

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Massive Rights Abuses Shatter Japanese Government Narrative

Knut Holdhus
June 1, 2025



Illustration of Fumihiro Kato asking Tomihiro Tanaka questions during interview published in Seiron June 2025



The June 2025 issue of the Japanese monthly magazine Seiron

State narrative shattered: Activist lawyers behind system continuously producing "plaintiffs" and "victims" are main source of information for media and advisors to the authorities

Part 3 of an interview (extensive excerpts) with Tomihiro Tanaka, President of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, published by the well-known monthly opinion magazine Seiron (正論) in its June 2025 issue. Translated from Japanese. Republished in English with permission. Seiron is a publication by the Sankei Shimbun, one of Japan's five national daily newspapers. Previously republished as two articles in [Bitter Winter](#) on [27th](#) and [28th May](#).

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Rights Abuse Exposed: State Narrative in Crisis

Interviewer: Fumihiro Kato, author



Illustration of faith-breaking victim Hideo Mima's [forced hospitalization](#)

History of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Renunciation of Faith

- Media outlets frequently report on alleged harm caused by the religious organization, but we rarely hear about harm it suffered. Tanaka: The media doesn't report on it at all, but in the context of the dissolution proceedings, there is something I want readers to understand: the issue of [abduction](#), [confinement](#), and [coercive faith-breaking](#) [See editor's note 2 below].

Since our founding, we have been branded as heretical by Christian churches, and that continues to this day. Christian pastors began to abduct our members and pressure them to leave our faith. This dates back to 1966, two years after we were recognized as a religious corporation.

By 1968, when our affiliated organization International Federation for Victory Over Communism was launched, left-wing groups and activists, including those affiliated with the Communist Party, began to [collaborate with Christian pastors](#) in such activities (faith-breaking) [See editor's note 2 below].



One tactic we struggled with was having our believers kidnapped and [forcibly confined in psychiatric hospitals](#) allegedly connected to Communist groups, where they were pressured to abandon their faith. This did result in some media attention, and when we filed habeas corpus petitions [See editor's note 1 below], the courts recognized them, leading to a decline in such activities due to human rights concerns.

However, the practice did not disappear. It evolved. So-called "deprogrammers" (faith-breakers), who coached families on how to de-convert members, became central figures. Families - parents and siblings - would [abduct the believers and confine them](#) in apartments, where [pastors collaborated with deprogrammers](#) to pressure the members to leave the [religious organization](#).

This kind of violent forced de-conversion is known as "deprogramming" (faith-breaking) [See editor's note 2 below]. In the United States, it has been recognized as a human rights violation and has all but disappeared. However, in Japan, it continued until 2015, when civil courts finally ruled it illegal. Although the [abductions and confinement](#) were carried out by family members, deprogrammers guided and supervised the process from start to finish. Even when police became involved, they would argue it was a "family matter", and authorities would not intervene. No one has ever faced criminal charges for it. This is a major, largely unspoken scandal.

The confinement would last until the believers renounced their faith. In some cases, our members pretended to deconvert to escape confinement and then returned to the [religious organization](#). After that, even claiming to deconvert wouldn't result in release, and the confinements grew longer.

Can this be called a fair procedure?

- How does this relate to the dissolution order?



Tanaka: In the [December 2023 issue](#) of Seiron, a [harrowing account](#) was published about Toru Goto, a victim who was abducted and confined for [12 years and 5 months](#). He is not alone - at least [4,300 of our believers](#) are known to have been victims of abduction and forced renunciation, and 3,000 of them ultimately abandoned their faith.

Many of those who deconverted went on to work with the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS), appearing in media reports and court cases.

Of the 157 written statements submitted by the government in support of the [dissolution order](#), 88% came from victims of [abduction and forced de-conversion](#). A significant portion of the 32 civil lawsuits cited by the government as grounds for dissolution involved plaintiffs who were deprogramming [See editor's note 2 below] victims.

Most citizens are completely unaware of this set-up. This "inconvenient truth" has been buried because it undermines the narrative promoted by NNLASS, which is connected to deprogrammers and has become the primary source for the media. The media continues to circulate only hostile portrayals of us, and even the Japanese government proceeded with the dissolution request in collaboration with NNLASS.

