

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Prejudice Japanese media refuse Unification Church's right to respond to false allegations

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From the TV program 'Information Live Miyaneya' aired on 22nd September 2022



Heavy bias in Japanese media - religious minority given no right to respond to false allegations

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Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat - Part 4: Media Crossing the Line

"Live Commentary" Infringing on Freedom of Expression

Miyane-ya deviates from normal journalistic practices

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

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A: "We are deeply saddened by the reports that the suspect, who is considered the perpetrator, acted out of resentment towards our organization, the [Family Federation](#). We sincerely apologize for the various disturbances caused to society."

B: "They're apologizing for the wrong thing. They're acting like it's someone else's problem."



This exchange took place on 10th August 2022, during the opening part of a press conference by Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広), the president of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)),

which was broadcast live on Yomiuri TV's program "Miyane-ya", hosted by comedian Seiji Miyane (宮根誠司).



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



Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka

A refers to Tomihiko Tanaka, and B refers to journalist Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト), who is well-versed in information about the [Family Federation](#). However, the two did not actually have this exchange at the press conference venue. The program overlaid Suzuki's screen frame on the screen where Tanaka was reading the statement, and while his remarks were being translated verbatim into English, the program had Suzuki provide real-time commentary. "Miyane-ya" labeled this as "Live Commentary by Attorney Masaki Kito (紀藤正樹) and Eito Suzuki."

At the time, there was heightened interest in the press conference by the head of the [religious organization](#) due to the motive of the man who shot former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), which was said to be resentment towards the former [Unification Church](#). However, there were also concerns within the television industry about broadcasting the [religious organization](#)'s claims live as they were. Simply put, there was a concern that "it might send incorrect information to viewers" (as reported by Tokyo Sports Web on 11th August 2022).

According to fundamental principles of reporting the claims of the [religious organization](#) should be accurately conveyed and, if there were any counterarguments, those ought to be presented equally as well. However, the method taken by Miyane-ya, as described above, was carried over to subsequent live broadcasts of the press conferences held by the [organization](#) ([Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)) and even escalated.



Hostile activist against [Family Federation](#): Yoshifu Arita, former House of Councilors member for CDP, the party professional faith-breaker Miyamura was advisor to. Before that, Arita was a communist politician 1990-2007



Hideyuki Teshigawara



Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto at press conference 8th Sep. 2023

In a press conference broadcast on 22nd September 2022 featuring Hideyuki Teshigawara (勅使河原秀行), head of the [Family Federation](#) Church Reform Promotion Headquarters, and his legal adviser Nobuya Fukumoto (福本修也), two "live commentators" - on that day, journalists critical of the [religious organization](#): Yoshifu Arita (有田芳生 (よしふ) and Eito Suzuki. They were superimposed on the bottom left and right of the screen, and each commentator held up a horizontal sign that read "Objection!" Then a red sign with the word "Objection!" appeared on the screen, after which each commentator's argument was presented in short sentences.

This method used by Miyane-ya deviated from normal reporting standards. The TV screen became a completely unfair space. The [religious organization](#) was not given the opportunity to respond, and across

a variety of rapidly shifting topics, only the views of the critics were aired at the end. This created the impression that the [religious organization](#) was making nonsensical claims, and it seemed as though it had no right to explain or express its opinions. The program not only lacked fairness, but also severely infringed on the freedom of expression of the [Family Federation](#).

For example, during Tomihiro Tanaka's press conference, he stated,

"Due to strict adherence to the compliance mentioned above, what is referred to as 'spiritual sales' is not being conducted by our [organization](#)'s followers, and there have been no reports of damage."

However, Eito Suzuki responded by saying,

"They conduct spiritual sales without involving products. They give something in exchange for donations, [...] they have just changed their methods."

This is a typical use of a fallacious argument, bringing up the different concept of "spiritual sales without involving products" to shift the argument away from what Tanaka had actually stated.

At this point, Suzuki remarked, "It's not about selling those vases for hundreds of thousands of yen." Commentator Patrick Harlan (known as "Pakkun") pressed him, saying, "So, it's true that they don't conduct spiritual sales anymore." Suzuki was forced to admit, "Yes, basically, they don't involve products."

In all the press conference broadcasts, Seiji Miyane (宮根誠司) ended the program by allowing only the specialists critical of the [religious organization](#) to express their one-sided opinions. This can only be described as crossing the line into biased reporting.

