

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japanese Media Criticized for Stereotyping Minorities

Knut Holdhus
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Sayyed Sajjad Shah being interviewed

Muslims in Japan censure media for stereotyping minorities, creating image that Islam is dangerous and associated with groups like al-Qaeda

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Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat - Part 6: Voices of Religious Leaders

Concerns over prejudice: "Religion is dangerous"

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

See part 1: The Kishida Administration's

Reckless Actions: [1st article](#), [2nd article](#), [3rd article](#), [4th article](#), [5th article](#), [6th article](#)



[Sekai Nippo](#)

See part 2: Ripples to Local Assemblies: [7th article](#), [8th article](#), [9th article](#), [10th article](#), [11th article](#), [12th article](#), [13th article](#), [14th article](#), [15th article](#)

See part 3: Believers Suffering Discrimination and Human Rights Violations: [16th article](#), [17th article](#), [18th article](#), [19th article](#), [20th article](#), [21st article](#), [22nd article](#)

See part 4: Media Crossing the Line: [23rd article](#), [24th article](#), [25th article](#), [26th article](#), [27th article](#), [28th article](#)

See part 5: The Distorted Image of the "Second-Generation": [29th article](#), [30th article](#), [31st article](#), [32nd article](#), [33rd article](#), [34th article](#), [35th article](#), [36th article](#), [37th article](#), [38th article](#)

See part 6: Voices of Religious Leaders: [39th article](#), [40th article](#), [41st article](#)

Outrage in Resident Muslim Communities

Sayyed Sajjad Shah, a 67-year-old self-employed resident of Nagoya, is a follower of the Ahmadiyya Muslim minority group. He is affiliated with the Japan Ahmadiyya Muslim Association.

Shah was born and raised in a family of doctors in Pakistan, where he was seen as having a bright future. However, as the only Ahmadiyya believer in his high school class, he faced discrimination. This deeply troubled both him and his parents, ultimately leading them to make the difficult decision for him to leave school.

This experience strengthened his resolve against religious persecution and deepened his commitment to the principle of freedom of religion.

Shah's Journey in Japan and His Advocacy for Religious Freedom

Shah migrated to Japan in 1984 and has been an active and devoted member of the Japan Ahmadiyya Muslim Association since the organization moved its headquarters from Tokyo to Nagoya in the 1980s. The association now has over 500 members. However, recent criticisms of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the government's subsequent dissolution request have heightened concerns within the association.

Shah asserts,

"The teachings of Islam do not advocate for the deprivation of religious freedom. Wise religious leaders must explain this to the government."



Humayun Mughal being interviewed

He believes that the spread of negative sentiment toward religion in Japan stems from a lack of education and understanding about it.

While the [Family Federation](#) faced scrutiny for excessive donations beyond its followers' means, Shah highlighted the Ahmadiyya approach:

"In the Ahmadiyya community, contributions and charitable giving are entirely voluntary. All funds collected and their uses are meticulously recorded and disclosed to members. This transparency ensures trust and satisfaction among believers."

Promoting Unity and Understanding Across Religions

Through Shah's introduction, Anis Ahmad Nadeem, the Japan headquarters' head missionary for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association, participated in the Aichi Prefecture Conference for Building Paths to Religious Harmony and Unified Peace on 5th October 2024, organized by [Family Federation](#) members

in Nagoya. In his guest address, Nadeem emphasized,

"No one has the right to deprive others of religious freedom."



Antonio Inoki (1943-2022), legendary Japanese professional wrestler, professional wrestling trainer, martial artist, and politician

A similar event titled One Osaka 10.14: Weaving the Value of Faith into the Future was held in Osaka on 14th October 2024. Religious commentator and journalist Humayun Mughal, a former friend of the late politician and professional wrestler Antonio Inoki, delivered a keynote speech wearing a suit and red shawl reminiscent of Inoki's style. He declared,

"True happiness arises only when there is freedom of faith, freedom of the soul, and freedom of the heart."

