

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Head of Anti-FFWPU Hate Campaign Guilty

Knut Holdhus
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Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka, known for his extreme "anti-cult" activism

Guilty of defamation: Loss at Tokyo court for leading activist journalist campaigning against religious minority

BITTER WINTER In an article 3rd February 2025, international attorney Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹) reveals telling details and key background facts in a recent defamation case. It is the first lawsuit involving the [Family Federation](#) that has been favourable to the [movement](#) in the hostile climate after the 2022 Abe assassination. The article was published by [Bitter Winter](#), the international online magazine for religious freedom and human rights, with the headline "[Japan: Anti-Cult Journalist Eito Suzuki Found Guilty of Defamation](#)".



International Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama, here in December 2023

Nakayama takes us back to October 2023, when [Bitter Winter](#) reported that Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト), a Japanese journalist known for his extreme "anti-cult" activism, had been sued in Tokyo District Court for making false statements.



Toru Goto, member of [Family Federation](#) held captive for 12 years and 5 months by his family and professional faith-breakers who attempted to break his faith

Toru Goto (後藤徹), a believer of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), [sued Suzuki for defamation](#), claiming that Suzuki's articles and remarks had harmed Goto's reputation. The Tokyo District Court issued on 31st January 2025, a verdict that some of Suzuki's comments were defamatory. The judges ordered Suzuki to pay 110,000 yen (approximately \$710 USD) in damages. While the monetary compensation is relatively small, in line with typical awards for defamation cases involving social media in Japan, the real consequence for Suzuki is the guilty verdict itself.

According to Attorney Nakayama, Toru Goto's case is particularly significant due to his past experience. He was forcibly abducted and locked up by his relatives and faith-breakers for [twelve long years](#) and five months in an attempt to make him abandon his faith. Previous court rulings deemed the [faith-breaking](#) illegal, a decision ultimately upheld by the Supreme Court in 2015.

Nakayama points out that Suzuki - despite being fully aware of these legal findings - repeatedly characterized Goto as a "hikikomori", a Japanese term referring to individuals who voluntarily isolate themselves from society due to extreme social withdrawal or agoraphobia [See editor's note below].



Masumi Fukuda delivering a speech September 23, 2024 in Chuo Ward, Chiba City, Japan

Investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ) is known for her critical stance against the so-called "anti-cult movement" of Japan. When she confronted Suzuki in 2023 about his persistent derogatory remarks against Goto, he dismissively responded, "I couldn't care less." This attitude sparked widespread outrage on social media and prompted Goto to [file a defamation lawsuit](#) against Suzuki in October 2023.

In his [Bitter Winter](#) article, Nakayama explains that during the trial, Suzuki failed to provide any new evidence to support his claim that Goto was a voluntary recluse. All the materials Suzuki submitted had already been used in the 2015 case, which ended in Goto's favor. The Tokyo District Court determined that Suzuki's statements had unlawfully damaged Goto's social standing.

As Attorney Nakayama mentions, this ruling marks a milestone as the first legal victory for a member of the [Family Federation](#) since the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in 2022. Following Abe's death, Japan's "anti-cult movement"

gained significant influence, leading to widespread defamation and [social discrimination](#) against the [Family Federation](#).



Does an unspoken judicial bias exist, so that if you are perceived as a "cult", you'll lose?

This hostile climate ultimately prompted the government to [file a lawsuit seeking the dissolution](#) of the [religious organization](#), a case that remains pending in the Tokyo District Court. In the past two years, all rulings in cases involving the [Family Federation](#) and its affiliates - approximately ten cases - had been unfavorable to them. This has fueled speculation that an unspoken judicial bias exists, encapsulated in the phrase, "If you are a 'cult', you lose." Goto's victory, therefore, could signal a turning point against this prevailing tide of prejudice.

Nakayama emphasizes that the ruling's impact extends beyond Goto's personal vindication; it also undermines Suzuki's credibility. Since Abe's assassination, Suzuki has risen to prominence, leading a national campaign against the [Family Federation](#) and labeling it a "cult" responsible for the crime. His argument

hinges on two key points:

that the assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami (山上 徹也), was a victim of the [Family Federation](#) due to his mother's significant donations made out of religious devotion, and

that Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), under Abe, maintained close ties with the [Family Federation](#).

This narrative has, according to Tatsuki Nakayama, been embraced by left-wing parties seeking to challenge the LDP, as well as by "anti-cult organizations" such as the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales. Suzuki has been at the forefront of this politically charged movement, making his court loss particularly significant. His defeat could weaken the broader campaign against the [Family Federation](#) in Japan.

Following the ruling, Suzuki downplayed the outcome, claiming it was "almost a victory" for him due to the nominal damages awarded. This statement appears to be a strategic effort to reframe the loss, echoing tactics employed by European anti-cult activists who often declare victory even in cases they have lost. By continuing to spin the narrative in his favor, Suzuki reaffirms his role as an anti-cult activist rather than an impartial journalist - a role he has embraced more publicly since Abe's assassination.

