

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Steinar Murud on Innocents Made Villains by Japan's Activist Lawyers

Knut Holdhus
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Steinar Murud delivering his message at the House of Literature in Oslo on June 12, 2025

Activist leftwing lawyers who swayed Japanese authorities managed to make innocent religious minority into perpetrators in Abe assassination case

Scapegoated: The Family Federation and Japan's Political Left

1st part of a speech by Steinar Murud, head of the [Family Federation](#) in Norway 2008-2022 and currently the [federation's](#) representative on Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Oslo, given on 12th June 2025 in the House of Literature in Oslo, at a [conference](#) titled "[Freedom of Religion Under Pressure - Experiences from Three Religious Communities](#)". Three faith communities in Norway joined forces to highlight the dehumanizing state persecution they face in Iran, Pakistan, and Japan. The [event](#) was organized by the Baha'i community, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, and the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#).

The [Family Federation](#) is active in most democratic countries, including Japan, where we have approximately 600,000 members. Our presence in Japan spans over 65 years, during which we have experienced significant growth. However, powerful forces have consistently worked against us, and this opposition intensified following the tragic incident on 8th July 2022, when former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated while delivering a speech.



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

The perpetrator was a young man who believed that Abe supported the [Family Federation](#). He harbored deep resentment toward [our organization](#), rooted in personal grievances - his mother became a member nearly 30 years ago and made substantial financial contributions.

The specifics of his family background raise several questions, and his deeper motives remain unclear. Reports suggest he held communist sympathies and spoke of initiating a revolution. Incredibly, a member of the Japanese Red Army even produced a film about him, portraying him as a hero; the film was shown in Japanese cinemas.

On 19th January 2024, renowned sociologist of religion Massimo Introvigne stated that key facts about the assassin had been largely ignored by the media, resulting in a distorted public understanding of the event.

What followed was a wave of harassment, spearheaded by a legal network known as>NNLASS, composed of left-leaning lawyers who frequently file lawsuits against religious organizations. Just days after the assassination, they held a press conference in which they labeled the [Family Federation](#) as an antisocial group and called for its dissolution.



Dr. Kevin M. Doak, author and professor of East Asian languages and cultures at Georgetown University, Washington DC

This was highly unethical. Instead of leaving it up to the police to carry out a thorough investigation, the lawyers - just days after the assassination - designated a scapegoat - the very organization they'd been trying to get dissolved since 40 years.

This marked the beginning of an orchestrated campaign of defamation and pressure. On 10th May 2023, Professor Kevin M. Doak of Georgetown University, an expert in East Asian studies, stated in an [interview with Sekai Nippo](#) that Japanese communists were exploiting Abe's assassination to "smear the former [Unification Church](#) and the LDP", Japan's ruling party.

The [Family Federation](#), formerly known as the [Unification Church](#), thus became entangled in a political struggle. The response to the assassination was startlingly unorthodox: instead of focusing scrutiny on the assassin, the media redirected public attention toward the [Family Federation](#).

On 4th November 2022, Thierry Valle, head of the French religious freedom organization CAP-LC, [addressed the UN Human Rights Committee](#) in Geneva. He noted that Japan's left-leaning media had distorted the narrative by adopting the assassin's justification and portraying him as the victim - while casting the [Family Federation](#) as the perpetrator, thereby disregarding numerous relevant factors.



Thierry Valle

The media played a central role in fueling this narrative. Coverage of the>NNLASS press conference was uncritical, amplifying the lawyers' claims and shaping public opinion accordingly. It is well known that the political left in Japan has long opposed the [Family Federation](#).

In an [interview](#) published on 22nd November 2022, in the communist newspaper Shimbun Akahata, Kazuo Shii, former chairman of the Japanese Communist Party, was asked: "From the Communist Party's point of view, is this the final war against the [Family Federation](#)?" He responded affirmatively, stating that the

struggle had been ongoing since at least a gubernatorial election in 1978.