A Shared Experience of Cultural and Religious Advocacy

Mughal, a Sunni Muslim, came to Japan 40 years ago as a student at Waseda University. Drawing on his experiences as an interpreter for the Pakistani Embassy and the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, he leads an Islamic cultural research group. Despite decades of life in Japan, he continues to grapple with differences in culture and customs, strengthening his resolve to promote understanding and harmony.

Humayun Mughal Expresses Concerns Over Prejudices and Religious Freedom

Mughal lamented the challenges facing Muslims in Japan, sharing an ongoing struggle to establish an Islamic cemetery in Kyushu. Local opposition has stalled the project, leaving it without approval. Currently, there are only seven burial sites in Japan where Muslims can be interred according to Islamic traditions, and none are located in the Chūgoku, Shikoku, or Kyushu regions.

He also pointed out a widespread misconception equating Islam with extremism, saying,

"Many people in Japan still associate Islam with groups like Al-Qaeda, reinforcing the notion that religion is strange or dangerous."



Islam is often associated with groups like Al-Qaeda. Here: members of Al-Qaeda, the militant Salafist Islamist terrorist network founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s

Mughal criticized the media for creating and perpetuating stereotypes, highlighting a similar issue in the backlash against the [Family Federation](#).

Mughal expressed deep concern about the government's dissolution request for the [Family Federation](#), viewing it as a potential threat to Muslim communities. "Politics should not interfere in matters of religion," he argued, fearing that government actions could create precedents affecting Islamic organizations.

He explained,

"Islamic groups are already under surveillance by public security authorities, like other new religious organizations. If the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) sets a precedent, it could lead to increasing restrictions and possibly dissolution orders for Islamic groups as well."

Mughal warned that such developments would not only hinder Muslims' ability to freely practice their faith but also create broader societal challenges, making life more difficult for Muslims in Japan.

See part 1: The Kishida Administration's Reckless Actions: [1st article](#), [2nd article](#), [3rd article](#), [4th article](#), [5th article](#), [6th article](#)

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See part 3: Believers Suffering Discrimination and Human Rights Violations: [16th article](#), [17th article](#), [18th article](#), [19th article](#), [20th article](#), [21st article](#), [22nd article](#)

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See part 6: Voices of Religious Leaders: [39th article](#), [40th article](#), [41st article](#)

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Japan: State Encroaching On Domain Of Faith

• November 28, 2024 • Knut Holdhus



Christian pastor warns against Japanese authorities joining leftist campaign to control domain of faith



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

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Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat – Part 6: **Voices of Religious Leaders**

Independent YouTuber Pastor Tatsuhiro Iwamoto

United Church of Christ in Japan: Systematic Faith-Breaking Activities

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial

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See **part 3: Believers Suffering Discrimination and Human Rights Violations: 16th article, 17th article, 18th article, 19th article, 20th article, 21st article, 22nd article**

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See **part 5: The Distorted Image of the "Second-Generation": 29th article, 30th article, 31st article, 32nd article, 33rd article, 34th article, 35th article, 36th article, 37th article, 38th article**

See **part 6: Voices of Religious Leaders: 39th article, 40th article, 42nd article**

Tatsuhiko Iwamoto (岩本龍弘), a former pastor of the *United Church of Christ in Japan* (Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan) and currently an independent YouTuber pastor residing in Aichi Prefecture, released a video on YouTube six years ago titled 'The United Church



Tatsuhiko Iwamoto introducing his 2018-video on YouTube called 'The United Church of Christ in Japan: A Hotbed of Leftists' (日本基督教団：左翼の温床). Photo: Screenshot

of Christ in Japan: A Hotbed of Leftists'. In the video, he exposed the church as a breeding ground for leftist activists.

At the time of its release, the video received no response. However, in mid-March this year, Iwamoto received a request to edit and post the video on social media. The request came from someone active in defending religious freedom, who mentioned that they were affiliated with the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (formerly the *Unification Church*) and wanted permission to use the video.

