

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Peter Zoehrer on Japan's Struggle to Gain State Recognition for Faith

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July 6, 2025



Peter Zoehrer speaking in Vienna 4th July 2025

10th anniversary of Unification Church finally obtaining state recognition in Austria after 50 years in the wilderness, social exclusion and the feeling of not being fully accepted

10 Years of Recognition of the Unification Church in Austria (2015 - 2025)



Speakers and distinguished guests at the celebration on 4th July 2025, of the 10th anniversary of the official recognition of the [Unification Church](#) in Austria

First part of a speech by Peter Zoehrer, President of the [Unification Church](#) of Austria 2015-2025 and President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) in Austria from 2000 to 2017. It was delivered at the [celebration](#) on 4th July 2025, of the 10th anniversary of the official recognition of the Unification Church in Austria. The [event](#) was held at the [Family Federation](#) headquarters in Vienna.

Zoehrer reports that the [program](#) celebrated not only the legal achievement of being recognized by the

authorities but also decades of dedication, faith, and public engagement. The [event](#) was graced by the presence of Dr. Martin Fischer, representative of the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport, who, according to the organizers, delivered an outstanding and thoughtful address. Peter Zoehrer writes that the [celebration](#) was further enriched by the participation of a number of dignitaries from various religious communities, whose support and solidarity gave the event a truly interfaith and inclusive spirit.

See also: [10 Years of Recognized Contribution to Society](#)

Dear Ministerial Councillor Prof. Dr. Martin Fischer,

Honored representatives of the religious communities,

Ladies and gentlemen,



From the celebration on 4th July 2025, of the 10th anniversary of the official recognition of the [Unification Church](#) in Austria

It is a particular honor for me to welcome you here today - on a day that represents much more than just an anniversary for our [faith community](#). Your presence, in the midst of the summer heat and the often-busy vacation season, is a powerful sign of solidarity and understanding. It shows that the experiences and challenges of the past ten years hold relevance far beyond our own community.

Today, we celebrate ten years of state recognition of the [Unification Church \(Vereinigungskirche\)](#) in Austria. A milestone that fills us with deep gratitude, but also with the obligation to reflect and to look ahead with clarity.

On 15th June 2015, our [faith community](#) (German: Gemeinschaft) was officially recognized as a registered religious denomination by the state (German: staatlich eingetragene Bekenntnisgemeinschaft). This act was not merely a formal step, but the result of years of efforts, dialogue, and active contributions to the social life of Austria.

This historic moment marked the end of a long journey - one characterized by idealism, tireless commitment, and a deeply rooted belief in the universal values of [family](#), peace, and dialogue.

As I said at the time - and I quote:

"State recognition was a victory for the rule of law - but also an invitation to make our faith more visible for the benefit of society. Religious freedom is not an end in itself but a mandate to help shape society."

A long road, a firm faith

The path to this day was anything but easy. It was lined with challenges and obstacles, yet always carried by the hope that truth and justice would ultimately prevail.

I vividly remember the many conversations, the doubts, but also the unwavering determination of our members. There were moments of despair, when the burden of prejudice and misunderstanding seemed almost unbearable. Yet it was in these very moments that we experienced the strength of unity and the

significance of our faith.

Anyone who wants to understand our position today must look back to where it all began - with those who courageously laid the first stone.



Paul Werner (1927-2008 - bottom left) and early members of the [Unification Church](#) in Europe

In 1965, Rev. Paul Werner came to Austria. With tireless dedication and a clear vision, he laid the foundation - with a few companions - for a movement that is now active in the fields of family, education, interreligious dialogue, and peacebuilding. We founded associations, overcame legal barriers, and created new structures - such as the Austrian [Family Federation for World Peace](#) (German: [Familienföderation für Weltfrieden](#)) in 1997. This testifies to our continued commitment to the well-being of society.

At a time when religious freedom in social practice was often reserved for established churches, our recognition process took four years. Four years in which we submitted countless documents, held discussions, and continually demonstrated the value of our community.

This success would not have been possible without the selfless contributions of many. I would especially like to highlight two individuals:

Dr. Christian Brünner, constitutional law expert at the University of Graz

Gerlinde Goach, a lawyer from Graz

With their professional expertise, unassailable integrity, and unwavering perseverance, they made a decisive contribution in ensuring that our application stood firm not only legally but was also respected on equal footing. We are sincerely grateful to them. They were without a doubt a "winning team".

Recognition as liberation

This recognition was far more than a legal act.

For many of us, it was a liberation - especially for our younger generation. For a long time, our youth were often listed as "OB" - without denomination - even though they had a deep faith, a unique religious identity, and a spiritual home in our community. This designation was not just an administrative label - it meant social exclusion and the feeling of not being fully accepted for many young people.

Today, our young people can openly profess their faith - in school, with authorities, and in everyday life. They are part of a recognized religious community. This gives them dignity, self-confidence, and hope for the future.

There has also been a noticeable shift in how religious minorities are portrayed in the media.

For a long time, religious minorities were stigmatized in the media - burdened with clichés and targeted by sensationalist coverage. But even here, much has changed: Today, public debate on religion is more nuanced, respectful, and dialogue-oriented.

We are no longer merely objects of media projection, but subjects in constructive discourse.

To be continued. Part 2 coming soon.

