

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's Dissolution of FFWPU Condemned at IRF Freedom Summit

Knut Holdhus
February 7, 2025



A panel discussion on the Japanese government's request for an order to disband the former Unification Church at the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit held in Washington on 5th February 2025



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Japan's dissolution request against religious minority draws strong condemnation at Washington DC religious freedom summit

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Expectation for Trump's "Pressure"

Request for Dissolution of Family Federation Discussed at International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington, D.C.

by Yosuke Yamazaki (山崎 洋介)



Katrina Lantos Swett speaking at the IRF Summit in Washington DC Feb. 25, 2025

[Washington DC] The International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit, aimed at promoting religious freedom worldwide, began on 4th February 2025 in Washington, D.C., for a two-day session. During a dinner event, former high-ranking officials voiced concerns that religious freedom was being violated in relation to the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), which the Japanese government has requested to be dissolved. Many attendees expressed expectations for the Trump administration's response to this issue.

Katrina Lantos Swett, a co-chair of the summit and former chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), expressed concern during a panel discussion about the Japanese government's handling of the [Family Federation](#). She

stated that Japan appears to be abandoning the rule of law and equality under the law, which are fundamental to democracy, driven by an obsessive desire to attack a religious community.

She pointed out that Trump's administration has shown a willingness to exert maximum pressure to achieve policy goals, stating, "It may not always be polite, but it can yield results." She further

emphasized her expectation that the Trump administration would apply strong pressure on Japan in defense of religious freedom.

See [Katrina Lantos Swett's remarks](#) at the panel



Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives in the American Congress 1995-1999, here delivering a video message to the IRF Summit in Washington DC Feb. 5, 2025

Additionally, former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich delivered a video message referring to the U.S. State Department's [2023 annual report on religious freedom](#), which pointed out that Japan's October 2023 request for dissolution was based on civil law violations rather than traditional legal standards. He also highlighted that the United Nations [issued a recommendation](#) last year, warning that Japan's actions were in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Gingrich stated,

"The Biden administration and the UN have already condemned this activity. And now with President Trump, we have somebody who is deeply, passionately committed to religious liberty. This is going to have grave consequences for the United States' relationship with Japan and our view of what's happening with Japanese politics."

The panel discussion also touched on allegations that Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) [fabricated statements](#) in the case against the [Family Federation](#). Marco Respinti, director of the Italian online religious freedom magazine [Bitter Winter](#), raised the question, "Is this true?" In response, Norishige Kondo (近藤徳茂), deputy director of the [Family Federation](#) of Japan's Legal Department, replied, "That's correct."

He strongly criticized the Japanese government, saying,

"I think it is outrageous that the government tried to dissolve a [religious organization](#) based on [fabricated evidence](#)."

The dinner event was sponsored by the Washington Times Foundation and the Universal Peace Federation (UPF). Other speakers at the panel discussion included Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹), an international lawyer, and Patricia Duval, a French international human rights lawyer.

See [Patricia Duval's speech](#)



Tomihiro Tanaka, President of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, speaking at the IRF Summit in Washington DC Feb. 5, 2025

Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広), President of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, criticized former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄) for changing the legal interpretation overnight to include "civil law violations" as grounds for dissolution. He stated,

"The Japanese government has crossed a line that should never have been crossed."

He expressed his determination to "overcome this crisis for religious freedom and democracy in Japan" with support from the U.S.

At the conclusion of the dinner event, participants signed a statement calling on Japan to protect religious freedom. The statement expressed deep concern that, following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), "various forces have begun dismantling the human rights of religious believers in

Japan."

Text: Yosuke Yamazaki (山崎 洋介)

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Spot-On Analysis Of Japan At Freedom Summit

• February 6, 2025 • Knut Holdhus



Authoritative analysis of Japan's state persecution of religious minority by former chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom



The panel of speakers at a special sponsored dinner at the IRF Summit in Washington DC 5th February 2025, from left: Dr. Marco Respinti, director-in-charge of Bitter Winter; Norishige Kondo, Deputy Director of Legal affairs of the Family Federation of Japan; Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama from Japan; Katrina Lantos Swett, former chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom; Attorney Patricia Duval, expert on international human rights law. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission

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Remarks by Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, Summit co-chair and president of the Lantos foundation for Human Rights and Justice and past chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom. The remarks were made as answers to questions from Dr. Marco Respinti, moderator of a panel of speakers at a special sponsored dinner 5th February at the [IRF Summit 2025](#) in Washington DC.

Q: Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, in 2022 in the [Real Clear Politics](#) magazine, you wrote that Japan, which has been a beacon of democracy and protection of human rights for several decades, is flirting with the idea of trampling on religious freedom in a move that is much more reminiscent of practices in Russia and China. Japan's government now threatens to dissolve a legally constituted religious group for seemingly political reasons.

[...] You also added, dissolving a religious organization that has not been found guilty of any crime would taint the image of Japan as a country committed to democratic principles. Will you elaborate on that comment and share your thoughts?

Lantos Swett: Absolutely! It's deeply disturbing what Japan is contemplating doing. And if they go forward with this, it will be an enormous stain on Japan's claim to being a liberal constitutional democracy.



Logo of the *International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit 2025*

If they were attempting to do that in this country, they would be laughed out of court. It would be so clearly and uncontestably unconstitutional.

And really, if we look at the protections for fundamental religious freedom that Japan has supposedly signed on to, supposedly enshrined in its law, it really should be seen as unlawful in the Japanese context as well.

