

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Masumi Fukuda says Japanese Deprogrammers Dehumanize Victims

Knut Holdhus
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Nonfiction writer Masumi Fukuda delivering her lecture on February 11, 2026 in Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture, Japan



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Award-winning Japanese author criticizes role of activist lawyers in dehumanizing believers portraying them as mind-controlled pawns

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Zenkoku Benren Is a "Left-Wing Movement Concealing Its True Identity," Says Masumi Fukuda in Lecture in Chiba

by Takahide Ishii (石井 孝秀)

Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ), author of the nonfiction book "Sacrificed by the State" (Asuka Shinsha), which addresses the issue of the dissolution of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), delivered a lecture in Chiba City on 11th February - hosted by the Chiba Citizens' Association for Protecting Freedom of Religion and Human Rights.



3 leading activist leftwing lawyers from the anti-[UC](#) lawyers' network called National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales - from left: Masaki Kito, Hiroshi Watanabe, Hiroshi Yamaguchi

She stated that, due to the activities of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (Zenkokenbenren - 全国霊感商法対策弁護士連絡会), the image spread that "the [Unification Church](#) is absolute evil." Masumi Fukuda emphasized,

"Without carrying out a revolution, the activist lawyers completely changed people's will. It is the most successful postwar left-wing movement that has concealed its true identity."

Fukuda analyzed that lawyers affiliated with Zenkoku Benren instilled societal prejudice portraying believers as "mind-controlled followers" [See editor's note 1 below], including claims that they were "indoctrinated to believe they would go to hell if they did not maintain their faith." She further stated,

"Even judges begin with prejudice due to Zenkoku Benren's propaganda. They do not see believers as ordinary people who might be living next door."



Abduction for the purpose of deprogramming (faith-breaking): A reenactment of Yukie Kanamori (pseudonym) having been forced into a sleeping bag and abducted into a van by several men. Image provided by the person involved, partially edited.

At the same time, she pointed out problems with the [religious organization](#)'s own response. Fukuda commented on the issue in which many followers were allegedly abducted and confined by members of their own family - under the guidance of professional "deprogrammers" (specialists who pressure individuals to renounce their faith) [See editor's note 2 below] - for the purpose of forcing believers to leave the [religious organization](#). She said,

"There may have been circumstances, but there was insufficient outreach to society. If they had made greater efforts to communicate to more people, perhaps things would not have gotten this bad."

She also referred to allegations of fabrications of some written statements by former believers, submitted by the Ministry of Education,

Culture, Sports, Science and Technology as evidence of legal violations constituting grounds for the [organization](#)'s dissolution. Masumi Fukuda asserted,

"Forgery by government officials would be a major incident. It would be a huge scandal, and the media must give it more coverage."

[Editor's note 1: In Japan, the "mind-control" myth has been a powerful tool used to stigmatize and suppress new religious movements (NRMs), particularly since the 1980s. The concept suggests that NRMs manipulate or "brainwash" their followers, depriving them of free will and rational thought. This narrative gained traction after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, when public fear of dangerous cults intensified. Although Aum was an extreme and violent exception, the incident cast suspicion on all NRMs, allowing critics, media, and the government to label diverse groups as manipulative or psychologically coercive.

The "mind-control" myth serves multiple social and political functions. It simplifies complex questions of belief, making it easier to portray converts as victims rather than as individuals exercising spiritual agency. This framing justifies legal and social intervention, including the coercive "[deprogramming](#)" of believers - sometimes involving confinement or psychological pressure to force renunciation of faith. Lawyers, ex-member groups, and certain media outlets have used the idea of mind control to construct NRMs as threats to family stability and national order, reinforcing social conformity and Japan's preference for established, non-controversial religions such as Buddhism and Shinto.

In recent years, the myth resurfaced following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose attacker cited resentment toward the [Unification Church](#). A public outrage largely created by media reignited scrutiny of NRMs, and politicians and journalists revived "mind-control" rhetoric to explain the [Church](#)'s fundraising and recruitment practices. Critics argue that this framing discourages genuine religious tolerance and critical examination of Japan's restrictive religious climate. Overall, the "mind-control" myth functions less as a scientific or psychological concept and more as a moral panic - a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority faiths and to reaffirm mainstream social norms about religion, obedience, and the boundaries of acceptable belief.]

[Editor's note 2: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively

attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

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Emotional Scenes As Mother Han Is Freed Briefly

- February 12, 2026
- Knut Holdhus



Scenes of joy, tears, and prayer outside Seoul Detention Center as Mother Han is released temporarily for medical treatment

On 12th February, Hankyoreh, a liberal South Korean daily considered the leading voice in independent journalism, ran a news item headlined “Released for 9 Days” – Members of Unificationism in Tears Tell Hak Ja Han, “Thank You, Mother”

See also [Court Delays Bail Decision for Mother Han \(82\)](#)

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Hak Ja Han (한학자) – also called **Mother Han** – the leader of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* – an international religious movement founded in South Korea, also referred to as **Unificationism** (통일교) – was temporarily released from detention for ten days to receive medical treatment, prompting an emotional gathering of her followers outside a Seoul-area detention center.

