

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Family Federation Press Release Challenges Dissolution in Tokyo High Court

Knut Holdhus
August 17, 2025



Demonstration in Kyoto August 16, 2025 against the [dissolution order](#)



Tokyo press release: Family Federation hands in rebuttals and challenges closed-door proceedings and lack of evidence in dissolution case at Tokyo High Court

Written Rebuttals Submitted Against MEXT's Claims, Which Are Not Based on Concrete Evidence

Press Release

Press release issued by the [Family Federation](#) of Japan 6th August 2025 concerning lawyers submitting written counterarguments to MEXT's evidence-free assertions. See [original article](#) in Japanese.

In the appeal proceedings concerning the [dissolution order](#), on 30th July and 5th August we submitted Written Arguments (6) and (7) to the Tokyo High Court. Below is a summary of those submissions, and the full text (with some personal information redacted) is published in PDF format (Not attached here).



Demonstration in the city of Fukuoka, Japan on August 16, 2025 against the [dissolution order](#)

1. Written Argument (6)

Submitted on 30th July 2025, this brief sets out legal considerations and arguments regarding the closed nature of the proceedings, which violates the principle of public trial guaranteed by Articles 32 and 82 of the Constitution. The main points are as follows:

① Constitutional Violation

We argue that the [dissolution order](#) proceedings being conducted behind closed doors violates Articles 32 and 82 of the Constitution. By disregarding the principle of public trial, the fairness and credibility of the court are undermined.

② Freedom of Religion and Strict Standards of Review

Freedom of religion is a constitutionally guaranteed fundamental right. Any regulation requires

"compelling public interest" or the existence of a "clear and present danger." The original decision fails to meet these standards and is rough and unjust.

③ Issues with Media Coverage of the Former Unification Church

The media imposed a biased reporting frame, unfairly demonizing members and the organization. Such coverage swayed public opinion and influenced the request for a dissolution order. We have presented claims based on data analysis supporting this point.



Demonstration in the city of Nagano, Japan on August 16, 2025 against the [dissolution order](#)

④ The Nature of Religion and Faith

Religion inherently contains elements that may not align with general social norms, and faith-based actions cannot be judged solely by rational criteria. A trial that fails to respect freedom of religion violates human dignity.

⑤ Essential Difference from Other Cases

This case is fundamentally different from incidents like Aum Shinrikyo [See editor's note 1 below], as it concerns religion and the inner faith of believers. A [dissolution order](#) would have enormous consequences for members and the [organization](#), requiring cautious and fair judgment.

2. Written Argument (7)

Submitted on 5th August 2025, this brief addresses MEXT's written rebuttal (response to our appeal) and presents counterarguments against both the original decision and the opposing party's claims. (A comprehensive rebuttal to MEXT's entire response will be submitted at a later date.) In this filing, we criticized the validity of the proceedings and judgments, calling for a fair trial based on concrete evidence.

① Problems with the Original Decision

Before applying the law, courts must establish concrete facts based on evidence. "Torts" are not raw facts, but legal evaluations made by judges. Thus, the facts alleged to constitute a tort must first be specifically shown (raw facts), after which it is determined whether they amount to a tort (legal evaluation).

The [original decision](#), however, did not identify specific acts by the [Family Federation](#) or its members that would constitute grounds for dissolution, based on evidence. Instead, it inferred "torts" and "damages" merely from abstract facts such as notification letters or settlements, which is improper. In particular, no specific unlawful acts after the "Compliance Declaration" [See editor's note 2 below] have been identified.

② Impropriety of the Opposing Party's (MEXT's) Response

Although the Tokyo High Court instructed MEXT to present specific evidence in rebuttal, they ignored this directive and continued with only abstract arguments, failing to provide concrete counterarguments.



Campaign collecting signatures at Nagoya Station, Japan August 16, 2025

③ Disregard for the Basic Structure of Trial

Trials must be conducted based on facts and evidence, yet the [original decision](#) ignored this and relied on speculation. It used the term "tort" in an abstract way, issuing the [dissolution order](#) without concrete factual support. This violates fundamental principles of judicial process and demonstrates the harmful effects of a "closed-door trial".

