

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan Justifies Government Backing of Faith-Breaking

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Exhibition introducing the realities of abduction, confinement, and coercive faith-breaking - January 11, 2025, Sugunami Ward, Tokyo



Human rights concerns rise as Japan's government faces criticism for dismissing religious persecution and faith-breaking based on criminal methods

Tokyo, 6th March 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

[Scoop] Ministry of Education Justifies "Abduction and Confinement" by Reframing It as "Surveillance" in District Court Hearing on Request for Dissolution Order Against Family Federation

UN Committee Issues Correction Recommendation

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



The issue of [forced deconversion](#) involving confinement and physical restraint, commonly referred to as "abduction and confinement" or "coercive faith-breaking", has been a grave human rights concern. The UN Human Rights Committee has previously urged the Japanese government to take corrective action.

Despite this, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has justified such practices by rephrasing "abduction and confinement" as "surveillance" in the legal proceedings of its request for a dissolution order against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) at the Tokyo District Court.

However, it has been revealed that multiple testimonies submitted as evidence for the dissolution order contain detailed descriptions of abduction and confinement. The ministry's stance highlights its singular focus on dissolving the organization without regard for the serious human rights violations suffered by its members.

According to sources, MEXT used the term "surveillance" in its written argument submitted to the Tokyo District Court on 20th September 2024, in response to documents submitted by the [Family Federation](#)

regarding cases of abduction and coercive faith-breaking. The [Family Federation](#) countered this by pointing out that multiple court rulings had already recognized such incidents as "confinement".



Reframing "abduction and confinement" as "surveillance"

The [Family Federation](#) claims that over [4,300 cases](#) of abduction and confinement have occurred over the past 50 years. However, MEXT attempted to diminish the criminal and malicious nature of these acts by using the term "surveillance", thereby denying the [Family Federation's](#) position as a victim of [human rights violations](#). This move, critics argue, is an excessive and deliberate

dismissal of a serious case of religious freedom infringement by the very ministry overseeing religious organizations.



Calling abductions and confinement "surveillance". Here, illustration of how [Family Federation](#) member Toru Goto was abducted by his own family

Faith-breaking testimonies submitted as evidence

According to sources, testimonies submitted as evidence in support of the dissolution order include accounts of [abduction and confinement](#), such as:

A believer who returned home for the New Year was asked by family members to clean a storage shed, only to be locked inside from the outside and forced to leave the [religious organization](#).

A mother who was a [Family Federation](#) member was forcibly taken away and confined in a hotel room under surveillance by multiple people to ensure she renounced her faith.

Parents of a Family Federation believer studied under an anti-[Family Federation](#) Christian

pastor for about six months before, with the help of relatives, confining their daughter in a hotel room to force her deconversion.

Criticism from religious freedom advocates



Tomihiro Tanaka



Toru Goto, at briefing in Tokyo October 4, 2023

In December 2024, Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広), President of the [Family Federation](#), strongly criticized MEXT at a [gathering](#) organized by the Japanese committee (chaired by Professor Emeritus Shoichi Ito (伊東正一) of Kyushu University) of International Coalition for Religious Freedom (ICRF).

Tanaka accused MEXT of attempting to "cover up the fabricated victimhood" by introducing the term "surveillance" and warned that basing government action solely on the testimonies of former

members misleads the public and undermines democracy. He also noted that about 30% of abducted members eventually returned to the [religious organization](#), questioning why their experiences were ignored.

Toru Goto (後藤徹), who was confined for [12 years and 5 months](#) and now serves as the head of the [National Association of Victims of Abduction and Forced Deconversion](#), spoke at a [gathering on 1st March](#) 2025. He asked,

"Have you ever been locked up? Locking someone up is a crime."

Goto previously filed a civil lawsuit against the relatives, Christian pastors, and professional "faith-breaking activists" who confined him. In September 2015, Japan's Supreme Court ruled in his favor, ordering the defendants to pay ¥22 million (approx. \$146,000) in damages. During the lawsuit, a manual detailing methods for [abduction and coercive faith-breaking](#) was submitted as evidence.

UN's warning on religious freedom violations

In 2014, the UN Human Rights Committee urged the Japanese government to take effective measures to prevent [coercive faith-breaking](#) through abduction and confinement. Article 9, Section 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states,

"Everyone has the right to personal liberty and security and shall not be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention."

By justifying abduction and confinement in its legal arguments for the dissolution of the Family Federation, MEXT is not only violating the religious freedom of affected believers but also potentially encouraging the "[faith-breaking business](#)", which specifically targets religious believers.

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Court Ruling Sparks Religious Freedom Outcry

• March 7, 2025 • Knut Holdhus

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Supreme Court rejects Family Federation's appeal, sparking religious freedom outcry as government could arbitrarily cite 'past issues' to justify dissolving any religious organization



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The Supreme Court has dismissed the appeal of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) in a case where Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) sought to impose an administrative fine on the [religious organization](#). The ministry had requested the fine after the [organization refused to answer certain questions](#) related to the government's request for a dissolution order.



Japanese Supreme Court judges. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 5th March 2025.



Imbalanced scale of justice.
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Following this ruling, the [Family Federation](#) released a statement on 5th March 2025 in response to the [Supreme Court's decision](#). The statement criticized the court for not making a constitutional judgment and for failing to specify which laws had been violated. The [organization](#) also warned that the ruling posed a "serious threat" to other religious corporations involved in civil litigation and claimed that it would "damage Japan's international credibility". Furthermore, the [religious organization](#) reiterated that it had

made efforts to respond to MEXT's inquiries, except for those related to the privacy of its followers.

The [Family Federation's](#) statement, titled *Our Organization's View on the Supreme Court Decision in the Administrative Fine Case* (excerpt), reads as follows:

"This decision could pose a serious threat to other religious organizations, as there are many that face civil law issues. Moreover, since there is no time limit on the grounds for dissolution under the Religious Corporations Act, the government could arbitrarily cite 'past issues' to justify dissolving any religious organization.

The fact that such a Supreme Court decision has been made in Japan, a country highly regarded as a model of freedom and democracy, damages Japan's international credibility. These rulings, which blatantly ignore constitutional and legal principles, directly contradict established international law that does not recognize unlawful acts as grounds for dissolving religious organizations. As a result, Japan is likely to face even greater international criticism in the future."

Featured image above: Sign at the entrance of the headquarters of the [Family Federation](#) of Japan in Shibuya, Tokyo. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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