

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Masaichi Hori Prepares Supreme Court Appeal

Knut Holdhus
March 8, 2026



Masaichi Hori, former president of former Japanese [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Statement issued after Tokyo High Court upholds dissolution of organization of large religious minority as preparations are being made for last resort special appeal to Supreme Court

Tokyo, 5th March 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Former Family Federation President Masaichi Hori Issues Statement Following Tokyo High Court Decision on Dissolution Order

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

On 4th March, the [Tokyo High Court decided](#) to uphold the [first instance ruling](#) of the Tokyo District Court ordering the dissolution of the religious corporation [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)).



Japanese followers of the [Family Federation](#) gathering in a private home 8th March, on the first Sunday after the [Tokyo High Court ruling](#) on 4th March 2026

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In response, Masaichi Hori (堀 正一), who had served as president of the [Family Federation](#), released a statement on 5th March in his personal capacity. In it, Hori declared that the decision violates the

principle of [trial based on evidence](#) and that preparations [See editor's note below] are underway to file a special appeal to the Supreme Court.

He also stated that he will respond sincerely to [liquidation procedures](#) and called for measures to ensure that human rights violations against believers do not occur. Horii lost his position as president when the [liquidation process](#) began following the [High Court's decision](#).

The full text of the statement is as follows.

Statement Following the High Court Decision

As you know, at 11:00 a.m. on 4th March, the Tokyo High Court issued [its decision](#) and dismissed the [Family Federation's appeal](#). It is extremely regrettable that the [Family Federation's](#) arguments were not accepted in the appeal proceedings.

In particular, regarding the [original decision](#) of the Tokyo District Court, although it deprives the believers of the preeminent human right of freedom of religion, the court readily endorsed and retroactively applied [arbitrary changes](#) to long-established legal interpretations. This constitutes a [violation of both the Constitution](#) and international law.

Furthermore, we argued before the High Court that arbitrary conjecture [not based on facts or evidence](#) violates the principle of adjudication based on evidence.



In addition, in October last year, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a [press release](#) warning that the [Tokyo District Court's decision](#) violated international law. However, the Tokyo High Court rejected the above arguments and issued [its decision](#) while completely ignoring the warnings from the international community.

Moreover, since 2022 the [Family Federation](#) has implemented a number of church reforms, including obtaining donation confirmation forms and establishing certified counselors. After the Act on the Prevention of Improper Solicitation of Donations was enacted in 2023, there have been no cases in which the [organization](#) received recommendations or orders from the Consumer Affairs Agency.



[No more access to its cemeteries](#). Here, the "Central Japan Cemetery" which spreads across a mountain area in Suzuka City, Mie Prefecture

Recently, through [settlements with parties in group lawsuits](#) and through a [compensation committee](#), the [organization](#) has also addressed claims from many individuals alleging damages, even beyond what is required by law.

Despite such efforts toward reform and improvement, the [dissolution order of the District Court](#) was [upheld](#) primarily on the basis of settlements and agreements, without recognizing these reforms and without concrete evidence of legal violations. This is deeply

regrettable. After consulting promptly with our attorneys, we intend to proceed with preparations for an appeal to the Supreme Court.

At the same time, on 4th March the court appointed a liquidator to oversee the [liquidation process](#). We intend to respond sincerely to the liquidation procedures.

Unfortunately, following the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe and also when the [District Court issued the dissolution order](#), numerous [human rights violations](#) occurred against members and their families, including [discrimination](#), [prejudice](#), [defamation](#), and [harassment](#). We sincerely ask everyone to ensure that such [violations against our members](#) and their families do not occur in the future.

Furthermore, we are an organization that sincerely believes in and follows [God](#), the Heavenly Parent, and works to realize God's will. Therefore, even if our corporate legal status is [denied](#), there will be absolutely no change in our commitment to continue religious activities aimed at fulfilling Heaven's will.

Rather, taking this event as an opportunity, we intend to make even greater efforts to let many people

know the truth about our activities. While continuing missionary and evangelistic work, we will strive to earn the trust of society more broadly.

5th March 2026

Masaichi Hori (堀 正一)

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See also [Social Ostracism for Believers After Legal Loss](#)

See also [If Civil Liability Is Enough, Is Any Faith Safe?](#)

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[Editor's note: The phrasing 準備する (junbi suru - prepare) in the Japanese original text suggests that Hori intends to organize or initiate the filing to the Supreme Court, likely with lawyers or on behalf of interested parties (e.g., believers).]

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UN Submission Protests Mass Closure Of Churches

March 7, 2026 • Knut Holdhus



UN submission raises concerns over Japan's dissolution of the Family Federation, its rapid liquidation, and coordinated shutdown of 260 churches

On 4th March 2026, French international human rights lawyer Patricia Duval submitted a [statement](#) to the *NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion and Belief* at the United Nations Office in Geneva. [Her declaration](#) was prepared ahead of a



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Declaration was prepared ahead of a meeting with the *United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief*, Nazila Ghanea [See [editor's note below](#)]. Duval's [statement](#) was published in the leading online human rights magazine *Bitter Winter* on 6th March under the headline [Japan: Hundreds of Thousands of Unification Church Believers Deprived of Places of Worship](#).



UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom: Nazila Ghanea. Photo: GiovannaKa / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#)

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Concerns About Religious Freedom in Japan

The [statement](#) raises serious concerns about the impact of a [court decision](#) in Japan, on the same day, that ordered the dissolution of the religious organization commonly known as the [Unification Church](#), formally called the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#). According to the submission, **the way this decision was implemented has had immediate and far-reaching consequences for the ability of hundreds of thousands of believers to practice their religion.**



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

The situation is particularly significant because Japan is a party to the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), an international treaty that protects fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of religion under Article 18. This [treaty](#) limits when

governments may restrict religious activity, allowing restrictions only under very narrow circumstances related to public safety, order, health, morals, or the rights of others.

The events that followed the [court decision](#) have raised questions among international observers about whether these [international legal obligations](#) have been respected.

Closure of Churches Across Japan

On the morning of 4th March, the *Tokyo High Court* announced its [decision](#) to uphold an [order](#) dissolving the [Family Federation](#) as a religious corporation. Immediately after the [ruling](#), the appointed liquidator, Hisashi Ito (伊藤尚), contacted the [Federation's](#) lead attorney, Nobuya Fukumoto (福本修也), to inform him that liquidation procedures would begin at once.

Within about an hour of the announcement, teams of lawyers accompanied by police officers reportedly [arrived simultaneously](#) at churches across Japan. Their mission was to explain the legal process of liquidation, take control of the buildings, and secure the organization's assets. Keys to the properties were confiscated, and the facilities were effectively closed.



Notification of closure, put up on 260 churches nationwide on 4th March 2026 by the Japanese authorities. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

This operation was carried out at approximately [260 church locations](#) nationwide. At the [organization's](#) headquarters in the Shibuya district of Tokyo, about twenty liquidators entered the building and shut it down. Staff members were reportedly told that they were no longer allowed to enter their workplace and were instructed to remain at home.

Members of the [religious organization](#) later stated that the scale

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and coordination of the operation suggested that preparations had been made well in advance. For example, a website dedicated to the liquidation process had already been created before the court issued its decision. The domain name for the site had been registered several weeks earlier, on 13th February, and several documents outlining liquidation procedures had already been uploaded.

According to one [Family Federation](#) member, the **rapid deployment of approximately one thousand lawyers and police officers across the country** gave the impression of a large-scale law-enforcement operation. The member noted that **this occurred despite assurances from government officials and courts that the dissolution of the [religious organization](#) as a legal entity would not interfere with the personal religious practices of its followers.**

In practice, however, the [closure](#) of all [Federation](#) buildings meant that many believers suddenly found themselves without any place to gather for worship or communal religious activity.

Legal Basis for the Dissolution

The dissolution order was originally issued by a [district court](#) and later [upheld on appeal](#). The courts based their decision primarily on civil lawsuits that had been filed over several decades by former members seeking damages.

In those cases, civil courts had concluded that certain activities by the [organization](#) violated “social norms” or “social appropriateness”. These judgments were then used as grounds to justify dissolving the [religious corporation](#).

Critics argue that this reasoning is problematic because the dissolution was **not based on criminal convictions but on civil liability claims connected to past disputes.**

Concerns Raised by United Nations Experts

Before the final decision was issued, four United Nations Special Rapporteurs [See editor's note below] expressed concern about the possible dissolution of the [religious organization](#). On 1st October 2025, they released a [public statement](#) warning that dissolving a religious organization based on the vague concept of “public welfare” would conflict with international human rights law.

In particular, they noted that Article 18(3) of the ICCPR allows restrictions on religious freedom only in very limited circumstances and requires governments to demonstrate that such restrictions are necessary and proportionate.

When the High Court eventually delivered its lengthy [ruling](#), it addressed the [concerns of the UN experts](#) only briefly.

The court argued that dissolving a religious corporation simply removes its legal status as an organization and does not legally prevent individuals from continuing to practice their religion.

However, critics argue that the immediate closure of all church



UN Special Rapporteur: Nina Romero. Photo: OHCHR / United Nations



UN Special Rapporteur: Farida Shaheed. Photo (2016): Wotancito / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int.](#) Cropped



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facilities suggests that the real-world consequences of the decision are much broader. **Without access to buildings, resources, and organizational structures, believers may find it extremely difficult to practice their religion collectively.**

The court also argued that actions considered civil wrongs under Japanese law – and deemed harmful to the public welfare – could be interpreted as falling within the categories of harm listed in Article 18(3), such as threats to public order or the rights of others.

A Broader Human Rights Debate

According to [Patricia Duval's statement](#), what she calls the Japanese authorities' "tautological and highly fallacious reasoning" creates a circular argument: because the court determined that the [organization](#) harmed the public welfare, the dissolution is therefore considered justified under international human rights standards.

From the perspective presented in the [statement](#), this approach risks undermining the strict safeguards that international law places on restrictions of religious freedom.

As a result, the case has become a subject of growing debate among legal experts and human rights advocates about the balance between protecting the public interest and safeguarding fundamental freedoms.

Patricia Duval ends her [statement](#) with clear words of warning,

"This [decision](#) constitutes a blatant violation of international law and shows profound contempt for international institutions and the human rights commitments that Japan pretended to join after World War II."

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Text: [Knut Holdhus](#), editor

Featured image above: French international human rights lawyer Patricia Duval in Tokyo 5th February 2025. She is a member of the Paris Bar Association, specializing in international human rights law. Earned a degree in public law from Sorbonne University. Has defended the rights of religious and faith minorities both in France and internationally, including at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), the Council of Europe (CE), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU), and the United Nations. Author of numerous academic papers on religion and freedom of belief. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

[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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