

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: 2nd-Gen Unificationist Believers Challenge Secret Court Hearings

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July 12, 2025



Nozomi Kojima, leader of Association of Second-Generation Members to Protect the Human Rights of Believers, speaking at the press conference in Tokyo July 11, 2025



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Push for transparency as young members demand to know the truth and challenge having the dissolution hearings behind closed doors

Tokyo, 12th July 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Application to take part in non-public court proceedings (closed hearings)

Second-Generation Members of the Family Federation Hold Press Conference

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

In response to the closed court proceedings regarding the request for a dissolution order of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), a group of second-generation believers has expressed opposition to the non-public nature of the hearings. On 11th July, the group "Association of Second-Generation Members to Protect the Human Rights of Believers" - led by Nozomi Kojima (小嶋希晶) reported that they had submitted a written application to the Tokyo High Court on 10th July to participate as interested parties.



From the press conference in Tokyo July 11, 2025 - Association of Second-Generation Members to Protect the Human Rights of Believers

The request to participate in the hearings was made by eight individuals, including leader Kojima. They are [church](#) staff, working adults, and students who are believers. The group collected over 35,000 signatures opposing the dissolution order through non-contentious procedures [See editor's note below]. If their participation is granted, they will be able not only to attend the hearings but also to review submitted materials and call witnesses independently of the [church](#).



A representative of Association of Second-Generation Members to Protect the Human Rights of Believers and a legal representative outside Tokyo High Court July 10, 2025. Photo: Association of Second-Generation Members to Protect the Human Rights of Believers

Kojima emphasized that if the hearings continue to be held behind closed doors,

"All we can do is watch the [church](#) disappear while being presumed guilty."

She added that even experts are saying,

"It is questionable to treat this as a non-contentious case [See editor's note below]; shouldn't it be made public?"

She further explained the reason for seeking to participate as an interested party:

"We don't know if the hearings are being conducted fairly. I want to know what will happen to my [church](#)."

[Editor's note: A non-contentious case refers to a legal matter where there is no dispute between parties. These cases typically involve administrative, procedural, or uncontested legal actions, such as probate (handling a deceased person's estate), uncontested divorces, adoption, or registering a trademark. Since there are no opposing parties or legal conflicts, these cases usually proceed smoothly through the legal system without litigation.]

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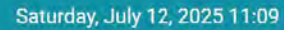
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the 3rd day of the conference, on 10th July 2025, in a session on second-generation members of, and apostates from, new religious movements in Japan and elsewhere. The conference is a premier international forum for scholarly exchange on religion's role amid socio-cultural transformation. The European Academy of Religion is known as the major forum for academic research on religion and its relevance for society.



Peter Zoehrer, journalist and executive director of [FOREF Europe](#), delivering his speech on 10th July 2025 in a session on second-generation members of, and apostates from, new religious movements in Japan and elsewhere, during the 8th annual conference of the European Academy of Religion (EuAre) at the University of Vienna. Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

1. Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues, and friends,

It is an honor to speak at the 8th Annual EuAre Conference here at the *University of Vienna*. I address you today not only as a journalist but also as Executive Director of [FOREF Europe](#), a Vienna-based human rights NGO dedicated to defending *Freedom of Religion or Belief* (FoRB) as a fundamental civil right.

While other presentations in this session offer academic analyses, I speak from the vantage point of an activist and passionate advocate for religious liberty. My hope is that this non-academic perspective will add a dynamic and perhaps urgent dimension to our discussion.

What I share today is not merely a legal case – it is a global warning. Since the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in July 2022, the [Unification Church](#) — also known as the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU) — has been subjected to an unprecedented, state-driven campaign of repression in Japan.

What is unfolding threatens to become a blueprint for suppressing religious freedom – not just in Asia, but across democratic societies worldwide.

2. The Abe Assassination and the “Court of Public Opinion”

The assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami, blamed the [Unification Church](#) for his mother’s financial ruin due to past donations. Yet instead of treating this as a criminal act by a disturbed individual, the Japanese media orchestrated a nationwide moral panic – a textbook case of blaming the victim and exonerating the perpetrator.

