

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Religious Freedom Crisis Exposed In Paris

Knut Holdhus
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Press conference in Paris 15th June 2024. From left: Maria Colleter, Moriko Hori, Tatsuki Nakayama



Peter Zoehrer

Paris press conference puts spotlight on religious freedom crisis in Japan by Peter Zoehrer, Austrian journalist who has published and lectured extensively in the fields of human rights and freedom of religion or belief, is the Executive Director of [Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe](#) (FOREF), an independent, secular, civil society formation dedicated to defending religious liberty and other fundamental human rights in accordance with international law. Article published with permission.

Paris, June 15, 2024 - A delegation from the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU) Japan has traveled to France to participate in the [2024 CESNUR Conference](#) in Bordeaux from 12th to 15th June and highlight the ongoing crisis of religious freedom in Japan. Tomihiro Tanaka, President of the [Family Federation](#) of Japan, sent a compelling video message to support the initiative. The press conference,

organized by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), an NGO in general consultative status with the UN ECOSOC, was held at the UPF France office in Paris. The event brought to light the severe social, political, and legal challenges facing the organization.

President Tomihiro Tanaka's address



Tomihiro Tanaka at press conference in Tokyo 7th Nov 2023

In his address, President Tomihiro Tanaka expressed his deep respect for Europe's historical journey toward achieving religious freedom, which is now protected under the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#). He reported on the escalating violations of religious freedom in Japan, where the [FFWPU](#) has faced significant persecution. The [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), formerly known as the [Unification Church](#), was [founded in Korea in 1954](#) by the renowned religious leader Rev. Dr. [Sun Myung Moon](#). The movement has experienced substantial growth, particularly since its establishment in Japan in 1958.

Historical context and challenges

President Tanaka detailed the difficult history of [FFWPU](#) in Japan, including the illegal abduction and coercion of members by various groups opposed to their beliefs. He emphasized that despite these challenges, the organization has remained committed to its mission of promoting global peace and mutual understanding. The [FFWPU](#) has a long-

standing history of advocating for freedom, with a membership that has grown to over 600,000 in Japan.

Impact of Shinzo Abe's assassination

The assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2022, which the media linked to the [FFWPU](#) due to the assailant's alleged grudge against the [organization](#), has significantly worsened the persecution. President Tanaka explained that, following the assassination, media attacks against [FFWPU](#) members intensified, leading to widespread discrimination. Members have faced difficulties in renting properties, finding employment, and maintaining their livelihoods.

Government actions and legal proceedings

In October 2022, Prime Minister Kishida's administration escalated the government's campaign against the [FFWPU](#) by altering legal interpretations to facilitate the organization's dissolution. A formal request for the dissolution order was made to the court in October 2023, with hearings commencing in February 2024. President Tanaka warned that such an order would represent a major setback for religious freedom in Japan, potentially increasing state control over all religious activities.

Legal perspective from Nakayama



Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama at 2024 CESNUR Conference 13th June 2024 in Bordeaux

Nakayama, a lawyer advising the [FFWPU](#), provided a comprehensive legal analysis of the situation. He emphasized that the dissolution of a religious corporation in Japan requires evidence of extreme harm to public welfare, typically through criminal activity. Nakayama pointed out that in its 60-year history in Japan, the [FFWPU](#) has committed no crimes. He also highlighted the human rights violations inherent in deprogramming efforts, where members are forcibly kidnapped and coerced into renouncing their faith.

Human rights violations and deprogramming

Nakayama shed light on the issue of deprogramming in Japan, where over 4,300 members have been victims of abduction and forced deconversion. These human rights abuses, often underreported, have led to significant psychological and physical harm. Nakayama

argued that many civil lawsuits against the [FFWPU](#) are driven by deprogramming victims coerced into legal action, undermining the legitimacy of claims used to justify the dissolution.

Call for international attention

Nakayama called for international attention and support to safeguard religious freedom in Japan. Despite intense political pressure, he stressed the importance of upholding justice and preventing the unjust dissolution of the [FFWPU](#) based on coerced and unfounded allegations.

