

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: In Japan Unification Church Believers Face Discrimination, Threats and Violence

Knut Holdhus
August 7, 2024

Damage suffered by members of Family Federation and its places of worship		
Damage to members	• Physical harm (incl. violence, outpatient treatment, suicide, etc.)	12
	• Property damage (incl. vandalism, destruction of belongings, etc.)	10
	• Discrimination (real estate contracts, speech and conduct at school/work, etc.)	25
	• Insults, threats, and harassment (from relatives, work mates, school mates, etc)	107
	• Others	10
Damage to places of worship	• Property damage (incl. vandalism, destruction of possessions, etc.)	7
	• Discrimination (real estate contracts, speech and conduct at school/work, etc.)	46
	• Insults, threats, and harassment (from relatives and acquaintances, etc.)	116
	• Others	18
Total		351
(According to the records of the HQ of Family Federation of Japan for Nov. 2023 – 20 th July 2024)		

English version of illustration used by [Sekai Nippo](#) 7th August 2024



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Ignored by Japanese media: Investigative team exposes how members of religious minority face widespread discrimination, insults, threats, and harassment

Tokyo, 7th August 2024 - Published as the 16th article in a series in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#)

Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat - Part 3: Believers Suffering Discrimination and Human Rights Violations

Threatening Phone Calls Such as "I'll Kill You"

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai](#)

[Nippo](#)

See [1st article](#), [2nd article](#), [3rd article](#), [4th article](#), [5th article](#), [6th article](#), [7th article](#), [8th article](#), [9th article](#), [10th article](#), [11th article](#), [12th article](#), [13th article](#), [14th article](#), [15th article](#)



Tomihiro Tanaka, here at press conference in Tokyo 7th Nov. 2023

The [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) has revealed that its members and places of worship have been experiencing various forms of harm since the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

At a press conference on 7th November last year, [Family Federation](#) President Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広) stated, "Since the incident, we have been going through truly difficult circumstances:"

"There is a young man who was forced to quit his job,"

"A student who graduated from a [Family Federation](#)-affiliated university in South Korea had his job offer rescinded,"

"In social studies classes, teachers have been continuously criticizing the [Family Federation](#), causing children to stop attending school,"

"In schools, there have been test questions that led to conclusions defaming the [Family Federation](#),"

"A young man, excessively stressed by media reports, attempted suicide, and there have been suicides as well."



Widespread discrimination by authorities made situation much worse: Graffiti sprayed on [Family Federation](#) properties throughout Japan

Since November 2023, the [Family Federation](#) headquarters has been compiling data, and as of July 20th, there have been 351 incidents of harm experienced by members and places of worship nationwide. Of these, 164 incidents involved harm to members, and 187 incidents involved harm to places of worship.

Breaking it down, the harm experienced by members includes 12 cases of physical harm such as violence, hospital outpatient treatment, and suicide; 10 cases of property damage such as vandalism and destruction of belongings; 25 cases of discrimination related to real estate contracts, and speech and conduct at schools and workplaces; 107 cases of insults, threats, and harassment from relatives, work mates and class mates; and 10 other cases.

The damage experienced by places of worship includes 7 cases of property damage such as vandalism and destruction of possessions; 46 cases of discrimination related to real estate contracts, and speech and conduct at schools and workplaces; 116 cases of insults, threats, and harassment from relatives and acquaintances of members; and 18 other cases. However, most of these incidents have not been reported by the media.

This is how Susumu Sato (佐藤進広), the Public Relations Director of the [Family Federation](#), reflects on the situation after the incident [Editor's note: the assassination of Shinzo Abe on 8th July 2022],

"The media's perspective has been that they have no interest in the harm suffered by the [Family Federation](#). Rather than seeing it as harm, it has been viewed as a deserved consequence for being the party that produced victims."



The 351 cases of harm are those identified by the [Family Federation](#) headquarters, and there is also information collected by groups such as the "[Second Generation Association for Protecting the Human Rights of Believers](#)," which was established by young believers. Some of this information is posted on the association's website. For instance, there is a severe case where a parent was denied admission to a hospital after the staff saw "[Family Federation](#)" written on the person's insurance card. Such cases of discrimination in medical settings, which can sometimes be life-threatening, are particularly serious.

[Family Federation](#)" written on the person's insurance card. Such cases of discrimination in medical settings, which can sometimes be life-threatening, are particularly serious.

Threatening phone calls such as "I'll kill you" have been received nationwide. The Public Relations Department estimates that the number might well exceed 10,000, making them too numerous to count.

The believers are persons who have no connection to the assassination of Shinzo Abe. However, following the shocking assassination of the former Prime Minister, the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (Zenkoku Benren), which has a contentious relationship with the [Family Federation](#), issued a statement on 12th July 2022, regarding the shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The statement read,

"As an organization that has long been concerned about the suffering, conflicts, and financial difficulties faced by many former believers, their families, and second-generation believers, we can understand the anguish of the suspect Yamagami and his anger towards the [Family Federation](#)."

The National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, which expressed "understanding" of the defendant's "anger", in other words, his intent to kill, became a source of information, leading to an unprecedented amount of media coverage criticizing the [Family Federation](#) and pursuing its "ties" to Shinzo Abe and the Liberal Democratic Party. Former believers who claimed to be victims were featured

almost daily.



Tetsuya Yamagami, the man who killed Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan

As a result, many gifts and donations have been sent to the detention center where Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), the defendant, is being held. Two years after the assassination, the defendant reportedly told his defense team,

"I did not anticipate the current situation to arise," and "I don't know if it has been good or bad for the second-generation believers."