[**Editor's note 1:** Aum Shinrikyo, a Buddhist new religious movement founded in 1984 by Shoko Asahara, preaching apocalyptic prophecies. It was dissolved in 1996 due to its leaders' criminal acts, including the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack in 1995 and the Matsumoto sarin incident in 1994.]

[**Editor's note 2:** The 2009 compliance declaration of the [Unification Church](#) of Japan (now the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)) was a formal commitment by the [organization](#) to reform its practices in response to longstanding public criticism and legal challenges.

The [Unification Church](#) in Japan had faced numerous allegations related to recruitment tactics and donation solicitation, termed "spiritual sales" (靈感商法) by a hostile network of activist lawyers who had declared the [religious organization](#) an enemy. These issues led to multiple lawsuits orchestrated by the activist lawyers and significant media backlash. This prompted the [organization](#) to take measures to restore its reputation and demonstrate compliance with legal and ethical standards.

The [religious organization](#) pledged to stop possibly unethical donation practices, including what the hostile network of lawyers claimed amounted to "pressuring members into making large financial contributions under spiritual pretexts."

This was in response to accusations from the same activist lawyers that followers "were being manipulated into giving away substantial amounts of money or property."

The [Unification Church](#) stated it would enhance internal oversight to ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards. Measures included better training for leaders and stricter guidelines for evangelization and solicitation of donations.

After this compliance declaration, there was a significant decrease in the number of lawsuits against the [Unification Church](#) - since 2015 called the [Family Federation](#). The [religious organization](#) has used this as evidence that it has improved its practices and should not be subject to [dissolution](#).]

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Japan: New Book On Legal And Social Attacks

- August 16, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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Another Tragedy In Japan: The Targeting & Dissolution of the Family Federation



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In his new book, James Edgerly delves into religious freedom on trial in Japan and the legal and social aspects of the 2025 dissolution order against the Family Federation

[Review]

Another Tragedy in Japan



Another Tragedy in Japan: The Targeting & Dissolution of the Family Federation, is the title of a 40-page booklet moderated by James B. Edgerly and published by *Higher Purpose Forum* as a second edition in July 2025. The publication presents a deeply considered reflection on the legal and social pressures confronting the *Family*

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James Edgerly, founder and director of the *Higher Purpose Forum*. Screenshot from live transmission by *HPF* 8th May 2024.

Edgerly dedicates the booklet to **Toru Goto** – a Unificationist who twice suffered **abduction and forced confinement** by his family, the second time for **more than 12 years** – from 1995 to 2008. After years of legal battle, he achieved a landmark Supreme Court victory in 2015. That court ruling did not end the coercive practices of dehumanizing **faith-breaking** entirely, but made it much more difficult for the professional deprogrammers to market their shady services. **Goto's story** serves as a testament to both the resilience of faith and the broader trajectory of rights for religious minorities in Japan.

Situational Context & Legal Background

Edgerly measures the recent **dissolution order** issued by a Tokyo court against a broader historical backdrop. In October 2023, Japan's *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* (MEXT) filed a request to dissolve the *Family Federation* of Japan, citing allegations like "manipulative fundraising" and other civil violations. In March 2025, the *Tokyo District Court* **granted that request** – an unprecedented legal step against a **religious organization** that had no criminal convictions on record.

Edgerly contrasts Japan's legal and cultural response with that of other democracies, particularly the United States, where religious freedom, including for unpopular movements, remains more vigorously safeguarded. He underscores that the civil cases cited by the court in Japan stem largely from decades-old disputes – all predating a 2009 compliance reform [\[See editor's note below\]](#) – and that many plaintiffs are ex-members whose testimonies originated from "**deprogramming**" conditions now considered coercive and discredited.

The Media, Law, and Public Sentiment



Tomihiko Tanaka (田中富彦), President of the *Family Federation* in Japan, speaking at a press conference at the *Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan* on the afternoon of 26th March 2025 in Tokyo. Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀).

presenting himself as the *Federation for World Peace and Unification* (FFWPU) – formerly the *Unification Church* – in Japan. Edgerly is founder and director of the *Higher Purpose Forum*, which according to him is an "independent project of the *Unification Movement*".



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*

One of the most striking elements in the **booklet** is the analysis of two press conferences at the *Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan* (FCCJ), held just two days apart in March 2025. On **26th March**, **Federation President Tomihiko Tanaka** calmly and factually responded to criticism – highlighting, for instance, the disappearance of complaints and civil cases over the past seven years, and the overwhelming origin of plaintiffs from **deprogramming** scenarios.