In this narrative inversion, the [Church](#) [\[See editor’s note\]](#) – itself the indirect target of political violence – was turned into the scapegoat.



Given exclusive access to major media platforms: Politically motivated leftwing lawyers from National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS), also known as Japan Federation of Bar Associations (Zenkoku Benren), here at press conference after the [dissolution verdict](#) against the Family Federation 25th March 2025. From left: Katsuomi Abe, Hiroshi Yamaguchi, Masaki Kito. Photo: Screenshot from [Bitter Winter](#)

Within two weeks of Abe’s death, more than 700 articles and broadcasts vilified the [Church](#) [\[See editor’s note\]](#) as a societal menace.
¹ The media narrative was dominated by anti-cult lawyers – many affiliated with the *Japan Federation of Bar Associations* – who were given exclusive access to major platforms.

What emerged was a “media firewall”: a closed information loop in which alternative perspectives – including those of scholars, [Church](#) [\[See editor’s note\]](#) members, or international legal experts — were systematically excluded.

Public opinion was manipulated. Emotional testimonies were treated as fact. In this emotionally charged environment, political action soon followed.

3. The Dissolution Order: Criminalizing Belief Without Crime

In October 2023, the Japanese government [filed a request](#) to dissolve the [Unification Church’s](#) [\[See editor’s note\]](#) legal status as a religious

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the Unification Church's [see editor's note] legal status as a religious corporation.²

This action was not based on any criminal conviction. No court has found the Church [See editor's note] guilty of illegal conduct. Instead, the dissolution relied on civil complaints, politicized hearings, and unverified allegations – not on judicial rulings.



This move flagrantly violates Japan's commitments under international law – particularly Article 18 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR), which protects the right not only to believe, but to organize, teach, and practice religion.

Significantly, UN Special Rapporteur Nazila Ghanea publicly raised concerns about the case and offered to visit Japan to investigate potential FoRB violations.³ To date, the Japanese government has failed to respond to her repeated requests.



Sent formal UN request to Japan, but no reply: Nazila Ghanea, UN Rapporteur on Religious Freedom since February 2023. Photo: GiovannaKa / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int

What does Tokyo have to hide? If the process is fair and transparent, why ignore the UN's top human rights envoy?

4. Silencing the World: Ignoring Global Appeals

This is not just a domestic matter. Leading international scholars, FoRB experts, and respected political leaders have appealed to Japan to halt this dangerous course.

These include former UN officials, Members of the *European Parliament*, renowned constitutional scholars, former heads of state, and over 400 senior advisors from global civil society networks.

But their appeals – formal letters, legal analyses, public statements – have been met with deaf ears in Tokyo.

What we are witnessing is not simply denial – it is the defense of a national narrative that scapegoats a [minority religion](#) to deflect from institutional responsibility.

A democracy that silences international counsel and censors domestic dissent is not acting in the spirit of human rights.

To be continued. Part 2 coming soon.

Featured image above: Peter Zoehrer, journalist and executive director of [FOREF Europe](#), delivering his speech on 10th July 2025 in a session on second-generation members of, and apostates from, new religious movements in Japan and elsewhere, during the 8th annual conference of the European Academy of Religion (EuARe) at the University of Vienna. Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

Footnote 1: "Shinzo Abe's death leads to scrutiny of Unification Church," *BBC*, July 2022; CESNUR and *Bitter Winter* compilations.

Footnote 2: "Japan files court request to dissolve Unification Church," *Kyodo News*, October 2023.

Footnote 3: UN Special Rapporteur communication to Japan, OHCHR, February 2024. Visit offer and rejection confirmed by UN press office.

[Editor's note: Although Peter Zoehrer uses the word "church", please be aware that the Unification Church in Japan in 2015 changed its name to [Family Federation for World peace and Unification](#).]

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