

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japan's High Court OKs Dissolution of Family Federation

Knut Holdhus
March 4, 2026



Fukumoto, legal advisor to the Family Federation in Japan, responding to media inquiries following the Tokyo High Court decision on March 4, 2026



First case ever of civil-code grounds used to dissolve religious organization as its appeal is rejected in what many perceive as an orchestrated campaign undertaken by the state as a whole

Tokyo, 4th March 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Tokyo High Court Upholds Dissolution Order for Family Federation;

Religious Corporation Status Revoked, Liquidation Proceedings to Begin

by editorial staff of [Sekai Nippo](#)

In the immediate appeal proceedings regarding the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's request for a dissolution order against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the Unification Church), the Tokyo High Court - Presiding Judge Motoko Miki (三木素子) - ruled on 4th March to uphold the [dissolution order](#) issued by the Tokyo District Court and dismissed the [Family Federation's](#) immediate [appeal](#). This marks the first case in which a dissolution order has been based on unlawful acts under the Civil Code.



Headquarters of the [Family Federation](#) in Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan

The [religious organization](#) plans to file a special appeal with the Supreme Court. However, as a result of the Tokyo High Court's decision, the organization will lose its status as a religious corporation and liquidation procedures will commence.

In response to the ruling, the [Family Federation](#) issued the following statement:

"We are deeply concerned and cannot help but feel profound shame that our believers may be labeled as members of an antisocial group and forced to live in fear of discrimination and

prejudice in Japanese society, concealing themselves in order to survive. We will never accept this unjust judicial decision and will continue fighting - including by filing a special appeal - to defend freedom of religion."

Regarding the request for a dissolution order, the Tokyo District Court [ruled in March of last year](#) that the [organization](#) had caused "damage on a massive scale" and ordered its dissolution. The [religious organization](#) filed an [immediate appeal](#), objecting to the district court's fact-finding based on presumptions - such as the assumption that "a considerable degree of hidden damage likely exists" - as well as alleging [fabrication of evidence](#) by the Ministry of Education.



The building housing Tokyo High Court and Tokyo District Court (2012)

During the appeal proceedings, the [Family Federation](#) argued that damages had sharply declined following its 2009 "Compliance Declaration" [See editor's note 1 below] and maintained that there was no necessity for a dissolution order. The hearings were conducted behind closed doors and concluded in November of last year.

The full statement released by the Family Federation of Japan is as follows:

"Today, the Tokyo High Court issued a decision approving the dissolution order against [our religious corporation](#). This can be said to fulfill, as an undertaking of the state as a whole [See editor's note 2 below], the desire

of the terrorist who assassinated former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三). The perpetrator is said to hold a grudge against the [Family Federation](#) and sought to inflict damage upon it. This judicial decision will not only incite new acts of political terrorism but will also undermine Japan's credibility in the international community, leaving a stain on our nation's history.

[Our corporation](#) strongly requested that the High Court conduct appropriate proceedings based on facts and evidence. However, this decision constitutes an unjust ruling reached with a predetermined conclusion, lacking factual and evidentiary support and contrary to the principle of adjudication based on evidence.

Furthermore, with the cooperation of independent attorneys, [our corporation](#) has been sincerely engaged in providing compensation to those claiming to have suffered 'damage.' Now that the [corporation](#) is to be dissolved, such compensation efforts can no longer continue, which we find extremely regrettable.

Above all, we are deeply concerned and filled with shame that, as a result of this decision, our believers may be branded as 'members of an antisocial group' and forced to live in fear of discrimination and prejudice within Japanese society, concealing themselves in order to survive. We will never accept this unjust judicial decision and will continue to fight - including by filing a special appeal - to defend freedom of religion."

[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](#).]

[Editor's note 2: In political discourse, the Japanese expression 国家ぐるみ (kokka gurumi) is rarely neutral. It carries strong connotations of institutional coordination and suggests involvement beyond a single agency - implying courts, ministries, police, legislature, etc. The expression implies top-down orchestration and centralized direction or political intent rather than independent bureaucratic or judicial action.

The phrase is often used in accusations of state repression, political persecution, cover-ups, systemic corruption. It frames the act as not just mistaken, but as a structural act of the state itself.

