

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Government's Media-Driven Religious Cleansing in Japan Today

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Norishige Kondo, Legal Affairs Director of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, delivering his message at a civil society side event September 26, 2025 in room 11 in the UN Office at Geneva, Switzerland.

Evil media-driven religious cleansing: How public opinion was turned against the large faith minority the Family Federation

A message by Norishige Kondo, Legal Affairs Director of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, delivered at a civil society side event 26th September organized by the NGO the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) in conjunction with the 60th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC60) in Geneva. The side event had as theme "Japan and Human Rights - Religious Cleansing in Japan: Eradication of an Entire Faith Community". Slightly edited.



The head table at the side event September 26, 2025 in Room 11 in the UN Office at Geneva, Switzerland organized by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF)

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My topic today is "The Danger of Religious Eradication Based on Public Opinion Manipulation".

The official name of our church is [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#). However, I think you are familiar with the former name the [Unification Church](#). So in my presentation, I will use the

abbreviation of the former name: "[UC](#)". [See editor's note 1 below]



*Both opposed by left-leaning mainstream media:
Here, former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe meeting
with then President-elect Donald Trump at Trump
Tower, 17th November 2016*

On 8th July 2022, former Prime Minister Abe was assassinated. The suspect claimed his motive was his mother's donations to the [UC](#) two decades earlier, which had "led to the collapse of his family." He also resented Abe for sending a video message to UPF, an affiliated organization of the [UC](#).

But can such an excuse for murder really be accepted?

Nevertheless, an anti-[UC](#) lawyers network immediately took advantage of this incident to launch attacks on the [UC](#).

Let me explain the basic stance of the major media in Japan. Japan's major media outlets are in general left-leaning. They tend to be hostile

to conservative politicians such as former Prime Minister Abe. In fact, just as the mainstream media in the United States strongly opposed President Trump, the Japanese major media consistently opposed Prime Minister Abe.

Minority religions also became convenient targets for such attacks since criticizing "cults" was a way to boost rankings.

Because the [UC](#) and its affiliated organizations took an anti-communist stance and actively campaigned for the enactment of an anti-espionage law, the media were particularly eager to criticize the [UC](#).



*3 leading activist leftwing lawyers from the anti-[UC](#)
lawyers' network called National Network of
Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales - from left: Masaki
Kito, Hiroshi Watanabe, Hiroshi Yamaguchi*

Knowing the tendencies of the media, the anti-[UC](#) lawyers' network exploited the Abe incident to attack the [UC](#), creating a false impression of the [UC](#). They categorically labeled the [UC](#) as a "great evil" and the cause of Abe's assassination. They gave the impression that the [UC](#) was still causing massive economic damage nationwide. The lawyers' network spread propaganda that the [UC](#) was a "dangerous cult", that all [UC](#) members were victims under "mind control", and that all donations constituted victimization.



Consumer Affairs Agency, Government of Japan

Logo of the Consumer Affairs Agency (CAA) of Japan, an administrative agency under the Ministry for Consumer Affairs and Food Safety. Under a law enacted on 10th December 2022, the Consumer Affairs Agency gained authority over matters related to donations between religious organizations and their followers. Previously, the Agency for Cultural Affairs held sole jurisdiction over all administrative matters involving religious organizations. This legislation aims to address issues such as donations to new religious movements like the [Unification Church](#)

The lawyers' manipulation of public opinion succeeded, and the Japanese society came to be dominated by the perception that the [UC](#) was nothing less than a heinous criminal organization.

In Japan, being an island nation, society places strong pressure on individuals to conform. During World War II, anyone who opposed the war was condemned as unpatriotic.

Likewise, after the Abe incident, members of the Diet who had attended [UC](#)-related events or even just sent a simple congratulatory message, were harshly criticized in the media and pressured to issue apologies.

Under this sustained campaign, Prime Minister Kishida finally declared that the Liberal Democrat Party (LDP) would [cut ties](#) to the [UC](#).

