

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Persecuted Unification Church Believer in Japanese Senate Race

Knut Holdhus
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Hiroshi Ogasawara announces his candidacy at a press conference - afternoon of 2nd June 2025, Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture, Japan



Believer from persecuted faith announces his candidacy for upcoming Senate race, championing religious freedom and the importance of family

Tokyo, 3rd June 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Active Member of the [Family Federation](#) to Run for Office in Chiba Electoral District in House of Councillors (Upper House) Election, Appealing for Believers' Freedom

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

Hiroshi Ogasawara (小笠原裕) (62), an active member of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) and a resident of Yachiyo City, Chiba Prefecture, held a press conference in Chiba City on 2nd June to announce his candidacy for this summer's House of Councillors election, running in the Chiba constituency. Ogasawara criticized the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#), calling it "a decision driven by highly political motives" and argued that it was "a violation of the Constitution infringing on freedom of religion".



Plenary session Nov. 21, 2017 in the House of Councillors (Upper House) in the Japanese Parliament

He plans to run as a candidate from the political group he founded last year, Association to Protect Japanese Families. His campaign will emphasize "freedom of religion" and also advocate for adding constitutional provisions to protect families, as well as correcting what he describes as "excessive" LGBT policies, based on the belief that "when thinking about 50 or 100 years into the future, the most important thing is to protect families."

He stated that he had not received support from the [religious organization](#) and had made the decision to run on his own.

The Chiba constituency has three seats up for election. At the candidate briefing session held by the Chiba Prefectural Election Commission on 30th May, 14 groups, including three incumbents, participated, suggesting a highly competitive race.

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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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Debunking Lies That Turn Victims into Perpetrators

Interviewer: Fumihiko Kato, author

Concerns of discrimination and persecution

– We've heard from followers all over the country that they've experienced [discrimination](#) in their communities, workplaces, and schools. Denial of medical care, [loss of business opportunities](#), and bullying or harassment at school have become increasingly severe.

Tanaka: The moment Prime Minister Kishida declared severance of ties, the attacks began. First came a wave of phone harassment directed at our headquarters and churches nationwide. After the [dissolution order](#) was issued, the harm to followers escalated. We fear this could spread rapidly in the future.

At our Shibuya Church, located across the street from our HQ, we were asked by the owner to "vacate the building". There was even a case where employees of our [religious organization](#) couldn't use their credit cards simply for being associated with it. In [Shimonoseki](#), Yamaguchi Prefecture, facilities we'd used annually were suddenly denied to us on grounds of being "anti-social". There have been families [torn apart](#) by divorce or even the [suicide](#) of children. We are particularly concerned that [coercive deprogramming](#) [\[See editor's note below\]](#) through [abduction and confinement](#) might happen again.



The man who made the wave of persecution far worse: Former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, here, delivering a speech at the COP26 in November 2021. Photo: [首相邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

Political position and past alliances

– The [religious organization](#) has historically maintained political affiliations. What are your thoughts on this and your future political stance?

Tanaka: We've always taken a firm stance against communism. That's a fundamental, non-negotiable ideal for us. If we are to make this country a better place, we must never allow communism to take the lead. We are doctrinally committed to this stance.

The political party that aligned closest with our values – such as our [emphasis on family](#) and anti-communist ideology – was the *Liberal Democratic Party* (LDP), so it was natural for us to support their lawmakers. However, we've also supported some members of the *Constitutional Democratic Party* (CDP).

Now that our relationship with politics has been officially severed, we are not in a position to engage politically at the moment.

Not an anti-Japanese religious organization

– The [Family Federation](#) has been labeled an anti-Japanese religion and a financial pipeline to Korea.

Tanaka: The claim that we're "anti-Japanese" was shocking. We're working for Japan's benefit – being called anti-Japanese is utterly outrageous.

Ask any of our hundreds of thousand followers nationwide, and I doubt even one of them would describe the [religious organization](#) as anti-Japanese. I don't think anyone received anti-Japanese education from the [church](#) either. Our reality is clearly not anti-Japanese – if anything, we are patriotic. In Reverend [Sun Myung Moon's](#) teachings, he explicitly states:

Send us a message

First Name *

Last Name

Email *

Email Address

Your Message *

Submit

"Those who cannot love their country cannot love the world."

Leadership must be nurtured through love of one's country. That is our foundation.

Our connection to Korea is spiritual, linked to our leaders [Hak Ja Han](#) and [Sun Myung Moon](#), whom we revere as messianic figures. Since our religious leaders are based in Korea, we naturally receive guidance from there, strengthening our faith.



The founders of the [Family Federation](#): [Sun Myung Moon](#) (1920-2012) and [Hak Ja Han](#) (Holy Mother Han). Here, in the 1970s. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

However, when it comes to money and donations, that's where misunderstandings arise.

Japan sends funds overseas as missionary support – not just to Korea, but to the global headquarters, which is currently located in Korea. From 1977 to 2009, the international HQ was in the United States, and during that time donations went to the U.S. It was never specifically about Korea. That part of the narrative has been twisted in media coverage, and we really want people to understand this.

– Could the [Family Federation](#) maintain its independence as a Japanese religious corporation?

Tanaka: For example, when the [Cheonwon Temple](#) (a sacred place) was being built in Korea, they called on worldwide support. If they say, "We hope Japan can contribute this much," then we in Japan discuss it in our board meetings and decide how much of our budget can be allocated.

– Regarding relations with South Korea, TV programs say the Japanese religious organization has no decision-making power.



From a demonstration in the city of Sagami-hara in May 2025 against the horrendous persecution in Japan. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Tanaka: Just as Catholics worldwide are encouraged by the Pope's words, we draw inspiration from [Hak Ja Han](#)'s messages. However, this does not serve as a directive to contribute funds based on our financial capabilities. The distribution of substantial amounts is decided during board meetings, and meticulous records are kept. We are not blindly following orders.

– Any concluding thoughts?

Tanaka: Our [organization](#) is not a perpetrator. We speak from the perspective of being victims. Prime Minister Kishida's declaration of severing ties is where it all started. That statement distorted everything and caused us to lose public trust. It has impacted over 100,000 followers. We believe Kishida bears a grave responsibility, and we want him to apologize.

Today's events will be remembered in history, and the burden of responsibility will rest on Prime Minister Kishida. We sincerely hope people will face the facts and realities of those who are wrongfully judged.

Tomihiko Tanaka

Born 1956, Hokkaido

Graduate of Hokkai Gakuen University, Department of Architecture
14th President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)

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Featured image above: A truck driving through the streets of Osaka, Japan on 2nd June 2025 with large posters from the [Family Federation](#). Photo: [FFWPU](#)

[Editor's note: 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. Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

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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