

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Tomihiro Tanaka on Balancing World Peace and Family Peace

Knut Holdhus
December 6, 2024



Tomihiro Tanaka, President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), during the interview



President Tanaka of the Family Federation in Japan shares about the persecution and creating family peace in a movement devoted to world peace

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

"The government has crossed a line": Kishida cuts ties without providing grounds

Interview with Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広), President of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in Japan (Part 1)

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](#)

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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See part 6: Voices of Religious Leaders: [39th article](#), [40th article](#), [41st article](#), [42nd article](#), [43rd article](#)



Committed heinous crime: Tetsuya Yamagami, the man who killed Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan

Sekai Nippo: It has been reported that Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), the suspect in the shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), stated that his motive for the crime was linked to the substantial donations his mother made to the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) after becoming a member. How do you respond to the suggestion that the circumstances of members' families contributed to this tragic incident?

President Tanaka: The core of the [Family Federation](#), as its name suggests, is that it places great emphasis on the family. In that sense, it is truly heartbreaking if the defendant Yamagami committed such an act due to his family environment. Since no trial has been held, we still do not know his true motive. However, if it is indeed the case that the incident [Editor's note: the assassination of Shinzo Abe] was caused by family circumstances, I believe there are aspects of [our organization](#) that we must reflect on and improve.

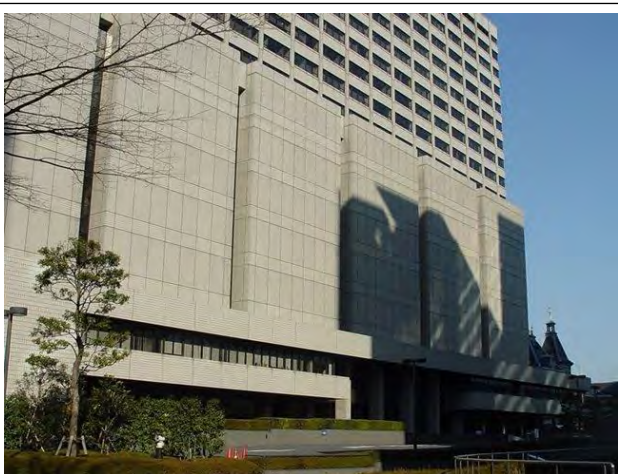
However, as an organization, there are many areas we need to reconsider and improve, and these past two and a

half years have made us reflect deeply.

Sekai Nippo: What have you thought about over these two and a half years?

President Tanaka: I feel that Japanese democracy is starting to crumble. Religious freedom itself is also starting to collapse. I was reminded once again that Japanese society is silently ignoring this.

In Japan, both religious freedom and democracy are givens, and I feel that we are a country that has come this far without ever truly discussing what religious freedom and democracy are.



Public office building of Japan with Tokyo High Court and Tokyo District Court

Sekai Nippo: In October of last year, the government requested the Tokyo District Court to issue a dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#) as a religious corporation.

President Tanaka: I believe this is unjust, and I feel the government has crossed a certain line. The environment surrounding the [Family Federation](#) has completely changed since the incident occurred. There has been a relentless wave of critical media coverage, and I think it has been very difficult for our members.

If you ask where this all originated, there's only one answer: the Prime Minister's declaration to sever ties. At the time, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, in his capacity as president of the

Liberal Democratic Party, stated,

"We will not associate with organizations that are socially problematic."

Although he made this comment as party president and not as Prime Minister, in Japan, the president of the Liberal Democratic Party is effectively the Prime Minister. As a result, this declaration was perceived by the public as a statement from the government.

However, while saying "socially problematic", not once did he clarify what the problem actually was. He reportedly met with former members of the [organization](#) but not with any current members. In a sense, the grounds for severing ties were left to others. In other words, it wasn't a decision he made himself but rather one influenced by society's claim that there was a problem. If that's the case, is the government applying the same standard to every organization? I don't think so.

Sekai Nippo: In a past interview with Kyodo News, you mentioned that there were areas where the [organization](#) lacked consideration for families. Why do you think such a situation arose within a group

that teaches the importance of the family?