Later, we found a table published on the website of the Consumer Affairs Agency, showing the number of consultations received by consumer centers concerning the [UC](#) compared to the total number of consultations.

According to this data, in June 2022, just before the Abe incident, consultations concerning the [UC](#) accounted for merely 0.003% of

the total.

This bar chart compares the number of consultations handled by consumer centers regarding Japanese major new religious groups, including the [UC](#).

Our lawyer recently researched it and according to it, in 2021, the year before the Abe assassination incident, the number of consultations concerning the [UC](#) was 27, whereas Japan's largest new religious group accounted for 67 cases, more than twice as many as the [UC](#). The [UC](#) was only third or fourth among them.



*Changing the law overnight:
Former Prime Minister Fumio
Kishida. Here, at press
conference 14th August 2024*

Later, a periodical [Consumer Law News] was found in which a major lawyer of the anti-[UC](#) network stated that the number of consultations related to the UC had declined. He said they were struggling, being overwhelmed with consultations from small unfamiliar groups rather than [UC](#)-related consultations.

The fact that only the [UC](#) became the target of attacks can be explained by nothing else than political motives.

In principle, when the government finds its decision was wrong, it should correct its course. However, like large objects such as a train, once it begins to move, it cannot stop easily. And the government didn't stop.

In October 2022, the government abruptly [changed its interpretation](#) of the Religious Corporations Act overnight, declaring that even civil torts [civil wrongs causing alleged harm] could constitute grounds for dissolution.

The government enacted new laws and policies:

a [new law to restrict solicitation of donations](#)

a [new law to promote claims](#) against the [UC](#)

a governmental decision on anti-[UC](#) instruction in schools.



*Taro Kono, government minister
who brought extreme leftwing
lawyer Masaki Kito, who is
hostile to the [Family Federation](#),
in as special advisor to the
Kishida government*

Finally, on 13th October 2023, the government filed a [lawsuit seeking the dissolution](#) of the [UC](#). They even submitted [fabricated evidence](#) to the court.

Instead of giving up the lawsuit, in court, the [UC](#) exposed the [fabrication of evidence](#).

Normally, the courts should have dismissed the dissolution petition (request).

Instead, it recognized as ground for dissolution - based merely on speculation - that there must be unknown victims, while it recognized that there were few actual civil cases. Thus, they valued false impression over facts.

The manipulation of public opinion also reached local governments. Several local assemblies adopted resolutions declaring the cutting of ties with the [UC](#).

In Fukuoka City, the government decided not to allow [UC](#) and its related groups to [rent public facilities](#). As a result, the [UC](#) could no longer hold Christmas gatherings and even peaceful marches were considered obstructive.

In Shimane Prefecture, support for volunteer activities by [UC](#) members was terminated. In fact, local authorities went as far as to order the removal of flowers planted by children as part of their volunteer work.

In Yamaguchi Prefecture, [UC](#) members were refused to eat at a restaurant.

When the [UC](#) or its affiliated organizations filed defamation lawsuits to restore their honor, the courts dismissed them all.

One of the abnormal cases was [UC](#) member Toru Goto's case. He had been a victim of deprogramming

[See editor's note 2 below] for 12 years and five months and he sued the deprogrammers. In 2014, during his case, the UN recommended that Japan act against deprogramming [See editor's note 2 below].



Protesting the coercive faith-breaking (deprogramming) business in Japan. Toru Goto (second from the right, front row) and others from the [National Association of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion Victims](#) participating in a protest march, 10th February 2025, Sugami Ward, Tokyo

As a result, he ultimately won his case at the Supreme Court in 2015. However, after the Abe assassination case, an anti-[UC](#) journalist announced in a TV program that Mr. Goto had simply been a social recluse (hikikomori), which meant that he had won the deprogramming [See editor's note 2 below] case by a false claim.

