

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Is Japan's Dissolution of Family Fed Legal?

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December 30, 2025



Seishiro Sugihara, former professor at Musashino Women's University and expert on issues of freedom of religion and constitutional law



Legal expert warns that the State's guidelines rely on unverified and time-barred claims as he questions the constitutionality of the dissolution framework

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

[Interview Feature] The Dark Side of the "Special Measures Law" Targeting the Family Federation (Part 1)

Suspicious of Unconstitutionality in the Guidelines for the Liquidation of the Religious Organization

Part 1 of Interview with Seishiro Sugihara, former professor at Musashino Women's University and expert on issues of freedom of religion and constitutional law
by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)



From a campaign to protest the dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#), held in front of Shibuya Station in Tokyo on December 27, 2025

On 20th October, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), with the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) in mind, formulated the "Guidelines on the Liquidation of Designated Religious Corporations" (hereinafter, the "Guidelines"). While the immediate appeal against the Tokyo District Court's [dissolution order decision](#) remain pending before the Tokyo High Court, the Guidelines were prepared in anticipation of a scenario

in which the High Court upholds the lower court's decision. However, Seishiro Sugihara (杉原誠四郎), former professor at Musashino Women's University, points out that there are serious problems with both the ongoing legal procedures toward the liquidation of the [religious organization](#) and the newly issued Guidelines intended to supplement them.

– I understand that you submitted a public comment to MEXT regarding the draft Guidelines. What were your main points?



[Family Federation](#) members marching in a demonstration to protest the dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#) - August 31, 2025, Kita Ward, Osaka, Japan

Even if a [dissolution order](#) has not yet been finalized, it is, in principle, permissible to establish guidelines for liquidation procedures in the event that such an [order](#) becomes final, so long as procedures toward dissolution are already underway.

However, to provide compensation for damages – described as "specific unlawful acts, etc." – from the assets of the [religious corporation](#) slated for dissolution, based solely on damage reports submitted by individuals who self-identify as victims, would infringe upon property rights guaranteed by the Constitution and may therefore constitute a constitutional violation.

– What exactly does the term "specific unlawful acts, etc." refer to?

"Specific unlawful acts, etc." is defined in Article 2, Paragraph 2 of the Act on Special Provisions for the Operations of the Japan Legal Support Center to Facilitate the Prompt and Smooth Relief of Victims of Specific Unlawful Acts, and Special Provisions on the Disposal and Management of Assets by Religious Corporations (hereinafter, the "Special Measures Law"), which was enacted on 13th December 2023, promulgated on 20th

December, and came into force on 19th March of the following year.



Believers rallying in Osaka City to protest the dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#) - June 29, 2025, Kita Ward, Osaka City

The law defines the term as "unlawful acts that constituted the cause for a specific dissolution order request, acts that serve as grounds for the rescission of contract applications, other acts, and acts of the same kind, committed by the subject [religious corporation](#) or its believers or other related persons." In other words, at the core are the alleged unlawful acts that prompted MEXT to request a dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#).

However, the "harm" cited in the damage reports that MEXT treated as grounds for dissolution consists merely of damage claims made by individuals identifying themselves as victims. These do not represent acts that have been legally established as unlawful on the part of the [religious organization](#).

– What do you mean by that?

MEXT applied for a dissolution order on the grounds that, over a period of approximately 43 years – from around 1980 to around 2023 – the [Family Federation](#) caused harm to just under 1,560 victims, with total damages exceeding 20.4 billion yen [ca. 130.5 million US dollars]. In other words, it asserted that there were 1,560 victims and approximately 20.4 billion yen in damages resulting from unlawful acts by the [organization](#).

However, this assertion contains two major problems. First, it completely ignores one of the fundamental principles of the rule of law: the statute of limitations. An "unlawful act" refers to conduct that causes harm to others in violation of existing laws and regulations. Under Article 724 of the Civil Code, the legal effect of such acts expires after 20 years from the time of the act, at which point compensation can no longer be claimed. To invoke alleged harm from unlawful acts committed as far back as 43 years ago is to utterly disregard this principle.

– What is the second problem?

