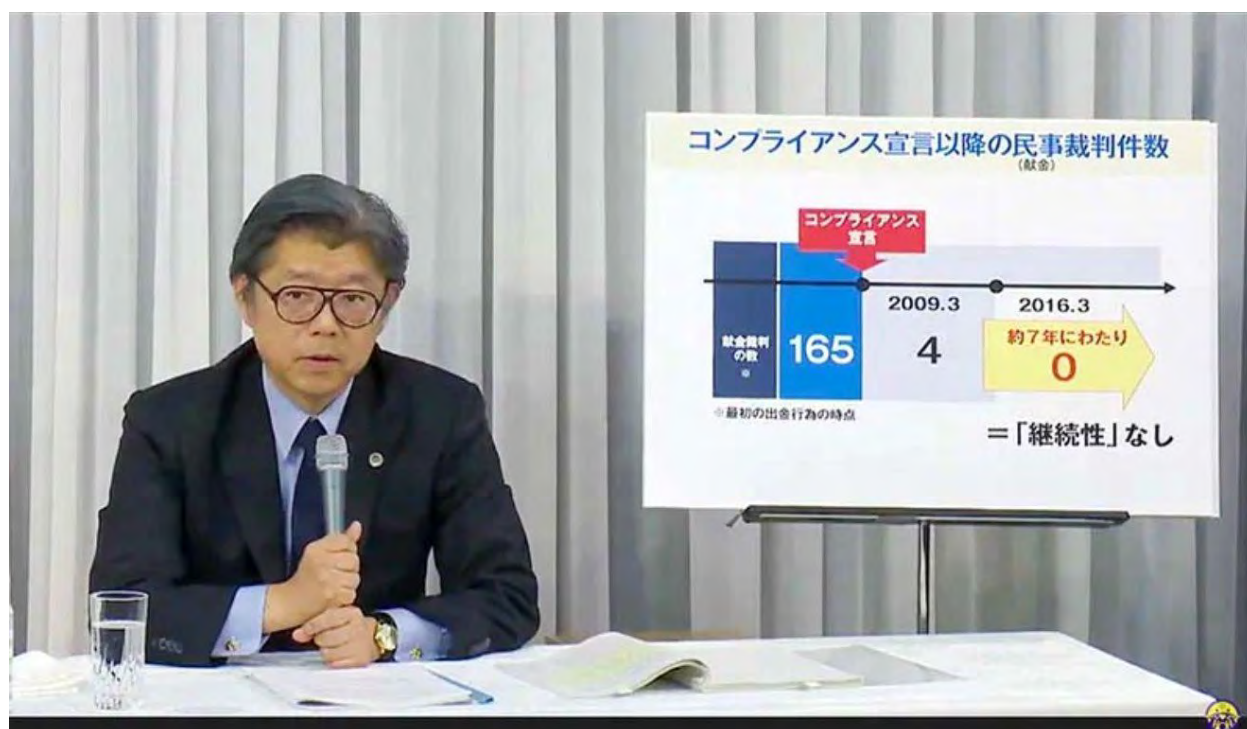


FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's Mob Justice-Like Trial of FFWPU with Prearranged Outcome

Knut Holdhus
March 29, 2025



Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto legal representative of the Family Federation, speaks at a press conference at the organization's headquarters on March 25, 2025. He is presenting a flip chart showing that lawsuits related to financial disputes, including donation-related issues, had sharply declined after the 2009 "compliance declaration". Before the declaration, 165 cases reached a verdict, afterward, only four. From March 2016 onward, there were no cases for nearly seven years



How the authorities had to rewrite the rules in order to have a case and then preceded with a mob justice-like trial behind closed doors, with a predetermined outcome in unjust dissolution case

Tokyo, 29th March 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Court Ruling Tied to Assassin's "Motive"

Request for Dissolution Order Against Family Federation

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



Tomihiro Tanaka, President of the [Family Federation](#) of Japan at [press conference March 25, 2025](#)

For the first time, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has requested the dissolution of a [religious corporation](#) based on "wrongdoings according to civil law". The Tokyo District Court [ruled in favor](#) of the request, [ordering the dissolution](#) of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)). However, the developments leading up to this decision, closely linked to the motives of the suspect in the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), expose the dangers of a people's trial-like (人民裁判的) [See editor's note 1 below] approach that could undermine democracy.

