FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Dissolution Case - Rule of Law on Trial in Japan

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From a demonstration against the dissolution order against the Family Federation, Shinjuku, Tokyo March 1, 2026

Sekai Nippo

A Defining moment for the rule of law in Japan: Tokyo High Court's historic test in the dissolution case against the Family Federation

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Editorial

Correct the Irrationality of the District Court's Decision!

The Hearing of the Family Federation Appeal

by the editorial board of Sekai Nippo

From a demonstration against the dissolution order against the Family Federation, Shinjuku, Tokyo March 1, 2026

The Tokyo High Court will issue its decision on 4th March regarding the request for a dissolution order

against the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly the Unification Church). This carries historic significance, as it calls into question the court's conviction and integrity as a "guardian of the law" in upholding the rule of law, a fundamental principle of democratic states. A strict judgment based solely on the law - without pandering to the mass media or public opinion - is required.

Dissolution Order Based on "Assumed" Damage

"Freedom of religion" is the foundation of a free society. Judicial decisions affecting this core human right also influence international confidence in Japan's human rights awareness. This matter is grave because it concerns not only the fate of a single religious organization, but also the future of our country.

Regarding large donations made by Family Federation believers, the Tokyo District Court in March of last year issued the first-ever dissolution order based on civil torts. In response, the organization immediately filed an appeal, arguing that treating civil cases as grounds for dissolution infringes upon religious freedom, and noting that since issuing its compliance declaration [See editor's note 1 below] in 2009, no major civil-law problems have arisen.

The district court decision identified 179 individuals - based on civil judgments, settlements, and out-of-court agreements - as victims whose damages became apparent after the compliance declaration [See editor's note 1 below]. However, among these, there was only one court judgment involving a case that occurred after the declaration . Given that few disputes have arisen in recent years, is it not unreasonable to order dissolution?

From a demonstration against the dissolution order against the Family Federation, Shinjuku, Tokyo March 1, 2026

Nevertheless, the district court concluded that even after the declaration [See editor's note 1 below], "it can be assumed that a considerable number of damages that have not yet surfaced exist," and determined that the organization "clearly committed acts in violation of laws and regulations that significantly harm public welfare." Inferring damage in this way appears to depart from the principle of adjudication based on evidence and factual findings.

Among those claiming damages are many former believers who were subjected to coercive faith-breaking (deprogramming) [See editor's note 2 below] by groups opposed to the religious organization. In addition, suspicions have emerged that some written statements submitted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology contain fabrications. The Tokyo District Court ignored these issues. It can only be said that the decision was made with dissolution as a foregone conclusion. The religious organization's immediate appeal was therefore natural.

It is also necessary to keep in mind that the request for a dissolution order began moving forward due to political motives. In October 2022, following the shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄), who was being criticized by the media over connections between the Liberal Democratic Party and an organization friendly to the religious organization, changed the legal interpretation to include civil cases as grounds for dissolution - something that had not previously qualified.

The UN Human Rights Committee, the treaty body for the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Japan has ratified, had long expressed concern about the ambiguity of the definition of "public welfare." Kishida's reinterpretation demonstrated that those concerns were not unfounded.

During the recent House of Representatives election, it became clear that China attempted to manipulate public opinion by using X (formerly Twitter) to link the "former Unification Church" with Sanae

Takaichi (高市早苗). It exploited the worsening image of the religious organization following the district court's decision. Japan's dissolution order has also been used by China to justify its religious repression of groups such as the Uyghurs and Falun Gong.

A Matter Concerning Japan's Prestige

Under international human rights standards, the state has an obligation to protect religious minorities that are prone to social exclusion by the majority. It should not be forgotten that the High Court's decision also concerns Japan's prestige in the international community.

[Editor's note 1: 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.]

[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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Malicious Statistical Manipulation By Lawyers

March 1, 2026 • Knut Holdhus

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The statistical expansion of "damage": How categories reshaped spiritual sales figures aggressively used by hostile lawyers against Family Federation in dissolution case

Tokyo, 24th February 2026 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper Sekai Nippo. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. Original article.

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National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales "Fabricated" Damage

Inflating Case Numbers by Using Apostates Who Had been Kidnapped

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of Sekai Nippo

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***3 leading activist leftwing lawyers from the anti-UC lawyers' network** called National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales – from left: Masaki Kito, Hiroshi Watanabe, Hiroshi Yamaguchi. Photo: Screenshot / Bitter Winter*

Since 1989, *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (Zenkoku Benren) began compiling "damage" statistics that included not only items typically associated with so-called "spiritual sales", but also donations, loans, video lecture fees, and other unspecified categories – items that can hardly be described as products of spiritual sales.

This raises questions. At a time when the media were abuzz with seals, vases, pagodas, and other items as products of spiritual sales, were there really "victims" who individually reported to Zenkoku Benren – an organization claiming to combat spiritual sales – saying, for example, "I took video lectures without knowing it was the Unification Church (then known as the Unification Church, now the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*)," or "I was made to donate (or take out loans) by the church"?

Donations are offerings made by believers to God based on their own faith. Even if someone later loses that faith for some reason, they would not normally recognize such donations as "damage". While some former members might individually consult Zenkoku Benren lawyers about seeking **the return of donations or similar payments**, that **does not constitute damage from spiritual sales**.