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Media Making Terrorist Yamagami Into Hero

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Japanese media rapidly making terrorist Yamagami into protagonist in their narrative



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

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Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat – Part 4: **Media Crossing the Line**

Making Yamagami into a Protagonist Before His Trial

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

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It has been two years since the



The immediate aftermath of the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in the vicinity of Kintetsu Yamato-Saidaiji station northern entrance on 8th July 2022. Photo: Tokumeigakarinoashima / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped

incident that occurred at the north exit roundabout of Yamato-Saidaiji Station in Nara Prefecture at 11:36 AM on 8th July 2022. During the Obon holiday on 13th August this year, Nippon TV aired a dramatization of the "Shinzo Abe Shooting Incident" in a two-hour special titled "The World's Astonishing News".

The narration began as follows:

"When did the man begin preparing for the attack? Why was former Prime Minister Abe targeted? We will recreate the events based on the police report, statements that have come to light, and interviews with those involved."



Tetsuya Yamagami, the man who killed Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan. Photo: Andrew2592009 / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped

The main character in this dramatization is "the man" – namely, the suspect Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), who was arrested at the scene. An actor who closely resembles him plays the role, including scenes of interrogation by the police.

The narration mentions "statements that have come to light", but there is nothing new. The suspect stated,

"My mother became deeply involved with a religious organization and donated large sums of money. That ruined our family life. I initially thought about targeting members of the religious organization, but that seemed difficult, so I targeted former Prime Minister Abe instead."

The main character speaks this way during police interrogation, and the drama unfolds with the narrator revealing,

"It later became known that this religious organization is the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), commonly known as the [Unification Church](#)."

Amid the intense media coverage following the incident, print media such as the monthly general magazine Bungei Shunju (文藝春秋), extensively covered the defendant's life story. While adapting this into a television drama may seem like a new experiment, it poses a significant problem.

This is because, as mentioned at the end of the drama,

"Yamagami has been indicted on charges including murder, and while the details of the incident and the core motive behind the crime will be clarified in court, there is currently no prospect of when the trial will begin."



The Bungei Shunju, here the July 1964 edition. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image

Since the details have not yet been made clear, the drama risks manipulating public perception before the trial has even taken place.

Based on a court case where former members won a lawsuit against the [religious organization](#), the program also dramatized the case of a woman who had become a member at the age of 17. The drama depicted her experiences: attending retreats to study the teachings, participating in

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experiences, attending retreats to study the teachings, participating in "spiritual sales", being matched with a Korean partner for a **mass wedding**, and eventually leaving the **organization** because of being "persuaded by her family". Through the experiences of this former member, the program criticized the **religious organization**.

Meanwhile, the reenactment of the incident reaches a climax with dramatic sound effects reminiscent of a morality tale of good triumphing over evil, interpreting the defendant's words posted on the bulletin board of a reporter's blog, "I will risk my life to become the liberator of all those associated with the **Unification Church**," and "Strangely enough, I too want a gun so badly I would give anything for it." These words were interpreted as a declaration of his resolve to carry out the shooting.

In the drama, Abe's cause of death was explained by the *Nara Prefectural Police* as "a fatal injury caused by damage to an artery under his left collarbone from a bullet that entered through his left shoulder." However, the content of a press conference held by *Nara Medical University Hospital*, where Abe received emergency treatment, was ignored. The hospital had stated that "a bullet that entered from the right front side of the neck damaged the heart and major blood vessels, leading to death from blood loss."



Shinzo Abe delivering a video message on 12th September 2021. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission via PeaceLink

Regarding the question why former Prime Minister Abe was targeted, the drama portrayed a scene where the main character watches on his computer a video message from Abe. This message was sent to an event held by the *Universal Peace*

Federation, a group related to the **religious organization**. The drama also suggested that the crime was committed because the suspect believed Abe's grandfather, former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi (岸信介), had invited the **religious organization** to Japan, and that Abe himself was also connected to it.

The program also showed a photo of **Unification Church** founder **Sun Myung Moon** meeting with Kishi and touched on the "ties" between the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the **religious organization**. As criticism of the **religious organization** and the LDP grew, the government requested a court order to dissolve the **organization**.



Sun Myung Moon and Nobusuke Kishi, Prime Minister of Japan 1957-1960, shaking hands in Tokyo. Photo: FFWPU

This drama does not evoke strong anger toward the suspect who killed former Prime Minister Abe. When the defendant is made the protagonist, his background, circumstances, and feelings are expressed in a way that evokes sympathy for him as a person.

In contrast, the followers of the **religious organization** were depicted in a dehumanized way – portrayed as being brainwashed with doctrines during retreats and being pushed to split with their boyfriend or girlfriend. The defendant is portrayed more humanely. The way the media has created the "Yamagami Story" and portrayed the suspect and the followers differently may have led to a case of misrepresentation of some kind.

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