Mr. Goto [filed a defamation lawsuit](#). At the [first instance](#), he won, but at the second instance, the court [reversed the ruling](#) based on the testimonies of the very defendants of the deprogramming [See editor's note 2 below] case - the deprogrammers.

It can be said that Japan as a whole is completely dominated by false impressions of the [UC](#). This problem has even influenced actions in a neighboring country. Under the prevailing social climate that "cults" must not be allowed to influence politics, even Mrs. [Hak Ja Han](#), the Co-Founder of the [UC](#), was [arrested](#) in South Korea.

Persecuting people who hold a certain faith based solely on manipulated impressions is like the Holocaust.

We sincerely request the protection of our human rights from the international community.

Thank you for your attention.

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[**Editor's note 1:** In Japan, the approval by the authorities for the [Unification Church](#) to change its name to [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) was given in 2015.]

[**Editor's note 2:** 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. Photo

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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Dr. Massimo Introvigne, here 16th June 2025. Photo: UPF

published a searing indictment in *Bitter Winter* of what he terms South Korea's "crisis of democracy". His article, "*Free Mother Han! Free Pastor*

magazine on human rights and religious freedom

Son! Confronting South Korea's Crisis of Democracy", is both a call to conscience and a meticulous documentation of human rights violations taking place in a nation once celebrated as a model of democratic governance in Asia.

Introvigne focuses on the **arbitrary detention of two religious figures** – **Dr. Hak Ja Han**, the spiritual leader of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU)*, and **Pastor Son Hyun-bo** (손현보) of Busan's Segyero Church (세계로교회 – literally: To the World Church) – whose cases, he argues, expose a dangerous erosion of due process, religious liberty, and political freedom in South Korea.

A Democracy in Peril

Introvigne opens with a deeply human moment: the message of **Chance Son**, a son worried about his father's deteriorating health in prison,

"My family went for a 10-minute visitation earlier today, my dad has caught the flu, and his voice is almost gone. He won't be able to get a prescription and medicine until about 10 days later. Please pray that his health doesn't get worse."



Chance Son in September 2025. Screenshot from video by FFWPU



Pastor Son Hyun-bo, here August 2025. Photo: *Bitter Winter*

The image is poignant and strategic – it reminds readers that the issue at stake is not abstract politics but the **suffering of real individuals**. Pastor Son, Introvigne explains, has been jailed not for any proven crime, but for exercising his constitutional right to encourage civic participation. His sermons, which reportedly urged congregants to support candidates sympathetic to his values, have been treated as "illegal electioneering". This criminalization of religious speech,

Introvigne suggests, signals a chilling shift from democratic pluralism to **ideological persecution**.

The heart of Introvigne's article, however, centers on **Mother Hak Ja Han**, the revered co-founder and spiritual leader of the *Family Federation*. Her detention, he asserts, is emblematic of a broader campaign to dismantle her **movement** through a blend of legal manipulation and psychological pressure. He documents in stark detail her **grueling interrogations** – nearly 25 hours over two weeks – despite her advanced age and frail health. These tactics, he writes, are not a "search for truth" but "psychological attrition", designed to break the will of a religious leader through exhaustion and humiliation.

Legal Pretext, Political Motive

Introvigne's critique of the Korean authorities is scathing yet precise. He dismantles the prosecution's claims that **Mother Han** misused *Federation* resources for political purposes, noting that



Logo of the People Power Party (PPP), currently the main opposition party in South Korea.

no credible evidence has been presented linking her personally to any wrongdoing. Even the core allegation – that the *Family Federation* orchestrated mass political enrollment into the *People Power Party* (PPP) – has collapsed, with inflated figures quietly revised downward from **110,000 to 3,500**, according to media reports. For Introvigne, this unraveling case illustrates not the impartial operation of justice but a **politically motivated witch hunt** targeting a **faith community** unpopular with certain segments of Korean society and government.

He contextualizes this within international legal frameworks, invoking the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*



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and the [UN Standard Minimum Rules](#)

– commonly known as the **Tokyo Rules** and **Nelson Mandela Rules**.