Although it is conceivable that some lawyers incorporated the number and amounts of such cases into spiritual sales "damage" statistics, the scale – 135 cases (approximately ¥300 million total) in 1989, 248 cases (approximately ¥700 million) in 1990, and 207 cases (approximately ¥400 million) in 1991 – and the fact that this continued annually through 2021, compels the conclusion that this was an **extremely malicious, organized, and ongoing act of fabrication by Zenkoku Benren**.

Certainly, following the 1992 international mass wedding ceremony, the media resumed critical campaigns against the Unification Church and spiritual sales, so it cannot be denied that "damage" reports increased from that year onward. However, it remains to be clarified why, in the three years prior – 1989, 1990, and 1991 – more than 100 apostates [See editor's note 1 below] each year, allegedly suffering donation-related "damage", visited Zenkoku Benren lawyers, who were reportedly troubled by a sharp decline in spiritual sales "damage" cases.

In 1987, when spiritual sales became a social issue, abductions and confinements of members of the former Unification Church – along with forced renunciations of faith [See editor's note 2 below] – carried out by

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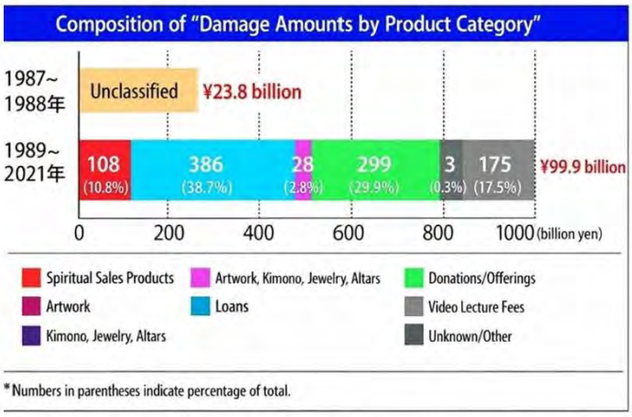
*Professional faith-breaker **Takashi Miyamura** (宮村峻), responsible for hundreds of deprogrammings based on abduction and forcible detention. He is said to have been advisor to the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP). Photo: FFWPU*

deprogrammer (faith-breaker) Takashi Miyamura (宮村峻) and certain Christian pastors, surged to 300 cases, approximately 1.5 times the previous year. The numbers were 224 in 1988, 192 in 1989, 264 in 1990, 302 in 1991, and 375 in 1992, marking the worst period.

It is known that 70% of the victims renounced their faith, and that **most of the legal representatives in damage compensation claims** filed against the religious organization – claims said to function as a "fumi-e" (踏み絵 – pledge of repudiation) [See editor's note 3 below] completely denying past faith – **were lawyers affiliated with Zenkoku Benren**.



***Manipulation of figures by including unrelated categories**: "Damage Statistics by Product Category" on the website of the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, captured on 13th October 2022 (now deleted). Illustration: Sekai Nippo. English version converted by ChatGPT, February 2026*

Reviewing multiple notification letters sent to the religious organization and related parties at the time reveals detailed listings of video center enrollment fees, training session fees, various donations, payments for goods purchased from church affiliates (including seals, jewelry, kimono, ginseng tea, etc.), loans, along with dates and amounts. When categorized, these items largely correspond to the "product-specific" damage categories that appeared in spiritual sales statistics beginning in 1989.

In other words, there is a very **strong suspicion that Zenkoku Benren inflated a single compensation claim** by one abducted and confined apostate [See footnote 1 below] **into anywhere from several to over ten separate 'product-specific' damage claims**.

Given the rapid expansion in reported damage after March 1988, it is the responsibility of Zenkoku Benren, as an organization of lawyers, to dispel these suspicions of exaggerated "damage". If the allegations are entirely unfounded, the solution is simple: rather than concealing the "product-specific" statistics, they should present the original source materials substantiating their figures.

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***Featured image** above: Statistical manipulation by hostile activist lawyers in Japan. Illustration: Chat GPT, 1st March 2026.*

[***Editor's note 1:* Apostates** here refer not just to someone who have left the religion, but who are now being used to **undermine** the group. The apostates in the text above are being used by hostile and cynical lawyers for malicious reasons to cause harm to the faith they were forced out of, when they had their faith broken coercively by so-called faith-breakers (deprogrammers), working in league with activist lawyers.]

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***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*

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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.]

[***Editor's note 3*: Fumi-e (踏み絵)** literally means "stepping picture". A *fumi-e* was a physical image – usually of Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary – that suspected Christians in early modern Japan were required to step on in order to prove they were not Christian.

This print shows Fumi-e (踏み絵: fumi "stepping-on" + e "picture"); step on a picture with the likeness of e.g. the Cross of Jesus or the Virgin Mary. Photo: Unknown author. Public domain image. Cropped

This happened primarily in the Edo period (17th-19th century). The purpose was to identify and suppress Christians after Christianity was banned in Japan. Officials placed an image on the ground and ordered suspects to step on it. Refusal to do so was interpreted as proof of Christian faith, often leading to imprisonment, torture, or execution.

The practice was particularly common in areas like Nagasaki, where Christianity had spread earlier

where Christianity had spread earlier.

Today, *fumi-e* is often used metaphorically in Japanese to describe a test of loyalty, a forced act meant to prove ideological conformity, a symbolic gesture requiring someone to repudiate prior beliefs.

In the above article, the term is used metaphorically to describe lawsuits against a religious organization being portrayed as a kind of symbolic act of renouncing one's former faith – comparable to being forced to step on a sacred image.]

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