

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: After Years of Waiting FFWPU Members Finally Allowed to Testify by Japanese Court

Knut Holdhus
October 5, 2025



Tomihiko Tanaka being interviewed by Japanese media July 30, 2025

Breakthrough for fairness and religious freedom as current members are to be heard for the first time in Family Federation dissolution proceedings



Tomihiko Tanaka with demonstrators protesting against the [dissolution order](#) in Fukuoka on September 2025



The 5th October 2025 [Kyodo News report](#) marks a significant development in the ongoing legal proceedings concerning the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU), formerly known as the [Unification Church](#). **For the first time, the Tokyo High Court has scheduled the testimony of current, active members of the movement - a crucial step toward a fair and balanced evaluation of the [organization](#).** This represents a clear departure from the earlier Tokyo District Court process, which relied heavily on statements from former members, many of whom had undergone so-called "deprogramming" [See editor's note below] and later expressed hostility toward their former faith.

The inclusion of present members' voices - those who continue to live by the teachings of the [Family Federation](#) and actively serve their communities - signals a recognition that genuine religious perspectives must be heard in court. It is, in effect, a long-awaited acknowledgment that freedom of religion and

fairness in legal proceedings require hearing from those who actually practice the faith being judged.



In Katashina Village, Gunma Prefecture: Oze Cemetery, owned by the [Family Federation](#)

During his 5th October remarks to reporters in Katashina Village, Gunma Prefecture, Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広), President of [Family Federation](#) in Japan, expressed confidence in the judicial process. He noted that the High Court's decision on the government's dissolution request is expected around January or February 2026, with witness examinations set for late October and final written submissions from both sides due in late November. Tanaka's calm and transparent approach underscores the [organization's](#) determination to confront misunderstanding with truth, patience, and respect for due process.

The article also referenced the situation surrounding [Hak Ja Han](#), the worldwide leader of the [movement](#), who was recently detained by South Korean authorities. Tanaka voiced concern about her health while reaffirming the movement's trust in her integrity - words that reflect both deep loyalty and moral strength in the face of adversity. His response conveys a quiet conviction: that faith, when sincere and principled, remains unshaken even under scrutiny.

When asked about the recent election of Sanae Takaichi (高市早苗) as the new president of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party, Tanaka simply replied,

"I have no message, as it is a political matter."



Demonstration in Japan in September 2025 against the [dissolution order](#)

This clear boundary between religion and politics demonstrates a mature and responsible stance - an important reminder that the [Family Federation](#) is committed to its spiritual mission, not political ambition.

Overall, the developments reported by Kyodo News signal a moment of cautious optimism for the [Family](#)

[Federation](#). For the first time in this long process, voices of living faith will be heard directly by the court, helping to correct one-sided narratives and paving the way for genuine understanding. President Tanaka's leadership - marked by composure, transparency, and compassion - embodies the [organization](#)'s resolve to uphold truth and spiritual freedom while contributing positively to society.

Text: Knut Holdhus. editor

[Editor's note: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

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Religious Minorities: UN Experts Caution Japan

- October 3, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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On 1st October, the UN Human Rights office issued a [press release](#) by four UN experts, so-called Special Rapporteurs [\[See editor’s note below\]](#), appointed by the *United Nations Human Rights Council*.

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In the [press release](#), the UN experts expressed strong concern about the worsening situation for religious minorities like Jehovah's Witnesses and the [Family Federation](#) in Japan and the continued stigmatization they suffer.

The section on the [Family Federation](#) mentions,

"The experts also noted the [decision](#) by the Tokyo District Court on the dissolution of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), formally known as the [Unification Church](#).

"The civil tort rulings on which the [dissolution decision](#) was based on relies on the violation of 'social appropriateness' which were deemed to constitute a serious harm to 'public welfare'. As previously noted by the Human Rights Committee the concept of 'public welfare' is vague and open-ended and may permit restrictions exceeding those permissible under the [ICCPR](#)," the experts warned.

They emphasised that any restrictions on the exercise of Article 18 rights must comply strictly with the limitations set out in Article 18.3 of the [ICCPR](#), as interpreted by the UN Human Rights Committee."

That section is significant because it goes to the heart of how international human rights law differs from certain domestic legal standards – and why the UN experts are cautioning Japan.

The *Tokyo District Court's* [dissolution decision](#) against the [Family Federation](#) relied on findings of "civil tort" (wrongdoing under civil law). The key legal justification was that the [religious organization's](#) activities violated "social appropriateness" and caused serious harm to "public welfare." In Japanese legal tradition, "public welfare" (*kōkyō no fukushi*) is actually often used as a flexible standard for limiting rights when balancing them against society's needs.