In contrast, on 28th March, representatives from anti-Unificationist lawyer networks (e.g., NNLASS) made sweeping claims, calling the **Federation's** activities "fabrications" and labeling its ceremonies as forced mass weddings. Their tone was

triumphalist and dismissive of **Federation** perspectives – but received applause from the press, underlining a broader media bias.

Edgerly argues that this polarized messaging – and the absence of active Unificationist voices in the courtroom or investigative processes

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– exemplifies a disturbing erosion of due process and fair representation.

Historical Campaign Against the Federation



From a conference by International Federation for Victory over Communism (IFVOC) in Japan 1972. Photo: IFVOC

situates the recent legal attack within a five-phase historical arc spanning over five decades:

1. **Late 1970s** – The **Federation's** affiliate *International Federation for Victory over Communism* (IFVOC) played influential roles in conservative politics, prompting backlash from Japan's left about its anti-communist activities.
2. **1980s-2009** – Fundraising methods, notably “spiritual sales,” came under criticism. Meanwhile, the **Federation** slowly admitted excesses and eventually reformed by 2009.
3. **1981-2025** – Anti-Unification legal entities formed early, engaging in **deprogramming** referrals, lawsuits, and generating “manufactured victims” The so-called “**Defection Business**” grew into a significant civil litigation mechanism.
4. **2009-2022** – The 2009 compliance measures [See editor's note below] marked a pivotal reform. Meanwhile, the Toru Goto case in 2015 reduced forced **deprogramming** significantly, setting a precedent for religious freedom protections.
5. **2022-Present** – The assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in July 2022 by Tetsuya Yamagami (who blamed the **Federation** for his family's bankruptcy) triggered a national backlash. Anti-Unification lawyers quickly framed the **Federation** as culpable, shifting public anger towards institutional dissolution rather than focusing on the assassin himself.

Democratic & Human Rights Stakes

Edgerly warns that dissolving a **religious organization** without criminal violations – primarily based on civil claims and hostility – sets a dangerous precedent for Japan's democratic ethos and for **religious freedom globally**. He notes how international bodies like the **U.S. State Department**, the U.N., and **religious freedom advocates** have raised alarm,

emphasizing that such actions **deviate from both Japan's constitution** and international obligations under instruments like the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** (ICCPR).



Tetsuya Yamagami, the suspect for the assassination of Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan. Photo: Andrew2592009 / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped

He particularly highlights the lack of transparent dialogue, the “herd mentality” of media-fueled public sentiment, and the marginalization of the **Family Federation's** narrative – all signaling a broader slide toward ideological conformity and against pluralism.

Analysis

Edgerly's **booklet** offers more than documentation; it is a care-filled plea for balance, justice, and empathy. This narrative:

- Humanizes the believers – showcasing their victimization and the trauma of **harassment, job loss**, evictions, and **social ostracism**.
- Elevates legal awareness by clearly showing that those bringing suit were beneficiaries of coercive methods, undermining the integrity of evidence.
- Connects modern events to long-standing tradition of pluralistic suppression, reminding us that the tensions predate the Abe assassination.
- Champions democratic resilience, highlighting voices – journalists, **international advocates**, and faith leaders – who reject the punitive **dissolution order** and stand for religious liberty.

In doing so, it challenges readers to consider whether a truly

democratic society should retaliate against religious minorities through legal means based on prejudice rather than fair adjudication.

Conclusion

In *Another Tragedy in Japan*, James Edgerly provides a powerful, compassionate account of a religious community caught in the crossfire of decades-long ideological warfare, public outrage, and legal overreach. The [booklet](#) goes beyond chronicle – it is a call for empathy, justice, and vigilance. It affirms that democratic values and [religious freedoms are fragile](#), especially when public pressure eclipses critical thinking and fair treatment.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Edited version of “*Another Tragedy in Japan: The Targeting & Dissolution of the Family Federation*” by James Edgerly, 2nd edition published by the [Higher Purpose Forum](#), July 2025.

[Editor’s note: The **2009 compliance declaration** of the Unification Church of Japan (now the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)) was a formal commitment by the organization to reform its practices in response to longstanding public criticism and legal challenges.

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