Testimony from Moriko Hori



Moriko Hori at the 2024 CESNUR Conference 13th June in Bordeaux

Moriko Hori, President of the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) in Japan and a second-generation [FFWPU](#) believer, provided a heartfelt testimony. She detailed the global humanitarian efforts of the Women's Federation, an NGO with General Consultative Status with ECOSOC at the UN. Since its founding in 1992 by Rev. [Sun Myung Moon](#) and Dr. [Hak Ja Han Moon](#), the Federation has empowered women and children in over 100 countries through international cooperation projects.

WFWP's humanitarian efforts and persecution

Mrs. Hori began by detailing the organization's extensive work. Since its inception, WFWP has supported over 400,000 women and children

through various projects, stabilizing families in developing countries. However, after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the Women's Federation of Japan, who shared the same founders with the [FFWPU](#), faced intense persecution.



Keiji Kokuta from the Japanese Communist Party) - 30th March 2023

Hori recounted a specific incident in November 2022, where Communist Party Parliamentarian Keiji Kokuta attacked the Foreign Ministry for awarding Mrs. Akiko Hozan, a school chairwoman in Mozambique, the prestigious Foreign Minister's Award. The Foreign Ministry, succumbing to political pressure, revoked the award. This decision, driven by fear of further attacks, damaged the federation's reputation and led to the loss of 2,000 paying members, jeopardizing the lives of 20,000 beneficiaries of their projects.

Loss of critical projects

One of the federation's flagship projects, the JAMOO vocational school, aimed at empowering women to achieve economic independence, has seen significant success. Recognized by the UN in 2008 as one of "the Best Practices", this project, along with others, faced severe setbacks due to government interference. Hori narrated how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under political pressure, conducted investigations and demanded the removal of all traces of the WFWP from their projects, even causing the resignation and illness of key personnel.

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Akiko Hozan

"We've been fighting to change the situation and restore our dignity, but we realized that we cannot do this alone. We need to build allies with other religious entities who are also suffering from persecution. We have been the 'Silent Majority'. We need to become the 'Noisy Minority' together," said Mrs. Hori.

Broader impacts and legal struggles

The persecution extended beyond organizational setbacks to personal attacks on members. Maria Colleter, a second-generation believer in the [Unification Church](#), shared her harrowing experiences at university. Despite their community service efforts through the CARP student

association, Maria and her peers faced defamatory campaigns and institutional discrimination. This culminated in legal battles, where Maria's rights to religious freedom were defended in court, setting a precedent against such discrimination.

Urgent call for international support

The testimonies emphasized the dire need for international intervention and solidarity among religious entities. Hori and Maria both stressed that the fight for religious freedom and human dignity cannot be won in isolation. They urged other religious organizations and the international community to stand against the rising tide of religious intolerance and discrimination in Japan.

Conclusion

The testimonies presented in Paris paint a grim picture of the current state of religious freedom in Japan. The Japanese delegation's message is clear: the international community must act to protect the fundamental rights of religious organizations and their members. The struggle of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), alongside the Women's Federation for World Peace, exemplifies a broader battle between secularism and spiritualism, materialism and morality. Upholding these values is essential for a just and free society.

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Japan: Threat To Religious Freedom

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Current threat to religious freedom in Japan may have global consequences

Aaron Rhodes, human rights expert and author, warns in



a [commentary](#) in the Washington DC based news website *The Messenger* 15th August 2023, about the present threat to religious freedom in Japan since the Abe assassination one year ago. Much is at stake for religious liberty in Japan and

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globally because of what he describes as a **campaign led by Japan's Communist Party against a minority religion.**

Normally, we see such attacks in communist and totalitarian states. Although Japan is a free nation, it has one of the largest communist parties in the democratic world.

Rhodes is a long-time campaigner for human rights and religious freedom and served from 1993 to 2007 as *executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights*. In the article headlined "**Japan's Threat to International Religious Freedom**", he points out the dangers posed to believers not just in the land of the rising sun, but all around the world, if the communists in Japan were to succeed in their decades long war against the **Family Federation**, formerly the **Unification Church**.