The [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), which Japan has ratified, protects religious freedom in Article 18. Restrictions on religious practice under Article 18 are very narrowly defined: only permissible if they are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. Importantly, "public welfare" is not a valid ground under the [ICCPR](#). It is too vague and broad, and therefore risks being used to justify excessive or arbitrary restrictions.



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If "public welfare" is used as a catch-all justification, it could permit the government or courts to restrict religious groups in ways that go beyond what international law allows. For example, activities that are unpopular or socially controversial might be labeled as "against public welfare", even if they fall within the legitimate exercise of religious freedom.

This creates a risk of undermining minority rights, since majority opinion often shapes what is considered "socially appropriate".

The UN experts are warning that **using vague legal standards like "public welfare" sets a precedent**. Other religious or belief minorities could later face similar restrictions, not because they caused demonstrable harm, but because their practices are viewed as "inappropriate" by mainstream society. This runs contrary to the [ICCPR's](#) stricter protections, which are designed to safeguard minority rights against exactly that kind of majoritarian pressure.

This section in the UN [press release](#) highlights a fundamental tension: Japan's reliance on "public welfare" as a legal concept may allow broader restrictions on religious groups than international human rights law permits. The UN experts are signaling that Japan must align its legal standards more closely with the [ICCPR](#) to ensure that dissolutions or restrictions on religious groups are based only on clear, necessary, and proportionate grounds.





From the “SOS Mini Letter.” One example of abuse is “Because of my parents’ religion I cannot participate in sport events.” Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

The UN experts raised questions about the treatment of certain religious or belief minorities, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, in educational and social contexts. They highlighted how initiatives, such as the *Children’s Human Rights SOS Mini-Letters* distributed between May and July 2025, carried discriminatory stereotypes that risk reinforcing social prejudice. While these pamphlets were designed to raise awareness of child abuse and provide children with avenues to seek help, the experts warned that their framing of religious practices could unfairly conflate legitimate spiritual activities with abuse. This, they argued, creates the risk of marginalisation and bullying for children belonging to minority faiths.

ひと、くらし、みらいのために

厚生労働省

Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

Logo of Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. [Public domain image](#)

The concerns also draw on the Japanese *Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare’s* “Q&A on Responses to Child Abuse Related to Religious Beliefs, etc.” (Q&A Guidelines), first published in December 2022. According to the experts, the persistence of these guidelines in shaping discourse illustrates a broader pattern of framing religious minorities as potential threats, which may lead to increased scrutiny and administrative pressures.

The [press release](#) gains additional weight because it is placed within the broader international framework of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR), to which Japan is a party. Article 18 of the *ICCPR* protects freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and it places strict limits on the kinds of restrictions governments can impose. The experts’ emphasis on this article underlines that Japan’s handling of religious minorities is not just a domestic matter but a question of fulfilling legally binding international obligations.

Through the *UN Special Rapporteur* [\[See editor’s note below\]](#) on freedom of religion or belief at the *Human Rights Council*, Nazila Ghanea, the UN should be able to lead dialogue with Japan.

The UN experts behind the [press release](#):

- Nazila Ghanea, [the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#);
- Nicolas Levrat, [the Special Rapporteur on minority issues](#);
- Farida Shaheed, [the Special Rapporteur on the right to education](#);
- Gina Romero, [the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association](#).

See also *UN Expert: “Japan’s Illegal Dissolution Request”*



Nazila Ghanea, UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom [\[See editor’s note below\]](#). **Ghanea has sent formal UN request to Japan, but has so far received no reply.** Nazila Ghanea holds the position since February 2023. Photo: [GiovannaKa / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#)

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Top left: From the header of the email announcing the [press release](#). The rest of the illustration is from the webpage containing the [press release](#).

*[Editor’s note: A **Special Rapporteur** (or Independent Expert) is an independent human rights expert appointed by the United Nations (UN) to provide reports or advice on human rights issues from either a thematic or country-specific perspective. These experts are selected by*

the UN Human Rights Council and operate independently of any government, playing a crucial role in monitoring the actions of sovereign nations and democratically elected governments.

Special Rapporteurs do not receive financial compensation from the United Nations for their work. However, they receive support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and are often funded by charities and corporations. Annually, they convene in Geneva to discuss common issues, coordinate their efforts, and engage with various stakeholders, including states and civil society organizations.

These experts frequently conduct fact-finding missions to investigate human rights violation allegations in different countries. In addition to these missions, they regularly review complaints from alleged victims of human rights abuses. If a complaint is verified, they send an urgent letter or appeal to the concerned government. Even without a specific complaint, Special Rapporteurs can intervene on behalf of individuals or groups at their discretion.]

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