Behind the scenes, however, a system that continuously produces "plaintiffs" and "victims" to attack the [religious organization](#) is being allowed to flourish, and most people are unaware of it. One must ask,

"Why are so many former believers suddenly stepping forward as 'victims'?"

You cannot understand the situation without acknowledging this context.

However, the government collaborated only with one side and proceeded with the process. Under such conditions, there's no way that a fair image of the [religious organization](#) could emerge. Although the court ultimately did not use the 32 civil lawsuits directly as grounds for the dissolution, it still reached its [conclusion](#) through [speculation](#).

Continued in [part 4](#).

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[Editor's note 1: A habeas corpus petition is a legal request to a court, usually made by someone who is detained or imprisoned, asking the court to determine whether their detention or imprisonment is lawful. The main purpose of a habeas corpus petition is to protect individuals from unlawful or arbitrary detention.

The detainee, or someone acting on their behalf (such as a lawyer or family member), files the petition with a court. The court reviews the petition and may issue a writ of habeas corpus, compelling the custodian (such as a prison warden or government authority) to bring the detainee before the court. At the hearing, the custodian must provide legal justification for the detention. If the court finds the detention unlawful, it may order the detainee's release.

Habeas corpus is considered a cornerstone of individual liberty and rule of law. It is enshrined in many constitutions and international human rights frameworks, including the U.S. Constitution (Article I, Section 9).]

[Editor's note 2: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") 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.



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001

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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Justice Twisted: Assumptions Replaced Evidence

- May 31, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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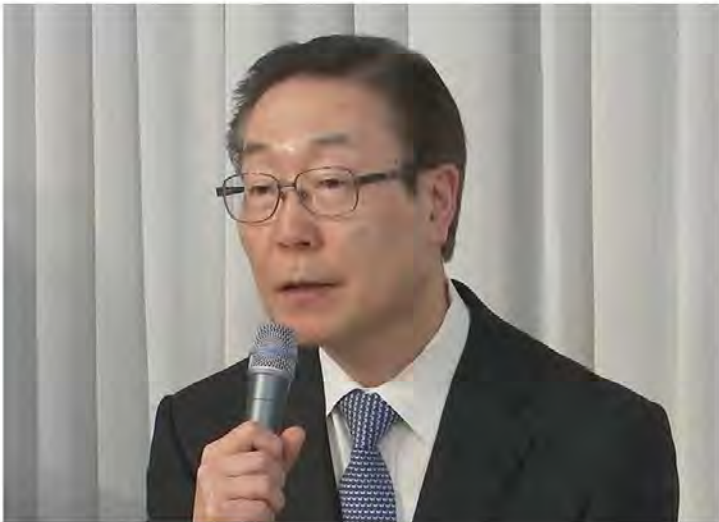













Religious head points out that after the Prime Minister changed course overnight and made the impossible possible, the judiciary passed verdict based on assumptions, not evidence

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see part 1: [Politics Overruled the Law in Dissolution Case](#) the front cover page of the June 2025 issue of the Japanese monthly magazine *Seiron*.

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The Authorities Changed the Rules to Punish Persecuted Religious Minority

Interviewer: Fumihiro Kato, author

Outrageous – Changing the rules to punish us



Akira Nagatsuma
8th June 2010. Photo: [首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

Tanaka: On the following day, 18th October 2022, during a session of the *House Budget Committee*, Kishida responded to questions from Akira Nagatsuma of the *Constitutional Democratic Party* (CDP). Nagatsuma pointed out that under the current legal interpretation, dissolution was not possible, and demanded civil torts (wrongdoings according to civil law) recognized in civil court judgments should be included as grounds for dissolution. His point was,

“You can’t dissolve them unless you change the rules.”

But Kishida replied that civil torts would not be included, emphasizing the importance of due process and rejecting the proposal. In

response, Nagatsuma criticized the government’s stance, saying it was “unbelievable”.

