speak out within their own families about their experiences of [abduction and confinement](#).



Forcibly sent to psychiatric hospital in Tokyo: Illustration of Hideo Mima's forced hospitalization. He is a Japanese member of the [Family Federation](#)

What I can say with certainty is that such acts are absolutely unacceptable. In the early days, there were cases where members were forcibly confined in psychiatric hospitals or locked in prepared apartments against their will. From the moment their own family or relatives engaged in such [abduction and confinement](#), it unavoidably resulted in tragedy. Even when victims of such actions approached the police, their cases were dismissed as "family matters", and no action was taken.

Professional faith-breakers who pressure individuals into renouncing their religion after orchestrating their [abduction and confinement](#)

lead parents down a most inhumane path from a human rights perspective, completely destroying the parent-child relationship.

This issue was highlighted in a [report submitted to the United Nations](#) by French attorney Patricia Duval. The UN Human Rights Committee has notified the Japanese government three times that [abduction and forced renunciation](#) constitute violations of freedom of religion and human rights. However, Japan has ignored these warnings on all three occasions, presenting an alarming image to the international community.

Sekai Nippo: Is there any criticism that your advocacy of religious freedom is purely for the benefit of the [religious organization](#)?

Tomihiko Tanaka: Human rights activists around the world mobilize for issues such as Tibet and the Uyghurs, so it is not enough for a religious organization to just shout about its own human rights. We

need to be prepared to seriously address the religious freedom of other religions as well. I also feel that people expect us to properly face up to such issues and get involved.



Patricia Duval, French attorney and expert on international human rights law. She has defended the rights of minorities of religion or belief in domestic and international fora, and before international institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union, and the United Nations. She has also published numerous scholarly articles on freedom of religion or belief

Sekai Nippo: Due to its origins as a new religion from South Korea, some media outlets criticize the [organization](#) as being "anti-Japanese".

Tomihiko Tanaka: While our stance as "anti-communist" has become well-known, the label of "anti-Japanese" has been unfairly applied to us, obscuring the truth of our mission. To address your question directly, we are unequivocally not anti-Japanese. Our founder, Reverend [Sun Myung Moon](#), clearly taught,

"One cannot love the world without loving one's own nation."

The vision of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) in Japan reflects this teaching:

Creating happy families that live for the sake of others.

Building churches that coexist with their local communities.

Establishing a [Family Federation](#) that contributes to both the nation and the world.

There is no basis for the term "anti-Japanese" in our mission or vision. If critics wish to cite [Reverend Moon's](#) teachings, they should also acknowledge his numerous pro-Japan statements. This is my honest request.

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Art Of Balancing World Peace And Family Peace

• December 6, 2024 • Knut Holdhus



President Tanaka of the Family Federation in Japan shares about the persecution and creating family peace in a movement devoted to world peace



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

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Part 1 of interview with Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富)

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
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Question:

It has been reported that Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), the suspect in the shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), stated that his motive for the crime was linked to the substantial donations his mother made to the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) after becoming a member. How do you respond to the suggestion that the circumstances of members' families contributed to this tragic incident?



Committed heinous crime: Tetsuya Yamagami, the man who killed Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan. Photo: Andrew2592009 / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 4.0 Int](#)

Answer:

The core of the [Family Federation](#), as its name suggests, is that it places great emphasis on the family. In that sense, it is truly heartbreaking if the defendant Yamagami committed such an act due to his family environment. Since no trial has been held, we still do not know his true motive. However, if it is indeed the case that the incident [[Editor's note: the assassination of Shinzo Abe](#)] was caused by family circumstances, I believe there are aspects of [our organization](#) that we must reflect on and improve.

However, as an organization, there are many areas we need to reconsider and improve, and these past two and a half years have made us reflect deeply.

Question:

What have you thought about over these two and a half years?

Answer:

I feel that Japanese democracy is starting to crumble. Religious freedom itself is also starting to collapse. I was reminded once again that Japanese society is silently ignoring this.

In Japan, both religious freedom and democracy are givens, and I feel that we are a country that has come this far without ever truly discussing what religious freedom and democracy are.

