

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Tokyo Court to Rule on March 25th in FFWPU Dissolution Case

Knut Holdhus
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The sign outside Tokyo District Court

Lower court to rule on 25th March in landmark religious dissolution case with wide-ranging implications for all religions

3 Judges to Decide Fate of Religious Organization That Has Committed No Crimes

by Knut Holdhus, editor



Several Japanese news outlets - NHK World, Mainichi Shimbun and The Japan Times - reported 23rd March 2025, that Tokyo District Court is expected to decide on Tuesday 25th March whether to issue a dissolution order for the religious organization formerly known as the

[Unification Church](#). The Japanese government's education and culture ministry requested the court's intervention in 2023, arguing that the [organization](#) engaged in unethical fundraising practices and frightened members with stories about eternal damnation in hell.



This case follows an extensive investigation by the ministry, which claims to have interviewed over 170 former members who had sought "damages" and their donations being refunded after being advised to do so by activists and hostile lawyers campaigning against the [religious organization](#) since the 1980s.

According to NHK World, government ministry officials claim that the [religious organization](#) forced its members to offer substantial donations over a long period of time.



The Japan Times reports that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology claims that members of the former [Unification Church](#) "committed illegal acts" when soliciting "people to make large donations to the group by stirring up their anxiety".

The Japan Times article was provided by Jiji News Agency, which states,

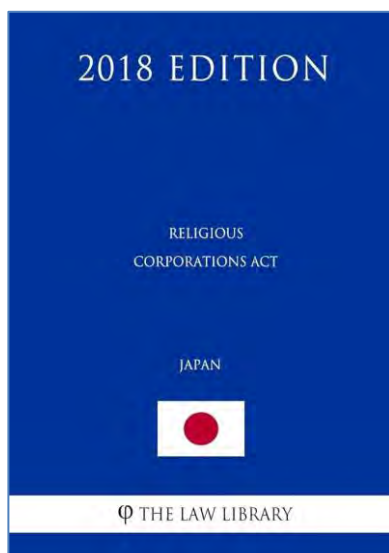
"The [Unification Church](#) has rebutted that the receipt of donations is part of religious activities and is not a way to acquire property through illegal acts. In January, the group filed with the court a claim that the evidence submitted by the ministry was fabricated."

The [Unification Church](#), which in 2015 changed its name in Japan to [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), denies forcing anyone to offer donations and stirring up potential donors' anxiety.

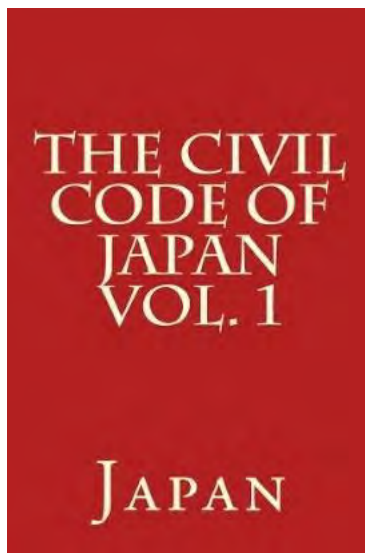
As NHK World reports, the [religious organization](#) points out that "receiving donations is part of its religious activities." According to Japanese law, all registered religious corporations are entitled to solicit donations. And donors are entitled to offer large donations if they wish to do so.

According to the media reports, the government ministry contends that asking for donations using

wrongful methods constitute unlawful acts under Japan's Civil Code, providing grounds for dissolution under the Religious Corporations Act. Up until now, only criminal acts would be ground for dissolution of a religious corporation. However, after the Abe assassination, the Kishida administration [changed the law overnight](#) in order to allow claimed civil wrongdoings to suffice for issuing a dissolution order.



2018 English version of Religious Corporations Act of Japan



English reproduction of The Civil Code of Japan, vol. 1, 4th edition, first published 1906

Although NHK World does not mention specifically that the authorities [changed the law](#) to specifically target the [Family Federation](#), the large state-run media outlet writes,

"The latest request [for a dissolution order] is the first case filed based on illegal acts under the Civil Code."

NHK describes that it "is the third time that a Japanese government ministry or agency has sought the dissolution of a religious group for violating laws." The state channel describes the two previous cases:

the Aum Shinrikyo movement, responsible for the deadly 1995 Tokyo subway sarin gas attack the Myokakuji group, whose leader was convicted of fraud.

In order for the [Family Federation](#) to be placed in this category, the [law had to be changed](#). Unlike these prior instances, the case against the former [Unification Church](#) is entirely based on alleged violations of the Civil Code rather than criminal offenses.