"This video became a turning point," Iwamoto explained. "Many members of the *Family Federation* began following me on X (formerly Twitter) and subscribing to my video channel. In particular, members of the *Family Federation* whom I just had become acquainted with named my channel 'Dragon Pastor'. I have developed friendly interactions with them. Through sharing Bible teachings and other content, I hope to offer even a little comfort and encouragement."

Reflecting on his connections with the *Family Federation*, Iwamoto recalled his time as a pastor in the *United Church of Christ in Japan*, during which he viewed the former *Unification Church*, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Mormon Church as heretical groups. He was also familiar with *faith-breaking* activities targeting these groups.

Iwamoto explains,

"One of the instructors at an orientation for new pastors was Sadao Asami (浅見定雄), a prominent anti-*Unification Church* advocate, so I heard the full spectrum of lectures on *faith-breaking* activities targeting *Family Federation* members."

At the time, Tatsuhiko Iwamoto regarded these efforts as "protective persuasion", believing that pastors volunteered for the cause without compensation.

However, after meeting *Family Federation* members, Iwamoto learned about cases where believers were confined for long periods – up to **12 years and 5 months** – and that pastors received substantial compensation for their involvement.

He remarked,

"Through my own research, I became convinced that most of the negative claims about the *Family Federation* were fabrications."

Iwamoto expressed concern that the activities of so-called "*faith-breaking* activists" have already led to an increase in



Toru Goto, member of *Family Federation* held captive for 12 years and 5 months by his own family and professional *faith-breakers* who attempted

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religious hatred and violence against Jehovah's Witnesses, among others. He warned that such trends risk cementing religious hatred and discrimination in society. *to break his faith. Photo: FOREF*

He also became aware that many [Family Federation](#) members suffered severe consequences, such as complex PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), depression, or even suicide, due to abduction, confinement, and [forced renunciation](#) of their faith. Iwamoto emphasized,

"This is an extremely grave and serious issue. We must not allow pastors or lawyers who incite such acts of abduction and [forced renunciation](#) to go unchecked."

For Iwamoto, both the severing of ties between the ruling *Liberal Democratic Party* (LDP) and the [Family Federation](#) and the government's request to dissolve the organization constitute "religious persecution". He pointed out,

"The principle of separation of religion and state is meant to prohibit specific religious organizations from receiving special privileges from the government, not to prevent religious groups from lobbying politicians."

He further criticized the dissolution request as overreach, arguing,

"The government encroaches on the domain of faith, where it should not tread."



岩本龍弘 Tatsuhiko Iwamoto
Tatsuhiko Iwamoto on X. Photo: Screenshot

Iwamoto decided to leave the *United Church of Christ in Japan* upon realizing it was a hotbed of leftist ideologies,

"In 2015, when the *Peace and Security Legislation* was being debated in the National Diet, a Christian student group called SEALDs gained media attention. At the time, I witnessed not only socially active pastors but also church-affiliated pastors praising this student movement. I also noticed that those opposing the *Peace and Security Legislation* were deliberately spreading false information to criticize the Abe administration."

Iwamoto argues that the same leftist pastors now support the government's dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#). He highlights this issue through his video broadcasts and lectures organized by [Family Federation](#) members, urging people not to turn a blind eye to these realities.

Featured image above: Independent YouTuber pastor Tatsuhiko Iwamoto (岩本龍弘) delivering a speech 23rd September 2024 in Chuo Ward, Chiba City, Japan. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda (豊田剛)

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See **part 2: Ripples to Local Assemblies: 7th article, 8th article, 9th article, 10th article, 11th article, 12th article, 13th article, 14th article, 15th article**

See **part 3: Believers Suffering Discrimination and Human Rights Violations: 16th article, 17th article, 18th article, 19th article, 20th article, 21st article, 22nd article**

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