And what we find is this pattern of twisting laws around fraud, which you referred to, to **try and create a crime that does not exist**, to **try and create a basis for prosecution that is entirely manufactured**.

It is not only incredibly unfair to this [community](#), this wonderful [faith community](#) that actually has been a boon and a blessing to Japanese society, but it is deeply undermining of the pillars of what Japan, modern Japan, is supposed to stand for. So I find it very concerning.

I appreciated the remarks from former speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, citing all of the respected international voices that have spoken out against this, from the United Nations to the Biden administration.



Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives in the American Congress 1995-1999, here delivering a video message to the IRF Summit in Washington DC 5th Feb. 2025. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission.

And I echo his hope that the Trump administration, which we expect to be very, very strongly pro-religious freedom, is going to use its leverage to let Japan know, "Don't do this!"

A few years ago when we had a discussion about this, I said that friends don't let friends drive drunk. And on this issue, Japan is driving its legal and constitutional vehicle right off a cliff. And we hope that they'll pull back onto the road before they make a huge error. [...]



Dr. Marco Respinti moderating a panel of speakers at a special sponsored dinner at the [IRF Summit](#) in Washington DC 5th February 2025. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission.

Q: [...] We heard that the United Nations Rapporteurs on human rights and religious freedom [issued a mandate](#) to Japan expressing concern that the country is violating the religious freedom. It's very important for the Jehovah's Witnesses and the [Family Federation](#). [...] Yet, this mandate seems not to have affected the government in Japan. I would really like to hear your comment on that.

Lantos Swett: It is outrageous, and it is, I think, an example of what we would in this country call weaponization of the law, weaponization of justice, weaponization of the media.

It is a kind of **despicable picking of a target that the powers that be think they can get away with scapegoating**, with

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marginalizing, and with ultimately destroying.

And it is a really an awful reflection on Japan's commitment to some of the most fundamental values that underlie a strong and democratic society – the rule of law, equal treatment under the law, not weaponizing the government against a community they think they can whip up anger towards.

Those should be the crown jewels of a country. And yet in Japan, we see a willingness to abandon all of this in this single-minded desire to attack a faith community.

You say they haven't responded to some of the pressure that's been brought to bear upon them. I think that's very, very unfortunate.

We are, as all of us know, still in the opening days of a new



President **Donald Trump** signing executive order on day one of his presidency, 20th January 2025. Photo: @VP / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image](#)

administration here in this country, and it's been something of a tornado of activity.

I think we're all trying to catch our breath because things have been happening in a fast and furious way. But one of the things I think that the new Trump administration is demonstrating is what it looks like when the United States uses its leverage in a maximum way to try and achieve a policy goal.

It isn't always diplomatic, it isn't always in accordance with the traditional norms that we're used to, but it has the potential to yield some results.

And as someone who is passionate about international religious freedom, somebody who of course has admiration for Japan in so many ways but wants to see Japan pull back from this cliff and get back on the right track, I hope that perhaps the new Trump administration will exert some of that tough leverage with Japan on behalf of religious freedom.

We'll say very simply, if this was happening in our country – and Japan's legal system, constitutional system, embrace of democratic norms and international human rights are not that different from what we have here in this country – again, they would be laughed out of court. Some of these practices seem more like suborning perjury [[See editor's note below](#)] or a bill of attainder [[See editor's note below](#)].



On 5th Feb. 2025, at the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit held in Washington, D.C., a declaration calling for Japan to uphold religious freedom was signed by religious leaders, lawyers and politicians. Photo: Yosuke Yamazaki / [Sekai Nippo](#)

For our members of the audience who don't know what that is, you can't, under the U.S. constitution, write, **draft a law that is specifically targeted to entrap and attack and accuse and imprison and convict one individual or one group.** That's not lawful. That's not the way a democracy functions.

And so, Japan is straying into some very dangerous territory, and ultimately most dangerous for Japan itself.

It does not want to lose its ability to count itself among those countries that stand for the rule of law, that stand for religious freedom, that stand for equal treatment under the law.

So, we're waiting to see who the Trump administration will appoint as the ambassador at large for religious freedom.

We are going to hear from Vice President Vance tomorrow at the summit, which is very exciting.

And I think friends of the [Family Federation](#), but more importantly, friends of religious liberty globally, need to reach out to the administration and say,

"This is wrong! Japan's a friend. Japan's an ally. We can help them do better."

And maybe it'll take a little tough love from America to help that happen.

[Editor's note: To **suborn perjury** means to persuade, induce, or coerce someone to commit perjury – that is, to lie under oath in a legal proceeding. This is a criminal offense because it obstructs justice and undermines the integrity of the judicial system.

For example, if a lawyer or defendant convinces a witness to falsely testify in court, that would be suborning perjury. In many jurisdictions, this crime carries serious penalties, including fines and imprisonment.]

[Editor's note: A **bill of attainder** is a law that declares a person or group guilty of a crime and imposes punishment without a trial. These laws bypass the judicial system, denying individuals due process.

The U.S. Constitution explicitly prohibits bills of attainder at both the federal (Article I, Section 9) and state (Article I, Section 10) levels, ensuring that punishment can only be imposed through fair legal proceedings.

Historically, bills of attainder were used by monarchs and legislatures to punish political enemies without a trial, which is why they are now considered a violation of fundamental rights.]

Featured image above: Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett speaking at a special sponsored dinner at the [IRF Summit](#) in Washington DC 5th February 2025. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission.

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