

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japan's Family Fed Attacks Threatens the Rule of Law

Knut Holdhus
August 16, 2026



The [Family Federation](#) case and the power of the state. Illustration: ChatGPT



Japanese author issues warning that the FFWPU dissolution is about far more than religion, as it raises constitutional concerns and threatens the rule of law

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Dissolution of Religious Organization Raises Questions About Japan as a State Governed by Law, Says Eitaro Ogawa in Sendai

Abe Was Loved by Many

by Yasuhiko Nagano (長野 康彦)



Eitaro Ogawa speaking in Sendai City August 1, 2026

A special lecture entitled "Cutting Through the Issues of the Day" by Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎), a literary critic and chairman of the Japan Institute for Peace Studies, was held in Sendai [large city on east coast of Japan's main island Honshu] on 1st August. Ogawa discussed Japan's political situation and the issues surrounding the dissolution of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU, formerly the [Unification Church](#)), while reflecting on the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) more than four years ago.

More by Eitaro Ogawa: [Experts Question Legal Basis for Dissolution](#)

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Dissolution of the [Religious Organization](#) Is an Example of Conformist Pressure

During the latter half of his lecture, Ogawa devoted considerable time to the series of issues surrounding the [Family Federation](#).

He characterized the government's request for a dissolution order against the [religious organization](#) and the subsequent judicial decisions as "not simply a matter concerning one religious corporation, but a question of what Japan should be as a state governed by the rule of law."

He also referred to his own involvement in submitting written opinions as an expert and said,

"At first, I thought I would keep my distance and observe the matter from the outside. But the more I investigated, the more astonishing things I found."



In particular, Ogawa expressed strong concern about the proceedings allegedly moving forward without sufficient examination in [closed court sessions](#), as well as the authorities' handling of the [religious organization](#)'s facilities. He asked,

"Police were even mobilized, making it look almost like a raid. Was this degree of exercise of state power really justified? [...] For the judiciary to go so far as to examine the content of religious doctrines is extremely unusual in a modern state."

He argued that this situation requires renewed consideration of freedom of religion as a constitutional value.

Ogawa also addressed the attitude of the mass media, in addition to that of the judiciary and administrative authorities. He described Japanese society as currently being in a state "like the frog in the boiling water", expressing concern that people have become increasingly reluctant to voice opinions that differ from those of the prevailing consensus.



Citing media coverage of political affairs in Hyogo Prefecture and other examples, he analyzed the problem not as the result of "some gigantic conspiracy", but rather as a consequence of the failure of society's elite to fulfill their responsibilities. He said,

"The courts and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) are corrupt. The dissolution order in this case is symbolic of that."

Ogawa warned,

"If the organs of state power, which are supposed to be separated under the principle of separation of powers, all end up facing in the same direction, that is an extremely dangerous sign."

Indicating that he intends to further deepen constitutional discussions involving experts in the future, Ogawa said,

"The [Family Federation](#) issue is not merely one concerning a religious organization. It is an issue that we must put before society as a matter concerning Japan's Constitution, freedom of religion, and human rights."

At the conclusion of the lecture, Ogawa said,

"Something has been growing over these past four years. And since July of this year, it has begun to blossom."

He then added, "Today, 1st August, has become a day when we begin a new start together with all of you."

The audience responded with enthusiastic applause.

The lecture was organized by the Association for Considering Japan's Future, chaired by Tetsuo Ando (安藤哲夫), and co-sponsored by the Miyagi Prefecture Peace Ambassadors Council and the Miyagi Prefectural Headquarters of the International Federation for Victory over Communism (IFVOC). Approximately 450 people attended the event.

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When Raising Children In Faith Turns Suspicious

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Defense
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Human rights attorney points out violations of basic rights and how raising children is made exceedingly difficult for persecuted Family Federation families in Japan as schools target the faith of a new generation

For parents who belong to the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU), raising children in their faith has traditionally been regarded as part of ordinary family life. Like parents belonging to many other religious communities, they may take their children to worship services, teach them their religious beliefs, celebrate religious holidays, encourage participation in community activities, and seek to pass on values they consider important.

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In Japan, however, this seemingly ordinary exercise of parental responsibility has become increasingly difficult. Following the Japanese government's campaign against the [Family Federation](#) and the subsequent dissolution proceedings, concerns have emerged that the country's public institutions are beginning to treat children from [Family Federation](#) families not simply as students who happen to have a particular religious background, but as potential victims of their parents' beliefs.