Question:

In October of last year, the government requested the [Tokyo District Court](#) to issue a dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#) as a religious corporation.



Answer:

Public office building of Japan with Tokyo High Court

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I believe this is unjust, and I feel the government has crossed a certain line. The environment surrounding the **Family Federation** has completely changed since the incident occurred. There has been a relentless wave of critical media coverage, and I think it has been very difficult for our members.



Fumio Kishida 14th July 2022. Photo: 首相官邸/Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int. Cropped

If you ask where this all originated, there's only one answer: the Prime Minister's declaration to sever ties. At the time, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, in his capacity as president of the *Liberal Democratic Party*, stated,

"We will not associate with organizations that are socially problematic."

Although he made this comment as party president and not as Prime Minister, in Japan, the president of the *Liberal Democratic Party* is effectively the Prime Minister. As a result, this declaration was perceived by the public as a statement

from the government.

However, while saying "socially problematic", not once did he clarify what the problem actually was. He reportedly met with former members of the **organization** but not with any current members. In a sense, the grounds for severing ties were left to others. In other words, it wasn't a decision he made himself but rather one influenced by society's claim that there was a problem. If that's the case, is the government applying the same standard to every organization? I don't think so.

Question:

In a past interview with Kyodo News, you mentioned that there were areas where the **organization** lacked consideration for families. Why do you think such a situation arose within a group that teaches the importance of the family?

Answer:

As may be the case with any religion during its early stages, ours initially – just to make it extremely clear – leaned towards a form of monasticism. Religions that start with a monastic focus (centered on monks/nuns), over time, evolve – like Theravāda Buddhism changed into Mahāyāna Buddhism. [See editor's note below]

In the case of the **Family Federation** in Japan, this year marks the 60th anniversary since its registration as a religious corporation and the 65th anniversary since its first worship service.

While we have upheld a vision of family peace, community peace, national peace, and world peace, with the family being the core of our teachings, during the early years, many of our senior members devoted themselves to overseas missions.



The family is at the core of the teachings of the **Family Federation**. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 21st October 2024.

These members often prioritized the goal of world peace over their own families and set out on global missions with a strong sense of purpose. Among many members who shared this mindset, there was a tendency to lose balance, which led to irregularities (歪) within their families.

Looking ahead, we need to redirect the passion that our members have poured into world peace. We need to redirect it toward their families and communities. This shift represents a crucial point of transformation for the **organization**.

Reflecting on this, if there are people who have suffered as a result, I believe it is my duty as president to sincerely apologize. That is why I spoke on this topic.

[Editor's note: Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism both trace their origins to early Indian Buddhism, but they represent different

streams of thought and practice that developed over time:

Theravāda: This tradition is associated with the Sthavira (Elder) school, one of the early Buddhist monastic communities. It preserved what it regarded as the original teachings of the Buddha, as codified in the Pāli Canon. Theravāda is prominent in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia).

Mahayana: Emerging around the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD, Mahāyāna developed as a movement within the broader Buddhist community, emphasizing the bodhisattva path – dedication to achieving enlightenment not just for oneself but for all sentient beings. It introduced new scriptures (e.g., the Mahāyāna sūtras) and philosophical developments (e.g., Madhyamaka and Yogācāra).

Mahāyāna often regards itself as a “greater vehicle” (the literal meaning of *Mahāyāna*) that builds upon and transcends the teachings preserved in Theravāda and other early schools. However, Theravāda does not consider Mahāyāna teachings as part of the Buddha’s original teachings.

Theravāda focus: Emphasis on personal liberation (nirvāṇa) through the Eightfold Path, following the example of the arhat.

Mahāyāna focus: Emphasis on universal salvation through the bodhisattva ideal, which aims to liberate all beings. Mahāyāna also introduced more expansive metaphysical concepts like śūnyatā (emptiness) and Buddha-nature.]

See [part 2 of interview](#)

Featured image above: Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広), President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), during the interview. Photo: Kato Reiwa (加藤 玲和)

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