A sudden change in legal interpretation - no statute of limitations in civil law [See editor's note 2 below]

Even as reported damages have drastically declined, the court "presumed" harm.

At a [press conference](#) held at 7:00 PM on the 25th March at the [Family Federation](#)'s headquarters in Shibuya, Tokyo, Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広), President of the [religious organization](#), argued that among the factors cited for the [dissolution order](#) - organizational involvement in unlawful acts, their malicious

nature, and continuity - "it is visibly clear that continuity no longer exists."



Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto at the [press conference](#) in Tokyo March 25, 2025

Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto (福本修也), representing the [organization](#), presented a flip chart showing that lawsuits related to financial disputes, including donation-related issues, had sharply declined after the 2009 "compliance declaration". Before the declaration, 165 cases reached a verdict; afterward, only four. From March 2016 onward, there were no cases for nearly seven years.

The court ruling described the damages before the declaration as "unprecedented in scale". While acknowledging a decline in damages afterward, it still claimed, "Harm has continued without interruption in recent years and remains at a significant level."

However, under the so-called "Anti-[Unification Church](#) Law" (a law to prevent fraudulent donation solicitations), enacted two years ago, there have been no reported cases in which the [Family Federation](#) has committed any of the six prohibited acts, including "using spiritual insights to induce donations". If such improvements were acknowledged, the argument for continuity would collapse, making it impossible to justify the dissolution order. The court decision, however, rejected the [Family Federation](#)'s claims using what appears to be a strained interpretation of the facts.

The trigger: The 2022 assassination



Tetsuya Yamagami, the man who killed Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan

The push for dissolution originated with the July 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Abe. According to police information leaked to the media, suspect Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也) allegedly targeted Abe because he believed the former prime minister was connected to the [Family Federation](#), an organization Yamagami harbored resentment against due to his mother's involvement. This led to an unprecedented wave of media criticism against the [religious organization](#).

Because the incident occurred during an election campaign, media coverage intensified, focusing on the [organization](#)'s political connections. Then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄), as head of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), publicly distanced the party from the [Family Federation](#). The opposition also pressured LDP members to sever ties with the [organization](#), ultimately leading to the request for dissolution.



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida swayed by communist campaign April 16, 2023

However, MEXT had previously stated that the [Family Federation](#) was not subject to dissolution since it had not been criminally prosecuted as a corporation. On 14th October 2022, three months after the assassination, the government officially confirmed that the [organization](#) did not meet the criteria for dissolution under Article 81, Sections 1 and 2 of the Religious Corporations Act.

Until 18th October, Kishida reaffirmed in parliamentary discussions that "wrongdoings according to civil law do not qualify" as grounds for dissolution. Yet on 19th October, in a sudden reversal, he declared that "wrongdoings according to civil law would be included," contradicting the prior cabinet decision - effectively changing a crucial legal interpretation overnight behind closed doors. This shift led to the legal battle over whether "organizational involvement in unlawful acts, their malicious nature, and continuity" justified dissolution.

Concerns over arbitrary use of power

At the press conference, Tanaka pointed out that wrongdoings according to civil law "have no statute of limitations" [See editor's note 2 below]. MEXT, in its dissolution request, cited alleged "damages" going back as far as 1980 - cases over 30 years old. This raises concerns about governmental overreach and abuse of power, as it suggests that MEXT could apply similar retroactive scrutiny to other religious organizations in the future. Public welfare and societal norms evolve over time, and allowing the government to arbitrarily reinterpret laws based on political considerations sets a dangerous precedent.



