

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Tomihiro Tanaka stresses Openness and Transparency

Knut Holdhus
December 15, 2024



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



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Openness and transparency emphasized as part of reforms of organizational culture

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

Reform Means Changing Culture

Part 3 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: As a result of the government's request for the dissolution order, many believers interviewed by [this newspaper](#) have been criticized and [discriminated](#) against by those around them. There were also voices calling for the [religious organization](#) to provide mental care to second-generation believers who are particularly hurt.



Family counselor with young couple. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 15th Dec. 2024

Tomihiko Tanaka: There are likely various areas where people have been hurt, and we may not fully understand what the best form of mental health care is. However, we must do what we can. One initiative the [organization](#) undertook, albeit belatedly after this incident [Editor's note: the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in July 2022], is the establishment of "Certified Family Counselors". Around 1,450 individuals have registered after completing organizational training, and we have created a system where members can request consultations through a dedicated app.

In the past, people might have thought, "If my consultation gets reported back to the staff in charge of my group, it's better not to say anything." Now, individuals can make appointments on their own and even specify the person they want to consult with.

However, for members who have been hurt and distanced themselves from the group, the most critical aspect is likely the [organization's](#) culture itself. I feel the best way forward is to demonstrate how the culture of the [organization](#) has changed.

Sekai Nippo: Although the [organization](#) issued a compliance declaration in 2009, wasn't the reform insufficiently thorough?



A Japanese woman offering a donation at a meeting

Tomihiko Tanaka: I acknowledge that it was inadequate. I feel the [church's](#) approach to families was lacking. The failure to adequately address this in our education efforts hindered reform.

In 2009, the organization issued a compliance declaration

This declaration emphasized that members must not be pressured to donate out of fear or anxiety related to ancestral issues and that no donations should exceed what is reasonable given a person's financial situation. We repeatedly gave guidance on these points and insisted on transparency in evangelism by identifying the [organization](#) from the outset. As a result, the number of lawsuits dropped significantly.

Since the compliance declaration, there have been only four civil lawsuits filed by former members involving donations, all before 2016. No such

lawsuits have occurred since then.

Even so, we have been criticized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) for "not adequately educating on compliance". One of MEXT's questions, as part of its exercise of inquiry rights, was: "Provide proof of compliance education." We have submitted substantial evidence, including compliance education topics from national conferences, lecture outlines, and official documents circulated nationwide.

Sekai Nippo: Are you investigating the progress of organizational reforms?

Tomihiko Tanaka: Our reform efforts are centered on two main pillars:

Urgent measures:

When accepting donations, we ensure they are not funded by loans, tied to disputes, or likely to harm family life. Both the [organization](#) and the individual must be mutually satisfied before any donation is made. This has been a major focus due to significant public scrutiny.

Regarding donations, we have fundamentally changed our practices. We introduced strict guidelines to ensure compliance, strengthened verification processes, and now issue official receipts to donors.

Cultural transformation:

Without a shift in culture, there is no future. We aim for fundamental reform to establish an open and transparent [organization](#). This is not something that can be achieved overnight, but we are committed to this vision as a major pillar of our efforts.

Currently, second-generation members have taken on leadership roles, with one-third of regional leaders nationwide being second-generation members. Their approaches to engaging with members, managing families, operating the [organization](#), and conducting meetings reflect a new era for the [organization](#).

This marks a significant transformation for our community and its culture.

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Focus On Crimes Of Professional Faith-Breaking

December 13, 2024 • Knut Holdhus



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



Tokyo, 2nd December 2024 – Published as the 45th article in a series in the Japanese newspaper Sekai Nippo. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. Original article

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Q: 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?

A: 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**.



What I can say with certainty is that such acts are

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

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.



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. Photo: [FOREF](#)

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

A: 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.

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

A: 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:

1. Creating happy families that live for the sake of others.
2. Building churches that coexist with their local communities.
3. 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.

See [part 1](#), [part 3](#) of interview

Featured image above: Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広), President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), during the interview conducted 15th November 2024. Photo: Kato Reiwa (加藤 玲和)

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