In the above text, the writers are asserting that the Tokyo High Court verdict is not merely a judicial ruling. It represents the state acting collectively. The state is therefore portrayed as fulfilling a terrorist's objective.

This dramatically escalates the accusation. Instead of saying that the court made an unfair decision, it implies that the Japanese state apparatus as a whole is enabling terrorism's goals."

That framing politicizes the judiciary, undermines claims of judicial independence, and portrays the organization as a victim of systemic persecution.]

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March 2, 2026 • Knut Holdhus

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A Defining moment for the rule of law in Japan: Tokyo High Court's historic test in the dissolution case against the Family Federation



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From a demonstration against the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#), Shinjuku, Tokyo 1st March 2026. Photo: FFWPU

The [Tokyo High Court](#) will issue its decision on 4th March regarding the request for a dissolution order against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)). This carries historic significance, as it calls into question the court's conviction and integrity as a "guardian of the law" in upholding the rule of law, a fundamental principle of democratic states. A strict judgment based solely on the law – without pandering to the mass media or public opinion – is required.

Dissolution Order Based on "Assumed" Damage

"Freedom of religion" is the foundation of a free society. Judicial decisions affecting this core human right also influence international confidence in Japan's human rights awareness. This matter is grave because it concerns not only the fate of a single religious organization, but also the future of our country.

Regarding large donations made by [Family Federation](#) believers, the [Tokyo District Court](#) in March of last year issued the first-ever [dissolution order](#) based on civil torts. In response, the organization immediately [filed an appeal](#), arguing that treating civil cases as grounds for dissolution infringes upon religious freedom, and noting that since issuing its compliance declaration [[See editor's note 1 below](#)] in 2009, no major civil-law problems have arisen.

The [district court decision](#) identified 179 individuals – based on civil judgments, settlements, and out-of-court agreements – as victims whose damages became apparent after the compliance declaration [[See editor's note 1 below](#)]. However, among these, there was only one court judgment involving a case that occurred after the declaration . Given that few disputes have arisen in recent years, is it not unreasonable to order dissolution?



From a demonstration against the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#), Shinjuku, Tokyo 1st March 2026. Photo: FFWPU

Nevertheless, the district court concluded that even after the

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declaration [See editor's note 1 below], "it can be assumed that a considerable number of damages that have not yet surfaced exist," and determined that the [organization](#) "clearly committed acts in violation of laws and regulations that significantly [harm public welfare](#)." Inferring damage in this way appears to depart from the principle of adjudication based on evidence and factual findings.

Among those claiming damages are many former believers who were subjected to coercive faith-breaking (deprogramming) [See editor's note 2 below] by groups opposed to the [religious organization](#). In addition, suspicions have emerged that some written statements submitted by the *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* contain [fabrications](#). The *Tokyo District Court* ignored these issues. It can only be said that the [decision](#) was made with dissolution as a foregone conclusion. The [religious organization's](#) immediate [appeal](#) was therefore natural.

It is also necessary to keep in mind that the request for a dissolution order began moving forward due to political motives. In October 2022, following the shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄), who was being criticized by the media over connections between the *Liberal Democratic Party* and an organization friendly to the [religious organization](#), [changed the legal interpretation](#) to include civil cases as grounds for dissolution – something that had not previously qualified.

The UN Human Rights Committee, the treaty body for the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, which Japan has ratified, had long [expressed concern](#) about the ambiguity of the definition of "public welfare." [Kishida's reinterpretation](#) demonstrated that those concerns were not unfounded.

During the recent *House of Representatives* election, it became clear that China attempted to manipulate public opinion [by using X \(formerly Twitter\)](#) to link the "former [Unification Church](#)" with Sanae Takaichi (高市早苗). It exploited the worsening image of the [religious organization](#) following the [district court's decision](#). Japan's [dissolution order](#) has also been used by China to justify its religious repression of groups such as the Uyghurs and Falun Gong.

A Matter Concerning Japan's Prestige

Under international human rights standards, the state has an obligation to protect religious minorities that are prone to [social exclusion](#) by the majority. It should not be forgotten that the High Court's decision also concerns Japan's prestige in the international community.

See also "[Loss of Appeal Part of Systemic Persecution](#)"

Featured image above: From a demonstration against the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#), Shinjuku, Tokyo 1st March 2026. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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[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: [Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

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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