In Nov. 2022 interview, Kazuo Shii, chairman of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) said the party is fighting the "final war" against the [Family Federation](#) / [Unification Church](#). Here Shii on March 30, 2023

Indeed, as far back as the 1960s, our movement was not only involved in religious activities but also actively opposed communism. During a time of radicalization across Japanese universities, the International Federation for Victory over Communism was founded by [Sun Myung Moon](#) and members of the [Family Federation](#). It was a separate organization but gained widespread support, amassing three million members. Through public information campaigns, the movement contributed to communist defeats in several local elections.

This longstanding opposition has made the Communist Party and other left-wing groups our persistent adversaries. After the Abe assassination, pressure intensified. At the initial press conference, the>NNLASS lawyers demanded the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) and eventually brought this demand to the Prime Minister. However, he initially responded that an organization cannot be dissolved without a criminal conviction. While there have been civil lawsuits - mostly related to donations and initiated by activist lawyers - such cases do not warrant the dissolution of a religious body.

Importantly, dissolution in Japan is not merely the removal of status as a religious corporation. It would involve the confiscation of assets and properties and could severely restrict our ability to pass on our faith to future generations.

On 18th October 2023, then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida stated

that the [Family Federation](#) could not be dissolved, as neither the organization nor its legal representatives had committed any criminal acts.



Fumio Kishida and Taro Kono in June 2024. Kono, Minister for Digital Transformation and Minister for Consumer Affairs and Food Safety, is known to have lobbied Kishida to get the [Family Federation](#) investigated. In August 2022 Kono appointed Masaki Kito as expert advisor in a [study group](#) Kono established in the Consumer Affairs Agency for the issue of the [Family Federation](#). Kito is an activist radical leftwing lawyer who has been campaigning against the [Family Federation](#) / [Unification Church](#) for decades

However, the very next day, following intense media and political pressure, he [reversed his position](#). He announced that civil disputes could also be grounds for dissolution. What he did was essentially changing the law - and not only that - he also gave it retroactive effect. This was something he did not have the authority to do alone, but he managed to push it through. This marked a significant governmental overreach. [...]

One key figure in this campaign was Minister Taro Kono, who had long been critical of the [Family Federation](#). He initiated the formation of an "[investigative committee](#)" to examine the organization. This committee lacked impartiality, as it included four outspoken opponents of the [Family Federation](#), among them Masaki Kito, a leading figure in the>NNLASS network. No one with a balanced or supportive view of the [Family Federation](#) was included.

Predictably, the committee's findings were negative and contributed to further political pressure. The report deeply influenced the Prime Minister and other policymakers, reinforcing an already skewed narrative.

To be continued. Part 2 coming soon.

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State Persecution In Japan, Iran, And Pakistan

- June 13, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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On 12th June, three faith communities in Norway joined forces to highlight the dehumanizing state persecution they face in Iran, Pakistan, and Japan. The joint event was held in the *House of Literature* in Oslo and titled “Freedom of Religion Under Pressure – Experiences from Three Religious Communities.” It was organized by the *Baha’i community*, the *Ahmadiyya Muslim community*, and the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*.

The estimated 300,000 Baha’is in Iran are socially excluded and treated as non-citizens. 600,000, possibly as many as 2 million, Ahmadis face a very similar situation in Pakistan. And maybe even more shocking is the fact that 600,000 members of the *Family Federation* in Japan are rapidly heading for the same social exclusion and treatment as non-citizens as the other two above-mentioned religious minorities experience in their more authoritarian countries.

The event was chaired by Kristine Tveit Jordet, a human rights advisor at the *Stefanus Alliance*, a Christian mission and human rights organization. Tveit Jordet is a social anthropologist working with human rights internationally, especially the right to freedom of religion or belief.



Kristine Tveit Jordet 12th June 2025. Photo: Knut Holdhus

Freedom of religion or belief

In her opening remarks, she said,

“Freedom of religion is fully named ‘freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief’. It is a fundamental right enshrined in, among others, the UN’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. We read from Article 18 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

‘Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.’

