

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Masumi Fukuda on Japan's Manufactured Victims, Fake Lawsuits and Illicit Faith-Breaking

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Ame-no-Uzume (pseudonym, left), co-representative of the Ame-no-Yachimata Association, Yuki (pseudonym, center) from the second-generation division, and Usagi (pseudonym, right), being interviewed March 30, 2026, afternoon, Tokyo, Japan



Healing when entire families were harmed by faith-breakers - parents misled into funding abusive treatment of their adult children, who were coerced to claim victimhood to sue the Family Federation

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[Part 7 of a Series] In Search of a Spiritual Anchor - One Month After the Dissolution of the Family Federation

An Association Seeking to Repair Family Relationships

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

[Nippo](#)



Masumi Fukuda - Japanese investigative journalist and award-winning nonfiction writer (2024)

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"Without speaking about [abduction and confinement](#), it is impossible to speak about the truth of the Family Federation."

Nonfiction writer Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ) asserted this in a [book](#) she published last year (Sacrificed by the State, Asuka Shinsha).

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's request for a dissolution order against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), as well as the [court's decision](#) to dissolve it, rely heavily on testimonies from former believers who were [forcibly made to renounce their faith](#) by their own family members acting under the guidance of so-called "[faith-breakers](#)" (professional exit counselors) [See editor's note 1 below]. In her book, Fukuda points out that "as a final step, [faith-breakers](#) encourage former believers to file lawsuits against the [religious organization](#) they once belonged to." This contributed to inflating the number of alleged "victims".

See also [Paper Reveals Hidden Story Behind Dissolution](#)



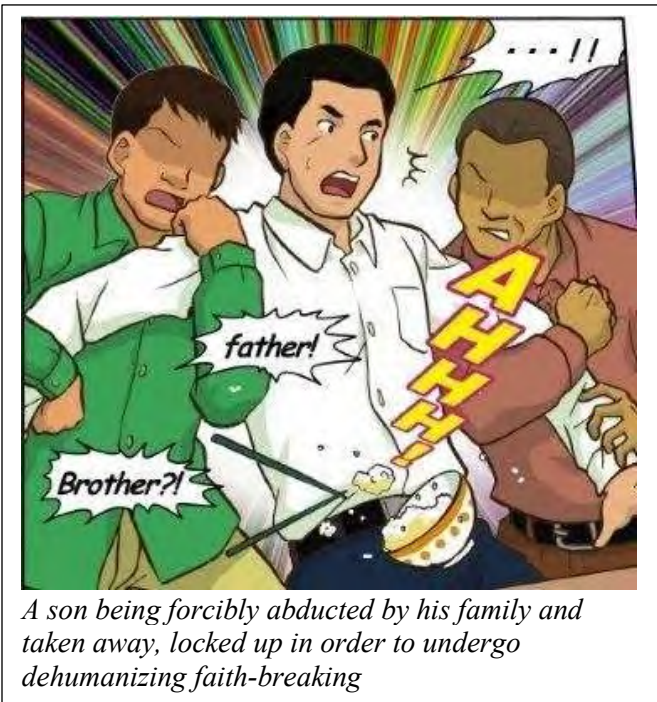
Sayuri Ogawa's book

Another issue that had a major impact on public opinion was the so-called "second-generation religious followers" problem. Following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, individuals claiming they had religion imposed on them by their parents began appearing in the media. Among them, [Sayuri Ogawa](#) (pseudonym), who says she was raised in a church leader's household within the [Family Federation](#), drew particular attention.

What the issues of [coercive faith-breaking](#) [See editor's note 1 below] and second-generation believers have in common is the theme of "family". Precisely because of the closeness of family ties, conflicts over faith become especially difficult, and these issues continue to weigh heavily on the [religious organization](#). Even if a religious corporation is "dissolved", many [believers remain believers](#). However, if those who relied on the church as a refuge due to family problems lose that place through liquidation procedures, and at the same time face criticism over the "dissolution" that further worsens family relationships, their

future becomes bleak.

A private organization called the "Ame-no-Yachimata Association" [See editor's note 2 below], which works toward reconciliation between families involved in [coercive faith-breaking](#) [See editor's note 1 below] and believers who were [abducted and confined](#), has been addressing the repair of fractured parent-child relationships.



A son being forcibly abducted by his family and taken away, locked up in order to undergo dehumanizing faith-breaking

One of its co-representatives, Ame-no-Uzume (pseudonym), met her biological brother for the first time in 27 years last year and resumed contact. Reflecting on their reunion, she said, "By talking after so long, we were able to understand each other's misunderstandings." When Uzume began attending the [religious organization](#) and started living in a dormitory with fellow believers, her brother had thought she had "abandoned the family". For Uzume, however, the motivation was "to grow as a person through communal living". She later realized for the first time that although she had continued to visit her family home after moving into the dormitory, her brother - who had already left home - had not known this.

Regarding reconciliation with her family, Uzume said,

"While enduring the pain of being unable to

interact with my family, I came to feel that it wasn't only I who was suffering - my family might have been suffering even more. That's why meeting in person allowed us to understand each other better."

This year, the Ame-no-Yachimata Association [See editor's note 2 below] launched a "Second-Generation Division" to address the conflicts between believers and their sons/daughters. Usagi (pseudonym), a second-generation believer from an international marriage, said, "Personally, I'm not particularly attached to religion or faith." However, after the incident involving [assassination of] former Prime Minister Abe, when she saw second-generation believers criticizing the [Family Federation](#), she felt,

"I don't want to deny the voices claiming 'harm'. But conflicts that are not aimed at reconciliation and seem intended only to oppose or destroy didn't sit right with me."