Patricia Duval – Member of the Paris Bar Association, specializing in international human rights law. Has defended the rights of religious and faith minorities both in France and internationally. Photo (2025): [Sekai Nippo](#)

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This development raises a fundamental question: **what happens to freedom of religion when a child is effectively encouraged to view his or her family's faith as something**

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Logo of *Bitter Winter*, the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights.

suspicious that should be investigated by teachers and counselors?

In the fourth installment of her four-part series, international human-rights attorney Patricia Duval addresses precisely this issue in a 4th June 2026 op-ed published by *Bitter Winter*, entitled "[Unification Church in Japan: After the Dissolution, the Purge. 4. School Surveillance and Coercive Counseling](#)." Her concern is not merely that [Family Federation](#) children may encounter criticism of their parents' religion.

Rather, she argues that new school-based procedures risk institutionalizing a system in which children from religious families are identified, questioned about their home life and religious practices, and potentially referred for psychological counseling or other interventions.

Schools instructed to look into children's religious backgrounds

臨床心理士のための 宗教カルト関連 心理相談ガイド



The front cover of the Japanese booklet *Guide for Psychological Counseling on Cult Issues*. Photo: *Bitter Winter*

At the center of Duval's argument is a booklet prepared by the *Japanese Society of Clinical Psychologists*, reportedly with encouragement from officials of the *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* (MEXT). The *Guide for Psychological Counseling on Cult Issues* is intended for school counselors and clinical psychologists dealing with what are described as religious or "cult"-related problems.

According to Duval, the Guide relies heavily on anti-cult literature and the

controversial concept of "mind control". [\[See editor's note below\]](#) More importantly, she argues, it encourages school personnel to investigate children's family circumstances specifically to determine whether religion is involved.

Counselors are instructed to ask children questions about where they go on Sundays, what their parents tell them, and other details of their family life. Once a child is identified as having a potentially problematic religious background, the Guide recommends that the matter be discussed with school administrators.

From the perspective of a [Family Federation](#) parent, this changes the character of the relationship between the family and the school.

Religious education that previously took place primarily within the family and religious community can become a subject of institutional scrutiny.

A child may begin to understand that his or her parents' faith is something that teachers, counselors, and school administrators regard as requiring special attention.

The problem of privacy and religious freedom

In her [op-ed](#), Duval argues that this raises **serious questions under international human-rights law**.

Article 18 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) protects freedom of thought, conscience and religion, while Article 17 protects individuals against arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy and family life.



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights



From header of the [webpage](#) of the Human Rights Committee, a subpage on the site of the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner

The *UN Human Rights Committee* has specifically stated that people cannot be compelled to reveal their religious affiliation or beliefs. Duval therefore regards systematic questioning of children about their parents' religious practices as potentially incompatible with these protections.

The issue becomes particularly sensitive

because the children concerned are minors. **A child may be asked about what happens at home without necessarily understanding the broader implications of disclosing information about his or her family.**

Even when counselors are instructed to proceed gently and obtain the child's consent before information is shared, Duval questions whether such consent can genuinely be considered voluntary when the child is dealing with teachers, counselors, and school authorities.

Once information is shared, the Guide envisages coordinated action involving a range of school personnel – including homeroom teachers, school nurses, social workers and administrators.

For parents, this potentially means that a matter that they regard as belonging to the private sphere of family religious upbringing can become known across an institutional network.

When parents' beliefs themselves become regarded as the problem

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the Guide, in Duval's view, is its treatment of communication between children and parents.

The Guide reportedly cautions counselors against simply telling children to discuss their concerns with their parents. Its reasoning is that parents whose views are grounded in religious conviction may be unlikely to change and that children may already have learned that disagreement with their parents is not readily accepted.

There is an important distinction here. If a child is suffering genuine abuse or serious neglect, professional intervention may obviously be justified. But Duval's concern is that **religious conviction itself can become an explanation for family difficulties**, potentially turning ordinary disagreements between parents and children into evidence of a problematic religious environment.

This creates a **particularly difficult situation for parents who want to transmit their faith to their children**.

Every religious tradition involves some form of intergenerational transmission. Parents teach children what they believe to be true and morally important. Children are introduced to religious practices before they are old enough to make fully independent decisions about their worldview. That is not normally regarded as coercion; it is a basic feature of family and religious life.

But if one particular religion becomes subject to systematic suspicion, the same parental activities can acquire a very different interpretation.

To be continued.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Raising children is made exceedingly difficult for persecuted [Family Federation](#) families in Japan as schools target the faith of a new generation. Illustration: ChatGPT, August 2026

[Editor's note: 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](#). Public outrage 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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