Mother Han, who is well into her 80s, has been on trial while in custody since last September. She faces charges that include allegedly providing money and valuables to prominent political figures, among them South Korea’s former First Lady, Kim Keon-hee (김건희), and then ruling party lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동). Prosecutors also accuse her of making improper political solicitations connected to matters affecting the **Family Federation**. **Mother Han** denies wrongdoing, and her trial is ongoing.



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Mother Han coming out from Seoul Detention Center in a wheelchair 12th February 2026. Screenshot from video by Masataka Asaoka.

On 11th February, a Seoul court [approved her request](#) for a temporary [suspension of detention](#) on medical grounds. The court allowed her to leave the *Seoul Detention Center* in Uiwang, just south of the capital, at 10:00 a.m. on 12th February. She is scheduled to receive hospital treatment until 2:00 p.m. on 21st February, after which she must return to custody. The court reportedly imposed conditions restricting her to hospital residence and limiting contact to medical staff and her legal team.

According to [Hankyoreh](#) reporter Shim Woo-sam (심우삼), the decision triggered a strong reaction among members of [Unificationism](#), many of whom gathered outside the detention center early that morning. For supporters, the moment was highly symbolic: [Mother Han](#) had been detained for roughly 140 days and had not been outside during that time. As they waited for her to emerge, followers repeatedly called out "Mother!", the title they use to address her.

The [Hankyoreh](#) writes that within [Unificationism](#) – officially known as the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification – Hak Ja Han* is revered as "True Mother" or "Holy Mother Han". Alongside her late husband, [Sun Myung Moon](#) (문선명), who founded what for decades was called the [Unification Church](#) in 1954, she is regarded by believers as a central spiritual figure and, theologically, as a co-Messiah. This religious status helps explain the intensity of emotion displayed at the scene.

When
[Mother Han](#)
finally
exited
the



Mother Han being assisted into waiting car outside Seoul Detention Center 12th February 2026. Screenshot from video by Masataka Asaoka.

detention center, she was wearing a padded winter jacket and seated in a wheelchair. She did not make any public statement. A [Family Federation](#) official who came to receive her told her, "Mother, you've endured a lot!" Supporters shouted phrases such as "Thank you, Mother!", "We love you, Mother!", and "Stay strong, Mother!" Some were visibly in tears.

The [Hankyoreh](#) points out that the [Federation](#) itself issued a statement on its website welcoming the court's decision. It said that many members – whom the [religious organization](#) refers to as "family members" (식구) [[See editor's note below](#)] – wept upon hearing the news and expressed gratitude that she would be able to receive medical treatment.

YTN

The 24-hour [Korean news channel YTN](#) reported live from outside *Seoul Detention Center* as [Mother Han](#) was released,

"Several related questions were asked, but [President Han](#) gave no response and remained silent as she boarded a vehicle. [...] If there are updates regarding [President Han's](#) hospital treatment or other developments from the scene, we will bring them to you in our continuing news coverage."

The
episode



Mother Han being assisted into waiting car outside Seoul Detention Center 12th February 2026. Screenshot from video by Masataka Asaoka.

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underscores both [Mother Han](#)'s contested legal situation and her enduring authority within the [religious movement](#) she leads. While prosecutors pursue allegations of political influence and financial misconduct, her followers continue to frame events in spiritual and devotional terms, interpreting her temporary release not simply as a procedural legal matter but as a moment of relief and affirmation for their [faith community](#).

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Text: Knüt Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Image reflected in car door of [Mother Han](#) being taken in wheelchair to waiting car outside Seoul Detention Center 12th February 2026. Screenshot from video by Masataka Asaoka.

[Editor's note: The Korean expression [식구님](#) (shikku-nim) is an internal, honorific term used by the [Family Federation](#) to refer to its members. 식구 (食口) literally means "people who share meals", and by extension, "family members" or "household members". It carries a strong connotation of intimate, familial belonging, not just organizational membership.

In the [Family Federation](#) (formerly the Unification Church), members commonly refer to one another as 식구 ("family") rather than "members" (신도) or "followers".

Adding -님 creates 식구님, which adds respect and warmth, elevates the term in formal or public communication, signals internal solidarity and spiritual kinship.

So the term 식구님들 used in the [Hankyoreh](#) article means something closer to "our respected family members" rather than simply "Federation members". [Hankyoreh](#) places the word inside quotation marks because it is citing the religious organization's own statement. The newspaper does not adopt the term itself but preserves the [Family Federation](#)'s internal language to accurately reflect how the organization framed the situation.

The [Federation](#) statement reads: "As news of [True Mother](#)'s suspension of detention was reported, many 식구님들 shed tears, welcomed the court's decision, and expressed gratitude for the opportunity for treatment." Here, 식구님들 reinforces the idea of the [Family Federation](#) as a spiritual family and strengthens at the same time the maternal framing of [Hak Ja Han](#) as "True Mother". It is rhetorically significant. Referring to followers as "family members" reinforces hierarchical and affective bonds: [Hak Ja Han](#) is "Mother", and believers are her "family".

In short, 식구님들 is an honorific internal term meaning "respected members of our (spiritual) family", reflecting the [Family Federation](#)'s self-understanding as a spiritual family under "True Parents".]

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