From the [press conference March 25, 2025](#) in Shibuya, Tokyo

The court ruling also referenced past legal issues involving businesses run by church members, including "spiritual sales" (where religious beliefs were used to sell goods) and the "Shinsei Incident" (新生事件) [See editor's note 3 below] (involving arrests for violations of the Act on Specified Commercial Transactions). However, these matters had already been resolved through legal judgments, settlements, or criminal penalties. Since the Compliance Declaration [See editor's note 4 below], almost no new issues have arisen. Nevertheless, by retroactively expanding the scope of alleged "damages", the court inferred that past wrongdoing continued even after the reforms and ultimately justified dissolution.

A Precedent for Political Persecution?

Dissolving the [organization](#) in response to the assassination case is akin to rearresting a person who has already served his or her sentence - not for a new crime, but simply because past judgments were deemed too lenient or because authorities suspect further wrongdoing.



Moreover, the entire process - from the Religious Affairs Council's deliberations to MEXT's questioning of the organization and the court's hearings - was conducted behind closed doors. Attorney Fukumoto pointed out that during cross-examination, it was revealed that MEXT had fabricated evidence. Yet the court ignored this problem in its ruling.

The excessive backlash [against the [Family Federation](#)] seized upon the motive of the suspect who killed the former prime minister out of hatred toward a [religious organization](#). This, coupled with an overnight change in legal interpretation, led to an unprecedented use of civil law as grounds for dissolving a [religious corporation](#). Although it was subject to legal procedures, it was like a people's trial (人民裁判的) [See editor's note 1 below], and the request for the dissolution of a [religious corporation](#) was carried out arbitrarily and behind closed doors.

[**Editor's note 1:** In this context, "like a people's trial" (人民裁判的 - Jinmin Saiban-teki) refers to a "people's tribunal-like" or "mob justice-like" process. It implies a trial or legal action that lacks proper judicial fairness, due process, and transparency - where decisions are driven by public sentiment, political pressure, or media influence rather than objective legal standards.

The article uses this term to criticize the dissolution request against the [Family Federation](#), suggesting that it was carried out in a manner resembling a show trial, where the outcome was predetermined and influenced by public backlash rather than impartial legal judgment.]

[**Editor's note 2:** In this context, "without statute of limitations" (時効なく) refers to the fact that the acts that are wrongdoings according to civil law (torts) (民法上の不法行為) cited as the basis for dissolving the [Family Federation](#) were not restricted by a time limit. Normally, in legal cases, there is a statute of limitations - a set period after which legal action can no longer be taken. However, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) retroactively examined alleged damages as far back as 1980, over 40 years prior, to justify the dissolution request.

The criticism in the article suggests that by disregarding any statute of limitations, the government expanded the scope of past allegations indefinitely, allowing decades-old issues to be used as grounds for

present legal action. This raises concerns about legal fairness, as organizations or individuals could be held accountable for actions far beyond the usual legal time limits.]

[**Editor's note 3:** The Shinsei Incident (新世事件) refers to a 2009 case in Japan involving the company Shinsei (New Life), which was run by members of the [Unification Church](#). Shinsei was accused of engaging in what lawyers campaigning against the church termed as "spiritual sales" (靈感商法) - a practice where individuals allegedly were persuaded to purchase items by being told that these goods possess supernatural benefits or that not buying them could lead to misfortune.]

[**Editor's note 4:** The 2009 compliance declaration of the [Unification Church](#) of Japan (now the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)) was a formal commitment by the [organization](#) to reform its practices in response to longstanding public criticism and legal challenges.

The [Unification Church](#) in Japan had faced numerous allegations related to recruitment tactics and donation solicitation, termed "spiritual sales" (靈感商法) by a hostile network of activist lawyers who had declared the [religious organization](#) an enemy. These issues led to multiple lawsuits orchestrated by the activist lawyers and significant media backlash. This prompted the [organization](#) to take measures to restore its reputation and demonstrate compliance with legal and ethical standards.