South Korea, as a signatory to these instruments, is bound to ensure that pre-trial detention is exceptional, not punitive; that interrogation is humane; and that detainees receive adequate medical care. The treatment of [Mother Han](#) and Pastor Son, Introvigne argues, violates all these standards. In denying medical access to Pastor Son and subjecting [Mother Han](#) to excessive questioning, South Korea is **betraying its democratic credentials** and breaching its **international human rights obligations**.



A Wider Crackdown on Conscience

Importantly, Introvigne situates these arrests within a **larger pattern of democratic backsliding**. He notes that protesters against the government's pro-China policies and critics of President Lee's administration have faced intimidation and surveillance. The same state apparatus that once safeguarded pluralism now appears to be turning against dissenters of all kinds – religious, civic, and political. The legal system, he warns, is being “weaponized against dissent”. The implication is grave: when religion, speech, and assembly are criminalized, democracy ceases to be a living reality and becomes merely a façade.

Transnational Repression

Introvigne also exposes the **international dimension** of this campaign. He points to the **coordinated pressure between Japan and South Korea** to weaken or destroy the [Family Federation](#). Japan's March 2025 [court ruling](#) ordering the dissolution of the [Federation](#) – currently



China, North Korea, South Korea, Japan.
Public domain image. Cropped

[under appeal](#) – was widely condemned by human rights experts and the United Nations for violating freedom of religion and association. Now, South Korea appears to be following suit through judicial harassment and arbitrary detention. In this sense, the persecution of [Mother Han](#) is not an isolated domestic issue but part of a **regional pattern of religious repression**, with chilling implications for all faith-based organizations in East Asia.

A Call to Action

Throughout his essay, Introvigne's tone oscillates between legal analysis and moral outrage. His conclusion – “Silence is complicity” – is a direct challenge to the international community, including the United Nations and global human rights NGOs. He demands a firm response: investigation, condemnation, and advocacy. The slogan “**Free Mother Han! Free Pastor Son!**” is not mere rhetoric but a moral imperative, encapsulating the defense of **freedom of religion**, **freedom of conscience**, and the **rule of law** itself.

For



Is South Korea copying China? here, from a Falun Dafa parade in Berlin in 2007, portraying persecution of Falun Gong members in China. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 2.0 Gen

activists supporting the [Family Federation](#) and religious liberty, Introvigne's article offers more than a report – it provides a **framework for mobilization**. It underscores the necessity of **international solidarity** among believers and human rights defenders. The cases of [Mother Han](#) and Pastor Son highlight that religious persecution can arise even in advanced democracies when governments allow ideology and expedience to override justice.

and experiences to overcome justice.

Why It Matters

What makes Introvigne's analysis particularly powerful is its recognition that the persecution of one faith endangers all. The erosion of due process for unpopular religious minorities sets a precedent that can later be used against anyone. If an 82-year-old spiritual leader can be interrogated for 25 hours and a pastor jailed for urging citizens to vote their conscience, then **the democratic foundations of South Korea itself are at risk**. This is not merely a crisis of two individuals – it is a **crisis of principle**.

Conclusion

Dr. Massimo Introvigne's "[Free Mother Han! Free Pastor Son!](#)" is both a warning and a rallying cry. It exposes the profound moral contradiction of a democracy that persecutes religious figures under the guise of law, and it demands a global response grounded in compassion, justice, and truth. For those who stand for **religious freedom, human dignity, and the sanctity of conscience**, the message is clear: now is the time to speak out, organize, and defend the rights of all who suffer for their faith.

To remain silent in the face of such injustice is to permit the slow death of democracy itself. To speak, to act, and to demand justice is to affirm the universal truth that **faith is not a crime – and freedom is not negotiable**.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: From a prayer vigil in front of Seoul Detention Center 4th October 2025. Screenshot from video by [FFWPU](#)

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