Fumio Kishida July 14, 2022

President Tanaka: As may be the case with any religion during its early stages, ours initially leaned - just to make it extremely clear - leaned towards a form of monasticism. Religions that start with a monastic focus (centered on monks/nuns), over time, evolve - like Theravāda Buddhism changed into Mahāyāna Buddhism. [See editor's note below]

In the case of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, this year marks the 60th anniversary since its registration as a religious corporation and the 65th anniversary since its first worship service.

While we have upheld a vision of family peace, community peace, national peace, and world peace, with the family being the core of our teachings, during the early years, many of our senior members devoted themselves to overseas missions.

These members often prioritized the goal of world peace over their own families and set out on global missions with a strong sense of purpose. Among many members who shared this mindset, there was a tendency to lose balance, which led to irregularities (歪) within their families.



The family is at the core of the teachings of the [Family Federation](#)

Looking ahead, we need to redirect the passion that our members have poured into world peace. We need to redirect it toward their families and communities. This shift represents a crucial point of transformation for the [organization](#).

Reflecting on this, if there are people who have suffered as a result, I believe it is my duty as president to sincerely apologize. That is why I spoke on this topic.

[Editor's note: Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism both trace their origins to early Indian Buddhism, but they represent different streams of thought and practice that developed over time:

Theravāda: This tradition is associated with the Sthavira (Elder) school, one of the early Buddhist monastic communities. It preserved

what it regarded as the original teachings of the Buddha, as codified in the Pāli Canon. Theravāda is prominent in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia).

Mahayana: Emerging around the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD, Mahāyāna developed as a movement within the broader Buddhist community, emphasizing the bodhisattva path - dedication to achieving enlightenment not just for oneself but for all sentient beings. It introduced new scriptures (e.g., the Mahāyāna sūtras) and philosophical developments (e.g., Madhyamaka and Yogācāra).

Mahāyāna often regards itself as a "greater vehicle" (the literal meaning of Mahāyāna) that builds upon and transcends the teachings preserved in Theravāda and other early schools. However, Theravāda does not consider Mahāyāna teachings as part of the Buddha's original teachings.

Theravāda focus: Emphasis on personal liberation (nirvāṇa) through the Eightfold Path, following the example of the arhat.

Mahāyāna focus: Emphasis on universal salvation through the bodhisattva ideal, which aims to liberate all beings. Mahāyāna also introduced more expansive metaphysical concepts like śūnyatā (emptiness) and Buddha-nature.]

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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[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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Politician Using Nazi Ideas To Attack Minority

• December 5, 2024 • Knut Holdhus



Japanese politician censured for his attack on religious minority when using Nazi ideas and the same kind of totalitarian thinking and eugenics ideology as that of Hitler



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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 6: Voices of Religious Leaders**: [39th article](#), [40th article](#), [41st article](#), [42nd article](#), [44th article](#)

In May last year, the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the Unification Church) held an international [mass wedding](#) ceremony in South Korea. Prior to this, in February of the same year, at a hearing of opposition parties held in the *National Diet*, Kazunori Yamanoi (山井和則), a member of the *House of Representatives* from the *Constitutional Democratic Party* (CDP), stated,

"A dissolution order must be issued before the [mass wedding](#) ceremony takes place. If it is delayed, it could lead to children born from the [mass wedding](#) asking, 'Why didn't you stop it?'"



Kazunori Yamanoi, Japanese politician of the Constitutional Democratic Party, a member of the House of Representatives in the Diet (national parliament) 2000-2017 for DPJ and again since 2021 for CDP. Photo (2009): 厚生労働省 / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int. Cropped

This remark implied that children born to parents of [this faith](#) should not exist.

Norio Hosoya (細谷典男), a city council member from Toride City, Ibaraki Prefecture, took issue with this statement. On 20th July this year, he delivered a lecture at the "[Niigata Prefectural Symposium to Protect Freedom of Religion and Human Rights](#)", which was organized by [Family Federation](#) believers. Hosoya criticized the statement, comparing it to the totalitarian and eugenic ideas of Nazi Germany, saying,

"This is the same kind of totalitarian thinking and eugenics ideology as that of Hitler. For example, the Nazis killed disabled people because they were deemed a burden, and this later escalated into the Holocaust – the systematic genocide of Jewish people by state power."