In Norway, we are fortunate to be part of a peaceful democracy with a functioning legal system and laws that protect citizens’ rights, including the right to freedom of thought, belief, and religious practice of one’s own choosing.

In theory, this should be the status for all of the UN’s 193 member states, all of which have signed the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. But as many in this room are painfully aware, this is not the case for people in many parts of the world.

Every single day, individuals experience severe violations of their rights for no other reason than that they have peacefully practiced their religion. Violations of religious freedom can take many forms. People of different religious affiliations and in different parts of the world experience that the state turns a blind eye and fails to intervene when they are subjected to abuse, injustice, and persecution for their beliefs.

In other places, the state itself is an active participant in promoting this injustice through discriminatory laws or practices – whether it involves restrictions on rights or active persecution of individuals or groups.

Which groups are under pressure and experience

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The universal declaration of human rights 10th December 1948. Author: UN. Public domain image

When groups are under pressure and experience persecution varies depending on where in the world you are. A majority in one place may be a minority in another. And in some countries, being part of the majority is no guarantee of protection.

Today we focus on three countries and religious communities, and we will hear about the unique and concrete experiences of individuals and groups whose human rights have been violated because of their faith."

The situation of the Baha'i community in Iran

Kristine Tveit Jordet introduced each of the speakers. The first one was **Elnaz Zabihyan**, a member of the Baha'i community's Office of Public Affairs.

She emphasized that the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran has deep historical roots, tracing back to the 19th century when Bahá'u'lláh founded the Bahá'í Faith with teachings centered on unity, equality, and harmony between science and religion. These progressive ideas, although widely embraced by many, were seen as a threat by Iran's religious authorities and political leaders, leading to widespread opposition.



Elnaz Zabihyan 12th June 2025.
Photo: Steinar Murud

Zabihyan pointed out that despite their contributions – such as building public bathhouses and founding schools that educated around 10% of Iranian youth in the 1920s – the Bahá'ís began facing systemic persecution. In 1934, the Shah ordered the closure of all Bahá'í schools. This discrimination intensified further after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, when persecution was institutionalized under Ayatollah Khomeini's regime.



10 Baha'i-women hanged in Shiraz, Iran in 1983 for teaching at Sunday school. Photo: Baha'i International Community / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#)

Key events include the abduction and execution of the entire elected Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly in 1980 and 1981, and the public hanging of ten Bahá'í women in Shiraz in 1983, who were offered their lives in exchange for renouncing their faith. All refused. Among them was 17-year-old Mona, who was forced to watch the others die before she was executed herself.

These atrocities represent not only visible acts of violence but also a deeper strategy of psychological warfare against the Bahá'í community. The persecution was later codified in a 1991 government memorandum signed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, which instructed authorities to block the Bahá'ís from social and economic advancement. This policy remains in effect and is further reinforced by religious fatwas declaring Bahá'ís unclean and demanding their social exclusion.

As a result, countless Bahá'ís have been imprisoned, executed, or forced to flee, making the Bahá'í situation in Iran one of the most documented and ongoing examples of religious persecution in the modern era.

The situation of the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan

The second speaker at the religious freedom event was **Musawer Shahid**, imam at the **Ahmadiyya Muslim Community** in Oslo, that was



established in 1957 as the first organized Muslim faith community in the country.

Shahid explained how the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in 1889 in British India, considers itself a faith within Islam that believes Ahmad to be the Promised Messiah and a subordinate prophet after Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). While Ahmadiyya Muslims follow all Islamic practices and read the same Qur'an, their belief in a prophet after Muhammad contradicts mainstream Islamic doctrine, which holds that Muhammad is the final prophet.



Musawer Shahid 12th June 2025.
Photo: David Toresen

In Pakistan, this theological difference has led to systemic persecution. Despite early contributions to the country – including the first Foreign Minister, Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, being an Ahmadi – in 1974, Pakistan amended its constitution to officially declare Ahmadis non-Muslims. This laid the foundation for state-sponsored discrimination.