Usagi once attempted to create an online community for second-generation believers that transcended differences in values, but ultimately "it ended without the members being able to reach agreement."

Later, after learning about the activities of the Ame-no-Yachimata Association [See editor's note 2 below], she decided - together with Yuki (pseudonym), the daughter of co-representative Sarutahiko (pseudonym) - to work as part of the "Second-Generation Division" to repair parent-child relationships between first- and second-generation believers.

Yuki said,

"I've watched my father's efforts for a long time, and I believe this is the culmination of his work. Drawing on that experience, I want first- and second-generation believers to work together to resolve parent-child issues."

As shared awareness of painful experiences resonated across generations of believers, there were those taking action in search of new connections.

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[Editor's note 1: 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.]

[Editor's note 2: The Japanese expression Yachimata (八衢) refers to a crossroads or intersection where multiple paths converge. It is often used in a metaphorical sense to symbolize choices, encounters, or the meeting of different fates.

In mythology and classical literature, 八衢 (Yachimata) can also evoke a mystical or sacred space where important decisions or transformations occur. It appears in the name of the deity Ame no Yachihoko (天の八衢), associated with crossroads and divine encounters in Japanese folklore.

As for the above-mentioned association Ame no Yachimata no Kai (天の八衢の会), the term symbolizes a place for reconciliation, dialogue, and resolution - a meeting point where estranged families can reconnect.]

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dissolution order of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), Toru Goto (後藤徹), head of the [National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion](#), posted the above warning on X (formerly Twitter).

Goto himself was confined by family members opposed to the [Family Federation](#) for **12 years and 5 months** and was pressured to renounce his faith. According to the [religious organization](#), there have been approximately **4,300 cases** in which believers were confined in places such as [apartments](#) by their families – acting under the guidance of so-called “faith-breakers” (professional deconversion specialists) – who claimed that “protective persuasion” was the only way to break the [religious organization](#)’s alleged “mind control” [See editor’s note 2 below]. Believers were **forced into prolonged detention** until they abandoned their faith.

See also [Paper Reveals Hidden Story Behind Dissolution](#)

As [liquidators](#)’ representatives enter church facilities nationwide and their use is prohibited, there is also strong concern that “membership lists might be misused”. Among believers voicing anxiety on social media, some fear that “**abductions and confinement** may increase again”. Some individuals who were previously victimized have even chosen to avoid meeting their families for the time being.



Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏), author. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda

Writer Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏) also addressed this issue on X on 5th March, pointing out the “possibility that **coercive faith-breaking** [See editor’s note 1 below] against believers could once again spread.” He noted that those subjected to confinement face a risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) regardless of whether they ultimately leave the faith or not, and called for “monitoring” to prevent recurrence, adding that “raising awareness across society can also have a deterrent effect.”

Amid growing anxiety over how the [high court decision](#) may affect religious faith, some argue conversely that “now that dissolution has occurred, this is precisely the time to tell parents the truth.”

Sarutahiko (pseudonym), co-representative of the private organization “Ama no Yachimata no Kai” (天の八衢の会 – Heavenly Eightfold Crossroads Association) [See editor’s note 3 below], which works toward reconciliation between parents who carried out **coercive faith-breaking** [See editor’s note 1 below] and believers who were **abducted and confined** – and who himself was a victim – pointed out:

“Now that we cannot even enter church facilities, some non-believers are expressing sympathy. This is a time when people may be more willing to listen to our perspective.”

Sarutahiko’s mother, Noriko (pseudonym), was one of those who carried out “protective persuasion” after being alarmed by a **pastor acting as a faith-breaker**. She now works as a counselor for repairing parent-child relationships within the [organization](#). At the time, however, the [pastor](#) repeatedly told her,

“Your son joined (the [religious organization](#)) because your parenting failed.”

She recalls feeling as though she was being rushed into action. Although she had doubts, she assumed,

“Someone in the position of a [pastor](#) would not say something wrong.”

She looks back,

“I fell into a state of suspended thinking and, without fully understanding, followed instructions and confined my son.”

Regarding parents who carried out confinement, Noriko says: “They often don’t realize they were **deceived**, so unless someone tells them, they won’t understand.” She has conveyed to Sarutahiko that “many of these parents are elderly, have nowhere to turn, regret what they did, and cannot talk to anyone about it.” Noriko expresses hope that “they will share their experiences.”

She also stated,

“The [pastors](#) did something outrageous. The past cannot be changed, but at the very least, they should help repair parent-child relationships.”

While she deeply feels that reconciliation is not easy, she added,

“If believers show gratitude toward their parents, it may change the parents’ hearts. I hope they will broaden their concerns beyond just the [church](#) and its teachings.”

As for expectations toward the [religious organization](#), Sarutahiko emphasized:

“If it simultaneously protects believers’ faith and works nationwide to restore parent-child relationships, its reputation can be restored at an early stage.”

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The reality of faith-breaking: Toru Goto, a member of the [Family Federation](#), in 2008, barely able to move after being held in forcible detention by his own family in league with professional faith-breakers for **more than 12 years**. Photo: Kazuhiro Yonemoto / [Japanese Victims’ Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion](#)

Featured image above: The apartment block where Sarutahiko (pseudonym), co-representative of the private association “Ama no Yachimata no Kai” (天の八衢の会 – Heavenly Eightfold Crossroads Association), was allegedly confined. Photo provided by the association.

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Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of [Soka Gakkai](#). Here students belonging to the faith in 2001. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

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[Editor's note 2: 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.]

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