

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japanese Court Dismisses *Mind Control* Claims

Knut Holdhus
March 16, 2025



Sapporo High and District Court in Chuo-ku, Sapporo, Hokkaido, Japan



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Family Federation wins appeal in donation case as Sapporo High Court rejects 'mind control' claims advocated by activist lawyer

Tokyo, 14th March 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Plaintiff Drops Claims in "Donation Lawsuit"

Sapporo High Court Confirms Victory for Former Unification Church

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

In an appeal trial at the Sapporo High Court, a lawsuit filed by the relatives of a husband against him, his wife, and the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU, formerly the [Unification Church](#)) came to an end on 12th March 2025, after the plaintiffs withdrew their claims. The plaintiffs had argued that they had suffered harm because the couple donated money from the deceased father's estate to the [religious organization](#). As a result of the withdrawal, the [Family Federation](#)'s victory was confirmed. The first trial, held at the Sapporo District Court in March of last year, had also ruled in favor of the [Family Federation](#).



Anti-religious legislation allows relatives of donors to claim refund decades later! Here, a Japanese woman offering a donation at a meeting

On 13th March, the [Family Federation](#) released a statement regarding its "complete victory in the donation-related lawsuit at the Sapporo High Court," emphasizing that already the district court had "entirely rejected" claims based on "mind control".

The statement also criticized attorney Masaki Gouro (郷路征記), who represented the plaintiffs, arguing that his claims were effectively advocating for the "mind control" theory. As an example, it cited his written arguments, which stated that "a person's entire personality is transformed into a [Unification Church](#)-type personality (統一協会的人格) for life" and that "through the process of missionary work and indoctrination, individuals are made to engage in unlawful activities and become subservient (隷属) to the [Unification Church](#)."

Additionally, the [Family Federation](#) urged the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to carefully consider the implications of civil court rulings in cases where former [Unification Church](#) members, who allegedly were victims of [abduction and coercive faith-breaking](#) (forced de-conversion) [See editor's note below], acted as plaintiffs. The [organization](#) pointed out that of the 32 civil lawsuits cited as evidence in the ministry's dissolution request filed with the Tokyo District Court, four were handled by attorney Gouro,

all of which promoted the "mind control" theory.

Editor's note: Coercive faith-breaking 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. 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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Disputed Verdict Sets Anti-Religious Precedent

• March 15, 2025 • Knut Holdhus

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Distinguished attorney spells out how disputed verdict in Japan's Supreme Court paves the way for dissolution of religious organizations



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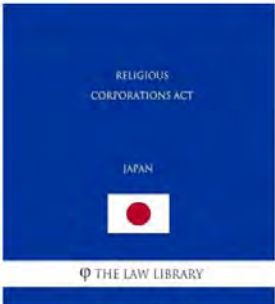
March 10, 2025

After [Takeshi](#), the leading crime magazine for human rights and religious freedom, published 10th March 2025, a commentary titled “[The Supreme Court and the Unification Church in Japan: Warrant for a ‘Religiocide’? Part 1](#)”. The article was penned by Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹), author and distinguished Japanese attorney and business ethics expert. He is an outspoken critic of the Japanese government’s campaign against the large religious minority the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), formerly known as the [Unification Church](#) and still widely referred to as such.

According to the attorney, on 3rd March 2025, Japan’s *Supreme Court* [delivered a final ruling](#) upholding a non-penal fine imposed on President Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広) of the [Family Federation](#). The fine was issued due to allegations that President Tanaka had not fully responded to government inquiries.



Fined for not replying to impossible questions: Tomihiro Tanaka, here during an interview 15th Nov. 2024. Photo: Kato Reiwa (加藤 玲和)



Front page of 2018 English version of *Religious Corporations Act of Japan*.

Nakayama points out that a key aspect of this ruling was the *Supreme Court*’s affirmation that civil wrongdoings committed by the [Family Federation](#) could constitute a “violation of laws and regulations” as specified in Article 81 of the *Religious Corporations Act* (RCA), which outlines the conditions under which a religious organization can be dissolved.

This interpretation holds significant implications for the ongoing case filed by the Japanese government with the *Tokyo District Court*, seeking the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#). **Until now, Japanese legal precedent had excluded civil wrongdoings from qualifying as grounds for dissolving religious organizations.** Furthermore, this decision appears to be **unprecedented among democratic nations**, as no other democracy has permitted such an extensive legal basis for dissolving religious groups.

Tatsuki Nakayama reports that the *Supreme Court*’s decision aligns with a **broader national movement led by the “anti-cult” organization National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales**, as well as **certain journalists**, including Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト). This campaign gained momentum following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍 晋三, 1954–2022) by an individual who claimed he wanted to punish Abe for his perceived ties to the [Family Federation](#).