Text: Knut Holdhus

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Abduction and Confinement Speak in Yokohama

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

On 20th March, a believer of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) who was abducted, confined, and forcibly pressured to renounce his faith by relatives under the guidance of pastors and professional “faith-breakers” opposing the [Family Federation](#), spoke at a [panel exhibition](#) in Yokohama. The event was hosted by the “Yokohama Citizens’ Association for the Protection of Religious Freedom and Fundamental Human Rights”.

Toru Goto (後藤徹) represented the “[National Association of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion Victims](#)”. He had been confined for [12 years and five months](#) and pointed out that former believers who were forced to leave the [religious organization](#) through [abduction and confinement](#) often developed hostility toward the [organization](#), leading to an increase in lawsuits and other reported incidents.

He also noted that the day of the event marked exactly 30 years since the [Aum Shinrikyo Tokyo subway sarin attack](#), which occurred while he was in confinement. Goto recalled being told by faith-breaking activists about the murder of lawyer Tsutsumi Sakamoto (坂本堤昇) and his family [[See editor's note 1 below](#)].

Goto stated,

“Under those strange circumstances, my family came to believe that if they released me, I would commit acts similar to Aum Shinrikyo.”

Last month, Goto published an autobiography detailing his experiences and appealed to the audience,

“Was it the [religious organization](#) that changed my once close and ordinary family, or was it the influence of a third party? I want readers to decide for themselves.”

Sarutahiko Okami (pseudonym), co-representative of “Ame no Yachimata no Kai” [[See editor's note 2 below](#)], an organization working to [restore parent-child relationships](#) disrupted by [abduction and confinement](#), emphasized,

“Repairing a parent-child relationship once it has been broken is not easy. The first step is for parents and children to face each other and foster mutual understanding through dialogue.”

Additionally, citing [materials distributed to elementary schools](#) across Japan, the event raised concerns that excessive measures against “child abuse” in Japan could lead to religious persecution. One example highlighted was that if parents provide religious guidance to their child, and the child later tells their school that they “didn’t like it”, school counselors and child welfare authorities might collaborate to separate the child from their parents, intentionally creating family divisions.

[Editor’s note 1: Tsutsumi Sakamoto (坂本堤, 1956–1989) was a Japanese lawyer and a key member of the notorious “anti-cult” organization *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (全国霊感商法対策弁護士連絡会, Zenkoku Reikan Shōhō Taisaku Bengoshi Renraku-kai). He was especially known for his work against the Aum Shinrikyo group, which later carried out the 1995 Tokyo subway sarin gas attack.

Sakamoto’s legal efforts were seen as a significant threat to Aum Shinrikyo. This led its leader, Shoko Asahara, to order Sakamoto’s



Poster used for the exhibition in Yokohama, Japan 19th and 20th March 2025. Photo: [FFWPU](#)



Front cover page of Japanese edition of **Toru Goto's new book “Deadly Struggle: Surviving 4,536 Days of Confinement”** (Sageisha)

Shinrikyo. This led to reader, Shiroko Asanuma, to order Sakamoto's assassination in 1989. In November 1989, Sakamoto, his wife Satoko, and their one-year-old son Tatsuhiko were murdered by Aum Shinrikyo members. The attackers entered the Sakamoto's home in Yokohama at night, drugged the family, and strangled them before disposing of their bodies in three different prefectures.

The case remained unsolved until 1995, when Aum Shinrikyo members confessed after being arrested for the sarin gas attack. The murders shocked Japan.

Tsutsumi Sakamoto is known for his activism pursuing legal action against Aum Shinrikyo based on the use of consumer protection law to reclaim donations to the organization. He represented so-called apostates, members who had left the group and become hostile to it. Sakamoto claimed that the Aum Shinrokyo were involved in unlawful activities years before the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway.]

[Editor's note 2: The Japanese expression **Yachimata (八衢)** refers to a crossroads or intersection where multiple paths converge. It is often used in a metaphorical sense to symbolize choices, encounters, or the meeting of different fates.

In mythology and classical literature, 八衢 (Yachimata) can also evoke a mystical or sacred space where important decisions or transformations occur. It appears in the name of the deity *Ame no Yachihoko* (天の八衢), associated with crossroads and divine encounters in Japanese folklore.

As for the above-mentioned association *Ame no Yachimata no Kai* (天の八衢の会), the term symbolizes a place for reconciliation, dialogue, and resolution – a meeting point where estranged families can reconnect.]

Featured image above: Toru Goto (後藤徹), representing the “National Association of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion Victims”, gives a lecture on the morning of 20th March 2025 in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀).

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