MEXT claimed that the [Family Federation](#) engaged in unlawful acts that were intolerable in their maliciousness, continuity, and organizational nature. However, in 2009, the [Family Federation](#) issued a compliance declaration [See editor's note below] instructing its organization to refrain from donation solicitation practices that had drawn social criticism – such as "unverified spiritual sales-style proselytization", "proselytization linking donations to ancestral karma", and "excessive donation solicitation" – which had previously been recognized as unlawful acts by the [organization](#) or its related parties.



A believer appeals to the public about the situation of the [Family Federation](#) in a busy shopping district - June 29, 2025, Matsuyama City, Ehime Prefecture, Japan

After that, only one case was recognized by the courts as constituting an unlawful act (one plaintiff, with damages awarded of approximately 4.76 million yen [ca. 30,000 US dollars]), and there have been no such cases at all since 2015. Accordingly, there is no continuity, and at present the [organization](#) is a religious corporation without legal issues.

Despite this, MEXT filed its dissolution order request by including, as "damage" from unlawful acts,

lawsuits in which no unlawful acts were legally recognized – even at the first-instance level – and for which settlement payments had already been completed. These included in-court settlements (419 people, approximately 5.7 billion yen [ca. 36.5 million US dollars]) and out-of-court settlements (971 people, approximately 12.5 billion yen [ca. 80 million US dollars]). In other words, the figures of 1,560 victims and approximately 20.4 billion yen [ca. 130.5 million US dollars] in damages were nothing more than a manipulation of impressions.

– MEXT also submitted 261 written statements from former members to the Tokyo District Court.

A dissolution request must be based on current circumstances. MEXT should have been fully aware that damage statements alone from people claiming to be victims are insufficient to establish unlawful acts. Presumably, in an effort to gather new evidence, it focused on collecting damage reports. However, it has already become clear that these reports not only lack legal recognition as unlawful acts but also contain numerous false statements.

In this way, the unlawful acts (specific unlawful acts) cited by MEXT as grounds for the dissolution order request reach back into the past while ignoring statutes of limitation and involve conduct that can no longer be held legally accountable. After the compliance declaration [See editor's note below] – particularly since 2015 – there have been no cases that have gone through procedures resulting in legally established findings. To nevertheless include such matters as subjects for compensation is inconceivable in a state governed by the rule of law. The Guidelines must therefore be fundamentally revised.

[Editor's note 1: 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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order to ensure balanced and accurate reporting.

had their office raided by prosecutors for publishing an interview sensitive to the authorities.

1. Facts Regarding the Hosting of an International Organization

[Reported Content]

"It has been confirmed that the incumbent Gapyeong County Governor has been actively cooperating in the rather absurd Unification Church project to host an international organization, a UN Secretariat, inside the Unification Church palace."

[Facts]

This claim is not true. The international organization established and currently operating at the relevant facility is the ISC Secretariat (Inter-Parliamentary Speaker's Conference). The "UN Secretariat" mentioned in the report is an incorrect designation and does not reflect reality. It appears that the report failed to verify the basic name of the organization in question.

We request that accurate fact-checking be conducted when reporting on a private organization that has made large-scale investments for public-interest purposes.

2. Facts Regarding Allegations of "Special Treatment and Waste of Taxpayer Money"

[Reported Content]

"There are indications that Gapyeong County, a local government, sought to support a Unification Church project aimed at turning Gapyeong, Gyeonggi Province, into a holy site. It has been revealed that the county is even pursuing designation as a special zone to provide various preferential measures such as financial support and regulatory relaxation. In short, it appears that Gapyeong County is preparing to pour public resources into a project being promoted under the direction of Unification Church leader Hak Ja Han (한학자)."

"This is an unprecedented allegation of church-state collusion, in which the public system of local autonomy has operated for the convenience of a specific religious organization."

[Facts]

As of the end of June 2025, Gapyeong County has a population of only 63,494. A review of annual population trends clearly shows that Gapyeong is classified as a "population-declining region." Under these circumstances, it is an essential administrative decision for the local government's survival to cooperate with private entities that have the capacity to invest in order to revitalize the regional economy.

The tourism cluster and planned development special zone being promoted by Gapyeong County are lawful regional development projects carried out in accordance with relevant legislation. The participation of HJ Group and ITC Korea, which are pursuing projects in the Gapyeong area, should be understood as a public-private partnership (PPP) model chosen by the local government in a situation where alternative investment options are limited. Labeling this as "special treatment" amounts to a wholesale denial of administrative efforts aimed at regional development.