See also: [10 Years of Recognized Contribution to Society](#)

Related to state recognition after long struggle: [God and Human Beings](#)

Also related to state recognition after long struggle: [The Kingdom of Heaven](#)

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And more, related to state recognition after long struggle: [In a Nutshell](#)

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Still more, related to state recognition after long struggle: [Relationships](#)

From the header of the [official webpage](#) of the [Family Federation of Japan](#).

Press release issued by the [Family Federation of Japan](#) **1st July 2025** concerning the publication of a new book in Japanese: “Objection to the ‘Dissolution Order’ Against the [Family Federation](#) – Statements from 35 Experts from Japan and Abroad”. See [original article](#) in Japanese.

We are pleased to announce the publication of the book “Objection to the ‘Dissolution Order’ Against the [Family Federation](#) – Statements from 35 Experts from Japan and Abroad”, edited by attorney Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹) and published by Good Time Publishing.



Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama, here in Tokyo in 2023. Photo: [Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion](#)

This book compiles into one volume the written opinions submitted to the Tokyo District Court during the first trial of the government’s request for the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#).

In the foreword, Attorney Nakayama writes:

“This book contains valuable opinion statements submitted to the court by politicians, scholars, journalists, pastors, and other intellectuals from Japan and abroad, who opposed the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) and sought to challenge the abnormal ‘atmosphere’ following the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe.

I hope readers will experience this brave, refreshing, and righteously indignant wave of resistance, boiling over with passion.”

The 35 experts featured in the book are as follows:

[Japanese experts]

- [Satoshi Hamada](#) (浜田 聡) – Member of the House of Councillors
- [Toshikazu Masubuchi](#) (増淵 賢一) – Former Speaker of the Tochigi Prefectural Assembly
- [Norio Hosoya](#) (細谷 典男) – City Council Member of Toride, Ibaraki Prefecture
- Hajime Takahira (高比良 元) – Former Nagasaki Prefectural Assembly Member
- [Hideo Mima](#) (美馬 秀夫) – Tokushima City Council Member
- [Shingo Inoue](#) (井上 真吾) – Kitakyushu City Council Member, Fukuoka
- Minoru Okada (岡田 実) – Tottori City Council Member
- Takeshi Tanaka (pseudonym) – Local Assembly Member in Miyazaki Prefecture
- Masatoshi Hayashi (林 正寿) – Professor Emeritus, Waseda University
- [Seishiro Sugihara](#) (杉原 誠四郎) – Former Professor, Musashino Women’s University
- [Masaki Nakamasa](#) (仲正 昌樹) – Professor, Kanazawa University
- Young-chul Ko (高 永喆) – Visiting Researcher, Takushoku University
- Masakazu Kobayashi (pseudonym) – Professor at a private university in Tokyo
- Shigeru Yamada (pen name) – Sociologist
- Kenichi Furuya (pseudonym) – Professor Emeritus, National University
- Eitaro Ogawa (小川 榮太郎) – Literary Critic
- [Masumi Fukuda](#) (福田 ますみ) – Non-fiction Writer
- [Masaki Kubota](#) (窪田 順生) – Non-fiction Writer
- [Fumihiko Kato](#) (加藤 文宏) – Author
- [Humayun A. Mughal](#) – Journalist
- [Haruhisa Nakagawa](#) (中川 晴久) – Pastor, Lord’s Sheep Christian Church
- [Tatsuhiko Iwamoto](#) (岩本 龍弘) – Pastor
- [Ryuichi Sunagawa](#) (砂川 竜一) – Pastor, Tsukishiro Christian Church
- Satoshi Mizota (溝田 悟士) – Evangelist, Speech-Language-Hearing Therapist
- [Tatsuki Nakayama](#) (中山 達樹) – International Attorney
- Tatsuki Park (pseudonym) – Former Director, Local Chapter of Mindan (Korean Residents Union in Japan)
- [Shunsuke Uotani](#) (魚谷 俊輔) – Secretary-General, UPF Japan

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Aaron Rhodes.
Screenshot
January 2023

[International experts]

• Statements by four human rights activists:

- [Willy Fautré](#) – Director, NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers
- [Ján Figel](#) – Former EU Commissioner for Education
- [Massimo Introvigne](#) – Sociologist of Religion
- [Aaron Rhodes](#) – President, Forum for Religious Freedom



Willy Fautré.
Photo: [FOREF](#)

- [Patricia Duval](#) – International Attorney
- [Massimo Introvigne](#) – Sociologist of Religion (appears again)
- [Paula White](#) – Pastor (currently Director of the U.S. White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative)
- [Newt Gingrich](#) – Former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives
- [Mike Pompeo](#) – 70th U.S. Secretary of State

This is the only book that brings together such a collection of valuable expert statements from across various fields. We encourage you to read it. (Available via Amazon and bookstores.)

Amazon (Paperback)

Amazon (Kindle Edition)

“Objection to the ‘Dissolution Order’ Against the Family Federation – Statements from 35 Experts from Japan and Abroad”

Editor: Tatsuki Nakayama (International Attorney)

Publisher: Good Time Publishing

Publication Date: 20th July 2025 (Available for purchase from around July 1)

Page Count: 322 pages

Price: ¥1,400 + tax

Featured image above: The front cover page of “Objection to the ‘Dissolution Order’ Against the [Family Federation](#) – Statements from 35 Experts from Japan and Abroad”

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