Then the next day, in the *House of Councillors Budget Committee*, Kishida completely reversed himself, stating that civil torts could indeed be grounds for dissolution.

MP Hiroyuki Konishi, who was questioning Kishida, expressed disbelief, saying, “This is the very definition of inconsistency.”

What we can infer from this whole sequence is that, unable to dissolve us under the existing rules, they were forced to change the rules and then apply them retroactively to drive forward the dissolution process. This is a serious error. It’s an unacceptable breach of procedure, and allowing such outrageous actions would collapse the rule of law.

At the very least, if the government was going to overturn a Cabinet decision, it should have convened a Cabinet meeting and passed a resolution. But that didn’t happen. In the first place, I doubt there is any precedent in developed nations for using civil torts in civil court as grounds to dissolve a religious corporation.

The words of a nation’s Prime Minister carry great weight. Bureaucrats have no choice but to comply. What followed was an acceleration of events that brought us to where we are now – this is nothing short of a historic incident. The international community will also view it with severity. We absolutely cannot accept it. We will promptly appeal and fight this thoroughly.

A Decision Full of Assumptions

– It’s reported that the court recognized 1,559 victims of donation-related harm, amounting to 20,448 billion yen.

Tanaka: However, these were not newly recognized damages, nor were new compensation payments imposed. These cases involved payments that had already been made following the resolution of disputes between private individuals. The government revived these past cases and compiled the figures, claiming, “There were so many, and they were so terrible, that it warrants dissolution.”

One of the key issues in the [court ruling](#) was whether [our organization](#) displayed continuity in its alleged wrongdoings – one of the criteria Prime Minister Kishida cited when calling for dissolution,

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along with organizational nature and maliciousness. Since 2009, we have promoted reform within [our organization](#) under our "Compliance Declaration" [\[See editor's note below\]](#). As a result, there have been only four civil lawsuits over donations since 2009, and none since 2016.

We vigorously challenged the government's use of older civil cases from before 2009. Struggling to prove continuity, the government submitted written statements from 157 individuals drawn from 22 lawsuits. To argue that continuity existed, the government also included cases that had been settled, informal agreements and notices.

We pointed out that **some of these written statements included fabrications.**

Yet the court recognized not only lawsuits and settlements but even informal notices as evidence of illegal conduct. Their reasoning was, "It is presumed that unlawful acts occurred." No mention was made of the [alleged fabrications](#) in the written statements. Although the court acknowledged the decrease in lawsuits, it ruled that this had no bearing on the issue of continuity. They claimed that our Compliance Declaration [\[See editor's note below\]](#) lacked demonstrable effectiveness and described it as a mere stopgap measure – saying we had not changed in essence, only feigned reform.

They determined facts based on speculation rather than evidence. We intend to vigorously contest this injustice.

Continued in [part 3](#).

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Featured image above: Tomihiro Tanaka, President of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, at a [press conference](#) on the day of the [dissolution verdict](#) 25th March 2025. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#).

[Editor's note: The **2009 compliance declaration** of the Unification Church of Japan (now the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)) was a formal commitment by the organization to reform its practices in response to longstanding public criticism and legal challenges.

The Unification Church in Japan had faced numerous allegations related to recruitment tactics and donation solicitation, termed "spiritual sales" (霊感商法) by a hostile network of activist lawyers who had declared the [religious organization](#) an enemy. These issues led to multiple lawsuits orchestrated by the activist lawyers and significant media backlash. This prompted the organization to take measures to restore its reputation and demonstrate compliance with legal and ethical standards.

The [religious organization](#) pledged to stop possibly unethical donation practices, including what the hostile network of lawyers claimed amounted to "pressuring members into making large financial contributions under spiritual pretexts."

This was in response to accusations from the same activist lawyers that followers "were being manipulated into giving away substantial amounts of money or property."

The Unification Church stated it would enhance internal oversight to ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards. Measures included better training for leaders and stricter guidelines for evangelization and solicitation of donations.

After this compliance declaration, there was a significant decrease in the number of lawsuits against the Unification Church – since 2015 called the Family Federation. The religious organization has used this as evidence that it has improved its practices and should not be subject to dissolution.]

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