The [religious organization](#) pledged to stop possibly unethical donation practices, including what the hostile network of lawyers claimed amounted to "pressuring members into making large financial contributions under spiritual pretexts."

This was in response to accusations from the same activist lawyers that followers "were being manipulated into giving away substantial amounts of money or property."

The [Unification Church](#) stated it would enhance internal oversight to ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards. Measures included better training for leaders and stricter guidelines for evangelization and solicitation of donations.

After this compliance declaration, there was a significant decrease in the number of lawsuits against the [Unification Church](#) - since 2015 called the [Family Federation](#). The [religious organization](#) has used this as evidence that it has improved its practices and should not be subject to [dissolution](#).]

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"Japan Becoming The Land Of The Setting Sun"

• March 28, 2025 • Knut Holdhus

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Leading expert on international human rights law calls Tokyo District Court's dissolution order a "parody of justice", warning that Japan is rapidly becoming "the land of the setting sun"










Logo of the Sekai Nippo

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"The Land of the Rising Sun Becomes the Land of the Setting Sun"

International Human Rights Lawyer Criticizes Tokyo District Court Over Dissolution Order for

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by the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*



Is Japan becoming the land of the setting sun? Here, a sunset at Porto Covo, west coast of Portugal. Photo: Alvesgaspar / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#)

Following the *Tokyo District Court's* decision on 25th March to **order the dissolution** of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (formerly the *Unification Church*) at the request of the *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* (MEXT), French international human rights lawyer Patricia Duval contributed a comment to our paper titled, "**Will Japan, the Land of the Rising Sun, Become the Land of the Setting Sun in Terms of Freedom?**" She writes,

"The *Tokyo District Court's* decision is a 'parody of justice'. The ruling appears as though it was written long ago, and the trial itself was nothing more than a pretense of delivering justice. This is because the court ignored all the arguments put forth by the defense and made no attempt to address them in its ruling."

At the end of last year, cross-examinations of witnesses – selected from both the Ministry's side and the **religious organization's** side – revealed fabricated and distorted testimonies from the Ministry. Yet, the court remained silent on this matter. Likewise, the court ignored the fact that many of the Ministry's witnesses had undergone abduction, confinement, and forced renunciation of faith, with testimonies dating back decades.

The judges have made a



Japanese judges using "reasonable inference" in order to dissolve religious minority organization even though there was no evidence for it. Illustration. Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 6th January 2025.

"reasonable inference" [\[See editor's note below\]](#) despite the lack of evidence proving the "continuity" of unlawful acts. The court also remained silent on the violations of international human rights law, which I particularly emphasize. Even evidence provided by the defense – demonstrating that the religious organization refunded donations in good faith – was twisted by the court and used against the **religious organization** as proof of wrongdoing.

In this "I win, you lose" game, the **religious organization** has no chance of victory.

Despite the absence of any concrete legal violations or criminal acts, the *Tokyo District Court* ordered the dissolution of the **religious corporation** on grounds of "deviation from social norms" and "harm to

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public welfare". In other words, this amounts to "**the social exclusion of a religious minority**".

[Editor's note: In a court case, "**reasonable inference**" refers to a conclusion that a judge or jury can logically draw from the evidence presented, even if it is not explicitly stated. It is based on facts, circumstances, and common-sense reasoning rather than mere speculation or guesswork.

A reasonable inference must stem from actual evidence introduced in the case, not just assumptions. In the above case, it is claimed that the judges use reasonable inference "despite the lack of evidence proving the 'continuity' of unlawful acts." And it is precisely the continuity of unlawful acts that is a key condition for dissolution. The judges appeared to have inferred a continuity that is not there, as there have been virtually no civil cases brought against the [Family Federation](#) since 2009.]

Featured image above: **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. Here, speaking at the International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington DC 5th February 2025. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission.

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