Portrait of former President of Pakistan and Army Chief, Gen. **Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq**. Photo: Pakistan Army / Wikimedia Commons.
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Under General Zia-ul-Haq's Ordinance XX in 1984, Ahmadis were criminalized for practicing their faith. They are legally barred from calling themselves Muslims, using Islamic greetings like "Assalamu alaikum," referring to their places of worship as mosques, or using Islamic titles. Even indirect signs of Islamic practice, such as growing a beard, owning a prayer rug, or fasting during Ramadan, can lead to arrest under Section 298-C. Penalties include up to three years in prison or, under blasphemy laws like Section 295-C, even the death penalty.

Imam Shahid pointed out that Ahmadis' religious literature is banned, and police frequently raid homes searching for such material. Arrests are often made on weak or malicious claims, with trials delayed indefinitely, robbing many of their liberty for years without formal sentencing.

Since being declared non-Muslims, Ahmadis in Pakistan are also disenfranchised. To vote, they must sign a declaration denouncing their founder and their faith – something most refuse. As a result, many Ahmadis boycott elections to avoid betraying their beliefs.

Despite persecution, the community maintains its peaceful motto: **"Love for all, hatred for none."**

The situation of the Family Federation in Japan

Steinar Murud, head of the [Family Federation](#) in Norway 2008-2022 and currently the [federation's](#) representative on *Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Oslo*, gave a brief overview of the fierce persecution that the [Family Federation](#) currently experiences in Japan.



Steinar Murud 12th June 2025. Photo: David Toresen

See [Steinar Murud's message](#)

The [Family Federation](#), active in most democratic nations, including Japan where there are around 600,000 members, faced significant backlash following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on 8th July 2022. The assassin, a young man with communist sympathies, claimed he targeted Abe due to perceived ties with the [Family Federation](#), blaming the [religious organization](#) for personal family grievances linked to his mother's past donations.

Murud pointed out that following the incident, the media and certain political groups radically shifted focus. They did not blame the perpetrator but rather condemned the [Family Federation](#) for what

propaganda campaign, including [Federation](#) that had happened. Notably, a left-leaning legal network, NNLASS, held a press conference just days after the attack, labeling the [Federation](#) as an antisocial group and calling for its dissolution – actions that many criticized as purely politically motivated.

International scholars and advocates, such as Massimo Introvigne and Thierry Valle, condemned the media's biased portrayal, arguing that facts were ignored and the [Family Federation](#) unfairly vilified. Historian Kevin M. Doak noted that left-wing forces, especially the [Japanese Communist Party](#) (JCP), [exploited the situation](#) to target both the [Federation](#) and the ruling [Liberal Democratic Party](#) (LDP). This hostility was rooted in long-standing ideological clashes, dating back to the 1960s and 70s when the [Federation](#) and its affiliates actively opposed communism.



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida swayed by communist campaign. Here, 16th April 2023. Photo: [首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#)

According to Steinar Murud, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida initially stated that the [Federation](#) could not be dissolved due to a lack of criminal convictions. Still, he [reversed his position](#) under media and political pressure, controversially allowing civil disputes to justify dissolution. Critics viewed this as an unconstitutional overreach.

Furthermore, an [investigative committee](#) was formed, composed entirely of [Family Federation](#) opponents,



Working in league with faith-breakers forcing believers into lawsuits and exploiting them to fit narrative: One of the architects of new law and advisor to the Japanese authorities: Masaki Kito (紀藤正樹), one of the hostile lawyers of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (全国霊感商法被害対策弁連) and Nationwide Unification Church Damage Countermeasures Legal Team (全国統一教会被害対策弁護団). Photo: Screenshot / [Bitter Winter](#)

including Masaki Kito, a leader of NNLASS, casting doubt on its impartiality. The outcome, influenced by longstanding political animosity, signaled a troubling precedent for religious freedom and due process in Japan.

See [Steinar Murud's message](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus

Featured image above: The moderator and the 3 speakers at the religious freedom conference in Oslo 12th June 2025. Photo: Knut Holdhus

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