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The Supreme Court of Japan (Saikōsaibansho). Photo: ↗ / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp

Nakayama suggests that a close examination of the [Supreme Court ruling](#) suggests it **paves the way for the dissolution of the Family Federation**. Several concerning signs emerge from the decision.

According to Nakayama, the Supreme Court's ruling, "addressed only the interpretation of "laws and regulations" (criterion b) and did not evaluate whether the [Family Federation's](#) actions harmed public welfare (criterion a). The assessment of this aspect remains pending in the *Tokyo District Court*, where Presiding Judge Kenya Suzuki (鈴木 健也) oversees the case.

Tatsuki Nakayama claims that [this ruling](#) signals a **significant erosion of respect for religious freedom in Japan**. From a legal and technical perspective, dissolving a religious organization does not directly prohibit believers from practicing their faith, as they can continue their religious activities privately, even in the absence of an official religious entity. However, the dissolution process results in the **loss of all organizational assets**, which has profound practical implications for religious adherents.

Past judicial precedents in Japan have, as Nakayama emphasizes, carefully considered these implications. For instance, in 1996, the *Supreme Court* ruled to dissolve Aum Shinrikyo, the religious group responsible for killing 29 people in a series of attacks.

Despite the severity of Aum Shinrikyo's crimes, the court at the time acknowledged the impact that dissolution could have on the religious freedom of its followers. The ruling explicitly recognized that without access to religious facilities and assets, believers might encounter difficulties in practicing their faith. It emphasized the need to carefully weigh the constitutionally guaranteed right to religious freedom against the necessity of imposing such a restriction.



Demonstration for religious freedom in Japan, 8th December 2024. Photo: FFWPU

Similarly, on 26th March 2024, the *Tokyo District Court* ruled in a non-penal fine case against the [Family Federation](#). In doing so, the court closely followed the reasoning of the 1996 Aum Shinrikyo case. The District Court stated that given the constitutional importance of religious freedom, any decision to dissolve a religious organization should be made with caution, considering whether such an extreme measure is truly necessary and unavoidable.

The [Bitter Winter](#) article mentions that prior cases thus have demonstrated a conscientious approach to protecting religious freedom. However, the [Supreme Court's ruling](#) on 3rd March 2025, **departed from this tradition**. The court stated that "a dissolution order shall have the effect of forfeiting the juridical personality of a religious corporation and shall not have any legal effect that prohibits or restricts the religious acts of a believer." **This position is alarming**, as it disregards the very real consequences that dissolution has on the ability of religious followers to continue their practices in an organized and meaningful way.

Historically,
Japan's legal
system has

upheld strong
protections
for religious
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cases
concerning
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[March 2025](#)

[ruling](#),

however,

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this**

established

principle. The

**Japanese judges deviating from establish
principle in order to dissolve religious
minority organization.** *Illustration.*

*Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 6th
January 2025.*

Court did not address the religious freedom implications for
believers, which raises concerns about the **judiciary's
willingness to permit the dissolution** of the [Family
Federation](#) under Presiding Judge Kenya Suzuki at the *Tokyo
District Court*.

Attorney Nakayama stresses that the implications of [this
decision](#) extend beyond the immediate case against the
[Family Federation](#). By setting a precedent that civil wrongs
may be used as grounds for dissolving religious organizations,
the *Supreme Court* has significantly broadened the legal
scope for **government intervention in religious affairs**. This
shift may embolden future legal actions against other
religious groups, potentially threatening the fundamental
right to religious freedom in Japan.

The ruling also raises concerns about the potential for political
and social pressures to influence judicial decisions. Given the
intense scrutiny the [Family Federation](#) has faced since Abe's
assassination, the decision appears to reflect not only legal
reasoning but also broader societal and political
considerations. The **influence of "anti-cult" activists and
media campaigns suggests that the court's ruling may
have been shaped by public sentiment rather than a
purely legal analysis.**

In conclusion, Nakayama writes that the 3rd March 2025,
[Supreme Court ruling](#) marks a pivotal moment in Japan's
legal approach to religious organizations. By affirming that
civil wrongdoings can justify dissolution under the *Religious
Corporations Act* (RCA), the decision sets a new and
potentially far-reaching precedent. While the court did not
directly address the question of public harm, it effectively
opened the door for the *Tokyo District Court* to [proceed with
dissolving](#) the [Family Federation](#).

[This ruling](#) represents a stark departure from previous
jurisprudence, which had placed a strong emphasis on
protecting religious freedom. It also raises broader concerns
about the future of religious liberty in Japan, as well as the
degree to which judicial decisions may be influenced by
political and social pressures. Moving forward, it remains to be
seen how this decision will shape the landscape of religious
rights and government intervention in Japan.

Featured image above: Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama, here in
December 2023. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

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