Shinzo Abe March 2022. Photo: US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel / Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image. Cropped

The communists, aided by leftwing activist lawyers, **exploited politically the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe** 8th July 2022. In a well-orchestrated campaign, they succeeded, as Rhodes points out, in telling the story that the **Family Federation** is to be blamed for the terror attack on Abe.

It is quite amazing how the **media took this story at face value** and focused on Japanese lawmakers' connection to the **Unification Church**, especially within the governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in spite of such connections often being slight.

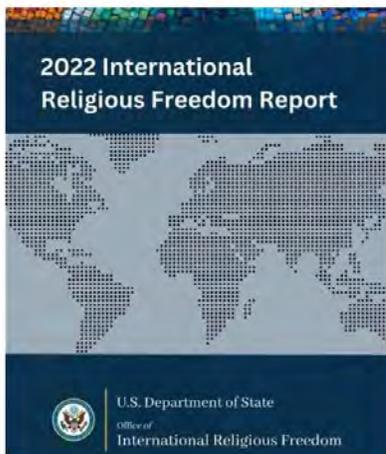
Not only that, the story told by the leftwing activist lawyers that "cults are dangerous", clearly was allowed to colour the articles of many a Japanese journalist and editor. And they printed the extreme claims unquestioningly even though those claims came from a body founded in order to destroy the **Unification Church**, now called the **Family Federation**.

Award-winning Japanese investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda makes this perfectly clear,

"Almost all of the lawyers in the Network were affiliated with the former Socialist Party and the Communist Party, who strongly opposed the enactment of the Anti-Espionage Law, were connected with extremist groups and North Korea, and were ideologically leftists and self-styled atheists. In contrast, the former **Unification Church** is an anti-communist and conservative organization that opposes atheism. It is clear that this was an ideological battle between the two camps." (*The Truth About the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales*, article by Masumi Fukuda in the monthly magazine *Hanada*, republished in English in *Bitter Winter* 30th March 2023)



Masumi Fukuda. Photo: FOREF



Rhodes describes his disappointment that such extreme anti-religious claims from a body initiated by communists were given abundant space in the US Department of State's *2022 International Religious Freedom Report*. He writes,

"the U.S. government's report

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on international religious freedom gives equal coverage to the

typical anti-cult position that the attack against the [Unification Church] and the Jehovah's Witnesses 'was not about religious freedom' but about 'harm' caused to members and society."

Rhodes describes this as disappointing lack of action taken by the United States, "the champion of religious freedom around the world". Last year's report on the condition for religious freedom globally was however exceptionally "soft" on Japan, even though the Japanese government clearly has done its part to create what leading religious freedom expert Massimo Introvigne calls "the most dramatic religious liberty crisis in a democratic country."

In spite of serious issues with freedom of faith in Japan, the country has been dealt with in an unusually soft manner. Rhodes, and Introvigne attribute this to political bias as Japan is one of the key allies of the USA in the Far East.

Rhodes is also critical of *Freedom House*, the Washington DC based non-governmental organization that measures the degree of civil liberty in each nation. The US human rights expert claims that *Freedom House* bypassed the Japanese "government's threat to religious freedom in its report."



Because of the lack of reaction by the United States and the international human rights community, Rhodes fears that the Japanese government may face little criticism even though it continues to ignore the constitutionally granted religious freedom of a religious minority.

And this may well become a much larger problem and affect other religious minorities not only in Japan, but potentially around the world. As Rhodes emphasizes,

"authoritarian states may see a green light for further assaults on Christians, Muslims, minorities such as the Ahmadi Muslims, Jews, the Baha'i and others. [...] With so much at stake, human rights monitors and friends of Japan should help ensure that the principle of religious freedom is not corroded."

Featured image above: Dr. Aaron Rhodes, executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights 1993-2007. Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

More about threat to religious freedom: [Japan Given Bottom Rank](#)

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