In



HJ Magnolia International Medical Center in Gapyeong, South Korea.
Photo: HJ Magnolia International Medical Center

particular, HJ Magnolia International Medical Center, established in 2003, operates the only emergency room and obstetrics department in Gapyeong, a medically underserved area. Over the past 22 years, it has invested a total of KRW 199.6 billion (ca. 138 million US dollars) – an annual average of KRW 9.1 billion (ca. 6.3 million US dollars) – in private funds. Despite operating at a loss, the hospital has maintained a 365-day emergency room, treated 6,634 emergency patients in 2024 alone, and handled 2,277 childbirths. It has faithfully fulfilled its role in public healthcare, including receiving commendations from the Governor of Gyeonggi Province for disaster recovery support.

While the report claims that public funds are being poured into the project, the reality is that private entities are bearing financial losses to invest in a medically vulnerable region, thereby protecting the lives and health of Gapyeong residents. We request balanced reporting that reflects this reality.

3. Facts Regarding the "Sanctification" Allegations

[Reported Content]

"The area where Gapyeong County plans to develop a tourism cluster exactly coincides with the Unification Church's Garden of Eden – from the vicinity of the HJ Cheonju Cheonbo Training Center, where Unification Church members pray, to the area near the HJ Global Art Center, which the church uses for large-scale events."

Submit

“At the very front, there are



HJ Global Art Center, previously Cheongshim Peace World Center. Photo (2018): FFWPU

instructions from [True Mother Hak Ja Han](#). It states that the *Cheonwon complex* must be made into a religious and cultural holy site like the Vatican in Rome.”

[Facts]

Gapyeong County, with a population of 63,494, faces the risk of regional extinction. In this context, it is a natural responsibility of the local government to pursue regional growth by cooperating with private entities capable of investing capital. Utilizing existing infrastructure is a managerial decision intended to enhance investment efficiency.

Gapyeong's tourism strategy has focused on developing stay-type tourism by connecting fragmented tourist destinations (such as Nami Island, Jarasum Island, and Petite France) via water routes. For more than a decade, the project failed to move forward due to uncertain business viability. It is now being implemented through cooperation among multiple private operators – including HJ Group, Gapyeong Cruise, Cheongpyeong Leisure, and Nami Island – while minimizing the county's financial burden through investments such as the construction of eco-friendly electric cruise ships totaling KRW 40 billion (ca. 27.5 million US dollars).

Furthermore, it falls under the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion for a [religious organization](#) to hold a vision of developing its facilities into globally recognized religious and cultural landmarks. Linking a private vision of building cultural assets – such as the Vatican in Rome or Mecca in Saudi Arabia – to separate allegations is inconsistent with the facts, and we ask that this point be reconsidered.

4. Facts Regarding the Interview Content

[Reported Content]

“The county governor admitted that he did what the [Unification Church](#) told him to do.”

[Facts]

The



On-the-ground [Family Federation](#) volunteers in Gapyeong, South Korea after the floods 20th July 2025. Photo: FFWPU

“scenario” referenced by Governor Seo Tae-won (서태원) referred to the event operation “protocol”. During the questioning process, the reporter reframed this as “doing as instructed”, which led the response in that direction. We request reporting that considers context so that the true intent of the interviewee’s remarks is accurately conveyed.

5. Opportunity for Rebuttal

In the course of producing this report, Newstapa did not provide the [Family Federation](#), as the party concerned, with any formal inquiry or opportunity to present a rebuttal. Under the *Press Arbitration Act* and broadcast deliberation regulations, guaranteeing the right of reply is a fundamental duty of the media. We request that, in future reporting, the positions of the parties involved be duly heard.

Closing Statement

This project represents a cooperative effort between the public and private sectors for the future of Gapyeong. We respectfully ask for the media's attention and cooperation so that legitimate public-private partnerships aimed at regional development and improving the quality of life for Gapyeong residents are reported based on accurate facts.

Should further verification be required, please feel free to contact us at any time.

29th December 2025,

External Relations Headquarters
Korea Branch of the
[Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)

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Featured image above: Part of the Cheonwon Complex of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), built in Songsan-ri, Seorak-myeon, Gapyeong-gun, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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