This was reported by Kyodo News, but some local newspapers, such as the Sanyo Shimbun on 23rd June 2024, headlined it as an "unanticipated situation".

We cannot overlook this "unanticipated" violation of the human rights of those with the faith of the [Family Federation](#).

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Kishida Succumbed To Pressure From Biased Media

July 26, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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Japanese parliamentarian criticizes Fumio Kishida succumbing to pressure from biased media against religious minority, completely ignoring its views



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

Tokyo, 26th July 2024 – Published as the **15th article** in a series in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article*

Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat – Part 2: Ripples to local assemblies

The persecution of religious organizations leaves a lasting stain on history

House of Councillors member Satoshi Hamada

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On 20th



From the Chiba Prefectural Convention of the "Symposium to Protect Freedom of Religion and Human Rights", held in Chiba City 20th March 2024. On the right is Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama, beside him Rev. Haruhisa Nakagawa. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda (豊田剛攢) / *Sekai Nippo*.

March this year, there was a [symposium on religious freedom in Chiba City](#) organized by members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)). Among the attendees was a member of parliament, Satoshi Hamada (浜田聡), from the "Party to Protect the People from NHK" (NHK Party).

Earlier that month, on the 12th, [Hamada had asked](#) during a session of the [House of Councillors Committee on General Affairs](#) whether it was inappropriate for members of parliament to attend meetings of the [Family Federation](#), a group with which the [Liberal Democratic Party](#) had declared a severance of relations.



Akiko Honda (LDP), Vice-Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Here on 26th Oct. 2023. Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

Akiko Honda (本田顕子), Vice-Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, responded that she was not in a position to comment on the activities of individual members of parliament or their participation in meetings of specific groups. Hamada interpreted this as government approval to maintain relations with the group.

When Fumio Kishida, the president of the [Liberal Democratic Party](#) (and Prime Minister), declared in August 2022 that the party would sever ties with the [Family Federation](#), this directive was communicated to local organizations as well. This had significant repercussions, and concerned [Family Federation](#) followers, who were worried about having their applications rejected in local assemblies, turned to Hamada as a last resort. They noticed Hamada due to his frequent

YouTube broadcasts discussing the irregularities in government and local policies. Upon receiving their message, Hamada readily agreed to meet with them.

Subsequently, Hamada met with multiple followers, listened to their stories, and attended meetings organized by them. Through these interactions, he **began to question whether the government and the Liberal Democratic Party's stance was excessively one-sided.**

What surprised Hamada the most was the fact that over 4,000 Family Federation followers had been forcibly abducted and confined by professional "faith-breakers" (individuals who specialize in coercing people to leave religious groups), compelling them to renounce their faith. He had vaguely thought of the [Family Federation](#) as a problematic organization, but he **came to realize that they were more often victims rather than perpetrators.**

Despite these facts, Hamada questions why there are no members of parliament defending the [Family Federation](#). On 22nd July 2024, he attended the "International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit Asia" held in Tokyo and stated in his guest speech,

"I think it is unfair that only the Family Federation is being oppressed. Out of 700 members of parliament, it is strange that not a single one addresses the issue of the Family Federation."

In an interview with our newspaper, Hamada stated,

"Considering the possibility that religious freedom could be unduly threatened by politicians distancing themselves en masse, I believe that politicians should now listen to the

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masse, I believe that politicians should now listen to the voices of [Family Federation](#) followers and take action."



Takashi Tachibana. Photo (2021): Noukei314 / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int.](#) Cropped

Takashi Tachibana (立花孝志), the leader of the *NHK Party* to which Hamada belongs, also shares the understanding that the **government and the Liberal Democratic Party's decision violates the freedom of religion guaranteed by the Constitution.**

Hamada also questions the **lack of transparency in the procedures for a dissolution order.** During the 213th regular session of the *National Diet* (from 26th January to 23rd June), he **submitted multiple written questions** to the *House of Councillors* regarding the [Family Federation](#), such as the **legality of the dissolution order and issues related to abduction and confinement.** However, to all those questions, he **received virtually zero response.**

On 18th June, during a symposium in Tokyo that examined the Kishida administration, Satoshi Hamada delivered a video message. He candidly expressed his impression, saying,

"Regarding the dissolution order request, I felt it was like brute force, and I believe there were plenty of opportunities to reconsider it. However, I sense that Kishida succumbed to pressure from the media."

Nevertheless, Hamada has no intention of backing down. He explained,

"The government's stance has already been decided, so what I can do is create a record that the issue has been raised in the Diet. The proceedings in the Diet are recorded in the minutes, and future historians will see that during this administration, unjust actions were taken against religious organizations. That is my intention behind my actions."

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[Editor's note on meaning of headline "The persecution of religious organizations leaves a lasting stain on history": Whether it's the suppression of Buddhist practices in Japan during the Kamakura period (1185-1333) or the Christian persecution in the Edo era (1603-1868), these instances have been recorded and remembered as significant challenges to religious freedom. Similarly, in more recent times, actions against religious groups have continued to shape our understanding of this complex issue. It's essential to recognize and learn from these historical events to ensure the protection of religious liberties today.]

Featured image above: Hamada Satoshi, born in Kyoto in 1977. After completing a graduate degree in education at the University of Tokyo Graduate School, he graduated from Kyoto University's School of Medicine in 2011. After working as a radiologist, he ran in the proportional representation district of the July 2019 House of Councillors election as a candidate for the Party to Protect the People from NHK. Although he lost, he was elected in October of the same year after party leader Senator Tachibana Takashi lost his seat automatically due to his running in a by-election for the Saitama constituency of the House of Councillors. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#).

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