Hosoya warned that such rhetoric must not be overlooked, drawing parallels to how the Nazis gained power with popular support.

At the Niigata Prefectural Symposium, attendees represented a wide range of religious denominations, reflecting diverse voices and perspectives.

A man who follows the teachings of Ryokan (良寛和尚), a renowned Zen Buddhist monk, expressed deep concern, saying,

"It's abnormal that something like the Holocaust is even being discussed in modern times."

He added,

"I was moved by the fact that [Family Federation](#) members practice their faith with conviction, no matter how much criticism they receive."



Norio Hosoya (細谷典男), Japanese author and politician. Among his books is one titled "[The Constitution and the Former Unification Church](#)" (憲法と『旧統一教会』) (2023). Photo (May 2024): [Sekai Nippo](#)

A priest from the Hokke School (法華宗 – Nichiren Buddhism) shared his worries about unchecked public sentiment, remarking,

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"The law should properly restrain the swelling tide of public opinion, but it is failing to do so. It is unhealthy to allow the vulnerable to be relentlessly attacked."

A female member of *Soka Gakkai*, who started studying the teachings of the [Family Federation](#) after her son joined it two years ago, stressed,

"We should not judge the essence, teachings, and activities of the [Family Federation](#) by looking at only a portion of it."

She added,

"As our organization also faces criticism, this gathering gave me courage."

A pastor leading a branch of a Christian new religious movement attended a similar symposium held on 14th October in Osaka. He warned,

"The media and the political left have run amok, with the legal community and public opinion completely capitulating. I sense an oppressive atmosphere close to totalitarianism."



Rev. Haruhisa Nakagawa (中川晴久) of the Christian Church of the Lord's Sheep (主の羊クリスチャン教会). Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

Haruhisa Nakagawa (中川晴久), Senior Pastor of the *Christian Church of the Lord's Sheep* (主の羊クリスチャン教会 – based in Yokohama), has also spoken at gatherings organized by [Family Federation](#) believers across Japan. In his lectures, he has argued against the unjust nature of the dissolution order request targeting the [organization](#).

Over 25 years ago, Pastor Nakagawa viewed the [Family Federation](#) as heretical. In 2013, harboring thoughts of "They should just collapse," he covertly infiltrated one of their facilities in Yokohama, concealing his role as a pastor. However, after repeatedly interacting with members through his visits, his perspective underwent a complete

transformation.

He stated,

"The [Family Federation](#) fosters a sense of connection and bonds among its believers, creating a very positive community. Members sincerely practice their faith, encouraging and supporting one another. This experience resolved almost all the issues I had with the [religious organization](#)."

Nakagawa also noted that the people he encountered in the [Family Federation](#) were "filled with a spirit of wanting to improve society." He observed significant improvements in visible metrics such as lawsuits and complaints, particularly after 2009. However, he criticized the lack of recognition for these positive changes, arguing,

"The absence of any acknowledgment of these efforts is, in itself, a problem."

Religious leaders are beginning to raise their voices on international platforms. On 22nd July 2024, at the *International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit Asia* held in Tokyo, Yoshinobu Miyake (三宅善信), Executive Director of the *Shinto International Institute* (神道国際学会), addressed the issue of the dissolution order request.

He remarked,

"In the National Diet, which is the source of democratic power, lawmakers have turned a blind eye to the social annihilation of a particular new religious movement due to fears of being associated with it. Furthermore, the mass media has taken on the role of judge."



Rev. Yoshinobu Miyake. Photo (2015): Yujiro.adreva / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int.](#) Cropped

His comments challenged the dominant narrative in major media outlets, which have overwhelmingly assumed a stance that "dissolution as inevitable" in their reporting.

Featured image above: Yoshinobu Miyake (三宅善信) speaking at *IRF Asia* (center of photo), 22nd July 2024, Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo. Photo: Kato Reiwa (加藤 玲和)

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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