Suzuki has announced his intention to appeal, arguing that "in-depth criticism shouldn't constitute defamation." However, his repeated assertion that Goto was a "hikikomori" (recluse) without any supporting evidence does not qualify as "in-depth criticism" but rather as slander and personal attack. The appeal case is expected to conclude by the summer of 2025, and its outcome will be closely watched as a potential further test of [judicial fairness in Japan](#)'s current climate of hostility toward the [Family Federation](#).

[Editor's note: Agoraphobia is an anxiety disorder characterized by an intense fear of situations where escape might be difficult or help may not be available if something goes wrong. People with agoraphobia often avoid places like crowded areas, public transportation, open spaces, or even leaving their homes.]

Text: Knut Holdhus

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Japan: Anti-Cult Journalist Eight Suzuki Found Guilty of Defamation

02/03/2025 TATSUKI NAKAYAMA

A+ | A-

Importing a typical attitude of European anti-cultists, Suzuki claims he "almost won" a case he lost. In this article, the attorney who defeated him explains why.

by Tatsu Nakayama



Eight Suzuki. Credits.

In October 2023, [Bitter Winter](#) reported that Japanese anti-cult journalist Eight Suzuki had been sued before the Tokyo District Court for false statements.

One of the lawsuits was filed by Toru Goto, a believer of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly the Unification Church), claiming that articles and comments by Suzuki had damaged his reputation. The Tokyo District Court ruled on 31 January, 2025 that part of Suzuki's comments constituted defamation. The court ordered Suzuki to pay 110,000 yen (US \$710) in compensation. The amount of damage is symbolic, but corresponds to the normal sums awarded in Japan in cases of defamation through social media. The real punishment is the verdict itself.

Toru Goto had been abducted and confined by his relatives and deprogrammers for twelve years and a half in a wicked attempt to force him to lose the faith. [Previous court rulings](#) held the deprogramming to be illegal, which was confirmed at the Supreme Court in 2015.

However, Suzuki, though knowing the whole court case, commented many times that Goto was just a "hikikomori," a term that in Japanese indicates a "shut-in," a recluse suffering of agoraphobia who voluntarily withdraws from society and remains for years in his room. When in 2023 [Masumi Fukuda](#), a journalist who is critic of the anti-cult movement in Japan, questioned Suzuki why he continued to insult Goto, the journalist bluntly answered "I couldn't care less." Such offensive attitude generated furious responses in social media, and made Goto file a defamation suit against Suzuki in October 2023.

In this suit, Suzuki could not submit any new evidence to prove that Goto was a "hikikomori" who voluntarily withdrew from society. All the arguments and documents produced by Suzuki were the ones already submitted in the previous case that ended in 2015 with Goto's victory. The Tokyo District Court held that Suzuki's remarks unlawfully damaged Goto's social reputation.

This victory by Goto is the first successful judgment for the Family Federation rendered after the assassination of ex-Prime Minister Abe in 2022. After the assassination, the anti-cult movement became almost omnipotent in Japan and the Family Federation was subject to nationwide slander and strong social discrimination, which brought the government to file a suit to dissolve the religious organization. This dissolution suit is now pending at the Tokyo District Court. Under the surge of such hostile atmosphere in Japan, all the judgments rendered in the last couple of years to the Family Federation and its associated entities (around ten cases) were unfavorable to them. Under such circumstances, it has been argued that in Japanese courts there is an "unwritten rule" that "If you are a cult, you lose." I wish Goto's victory over Suzuki could become a threshold to make the current tide change.

wish Goto's victory over Suzuki could become a threshold to make the wrong tide change.



Toru Goto after his long non-voluntary confinement.

That this judgment attacks the credibility of Suzuki is also significant. After the Abe assassination, Suzuki became very popular and led the national campaign against the Family Federation calling it a "cult" that caused the crime against Abe to be committed. Suzuki's argument is that (i) the assassin Tetsuya Yamagami, whose mother is a believer of the Family Federation who donated significant money based on her devout faith, is a "victim" of the Family Federation and (ii) the ruling party in Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has historically maintained under Abe an intimate connection with the Family Federation. This argument by Suzuki was welcomed by both the left-wing parties who attacks the LDP and anti-cult organizations such as the [National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales](#). Suzuki has acted as a national leader of the partisan attack against the Family Federation. The leader's defeat in court would hopefully weaken this partisan campaign in Japan.

Following the ruling, Suzuki has commented that the ruling was "almost victorious" for him given the nominal damages. This is just propaganda, and it seems Suzuki has learned from European anti-cultists the dubious art of **systematically claiming** they won cases they in fact lost. By making such propaganda, Suzuki continues to prove his main job is as an anti-cult activist though after the Abe assassination he became famous as a journalist. He expressed his intention to appeal this case by saying, "In-depth criticism shouldn't constitute defamation." However, humiliating a 12-year-confined victim by calling him "hikikomori" or voluntary recluse without showing any evidence is not "in-depth" criticism but slander and offense. The appeal case is expected to conclude in the summer of 2025.

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