

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Attorney Reveals Inside Story of Dissolution of Japan's Family Fed

Knut Holdhus
July 20, 2026



Featured image above: Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama and literary critic Eitaro Ogawa



[Bitter Winter](#), the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights.



Dr. Massimo Introvigne, Italian sociologist of religion, founder of [CESNUR](#), specializing in new religious movements and religious liberty. A prolific author, he has advised governments and international bodies, and served as OSCE Representative on combating racism, xenophobia, and intolerance against Christians worldwide and comments on contemporary religious controversies

Rare behind-the-scenes insight from attorney into legal process tainted by political pressure, media narratives, and judicial decision-making threatening fundamental legal principles

[Bitter Winter](#), the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights, published on 10th July an [article](#) with rare behind-the-scenes insight into the legal campaign to dissolve Japan's [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - formerly known as the [Unification Church](#). The report was headlined "[How Japan's Unification Church Case Went Off the Rails: Attorney Nakayama's Inside Account](#)".

In this [article](#), Italian sociologist of religion Dr. Massimo Introvigne summarizes a lengthy conversation between literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎) and attorney Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹), one of the lawyers representing the [Family Federation](#). Rather than presenting a general defense of the [religious organization](#)'s theology or practices, Nakayama focuses on what he considers serious procedural and legal shortcomings in the dissolution proceedings. His account argues that the case illustrates how political pressure, media narratives, and judicial decision-making can become intertwined in ways that threaten fundamental legal principles.

Nakayama explains that he became involved shortly after the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in July 2022, when another lawyer informed him that dozens of law firms had declined to represent the [Family Federation](#). Although he had no personal connection to the [religious movement](#) and was not a believer, he found it disturbing that so many attorneys were unwilling to accept the case. To him, this suggested an atmosphere in which professional and reputational concerns discouraged legal representation of an unpopular client. Believing that every party deserves competent legal counsel regardless of public opinion, he agreed to take the case despite

anticipating criticism.

One of Nakayama's principal arguments concerns the government's sudden change in legal position. He notes that Japanese officials had initially concluded that dissolution was not legally justified because the [Family Federation](#) had not been convicted of criminal offenses comparable to those committed by Aum Shinrikyo (オウム真理教) [See editor's note 1 below], whose dissolution followed acts of terrorism. According to Nakayama, this position [changed abruptly](#) after political pressure emerged within the Diet, the national legislature of Japan. He argues that the government reversed course without presenting significant new evidence or a convincing legal rationale, raising concerns that political considerations had begun to outweigh established legal standards. Introvigne writes,

"Then, in Diet testimony, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida reversed the position overnight, without providing a legal or factual explanation.

Nakayama was stunned. He recalls how embarrassing it was to report this internationally, because Japan is supposed to be governed by law, not by the whims of individuals. Later, he learned what had triggered the reversal. According to Nakayama, Constitutional Democratic Party lawmaker Konishi warned Kishida that if he did not move toward dissolution, he would be labeled 'a billboard for the [Unification Church](#)'. Nakayama calls it a form of political intimidation. Kishida, he argues, flipped instantly. Ogawa notes that a Cabinet decision [overturned in a single night](#), without new evidence, means the dissolution process began without legal foundation."



Fumio Kishida, here delivering a speech at the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) Nov. 2, 2021



Hiroyuki Konishi. Photo (2014)

The article also examines the evidence collected during the government's investigation. Nakayama questions the reliability of witness testimony submitted in support of dissolution. He points to the extensive use of anonymous statements, arguing that anonymity limited opportunities for meaningful cross-examination or independent verification. He further claims that many written affidavits contained remarkably similar wording, suggesting that they may have been prepared using standardized templates rather than reflecting entirely independent personal accounts. Even more seriously, he alleges that some individuals later disputed statements attributed to them. If such claims were substantiated, they would raise important questions about the integrity of the evidentiary process.

Another central issue is the legal standard required for dissolving a [religious corporation](#). Japanese law generally requires that dissolution be justified by conduct that clearly and seriously harms the public welfare. Nakayama contends that the courts applied this standard far more broadly than intended. He argues that after the [Family Federation](#) announced compliance reforms in 2009 [See editor's note 2 below], relatively few civil judgments were entered against the [religious organization](#). In his view, describing the remaining incidents as sufficiently serious to justify dissolution represented a significant expansion of previous judicial interpretation.

Nakayama is especially critical of later court decisions, which he believes relied on speculative reasoning rather than clearly established misconduct. He argues that treating settlements as evidence of wrongdoing, or suggesting that unlawful conduct might have occurred without making definitive findings, weakens the traditional presumption that legal conclusions should rest upon proven facts rather than possibility or inference. Introvigne points out,

"The Tokyo High Court went further. Presiding Judge Motoko Miki treated settlements as evidence of civil torts and relied on the unprecedented reasoning that "the possibility of unlawful

conduct cannot be ruled out." Nakayama believes this was dishonest and unjust. In his entire career, he had never seen anything so extraordinary. Ogawa compares it to sentencing someone to death for shoplifting. He notes that if courts use extreme language without evidence, public opinion will assume extreme wrongdoing even when none exists."

Throughout the conversation, both Nakayama and Ogawa argue that the legal proceedings cannot be understood apart from the broader social climate that developed after Abe's 2022-assassination. They suggest that sustained media coverage, intense political debate, and widespread public hostility created an

environment in which objective legal assessment became increasingly difficult. In their view, once the [Family Federation](#) became widely associated with national tragedy and political scandal, legal institutions faced enormous pressure to respond in ways that reflected prevailing public sentiment.



To illustrate this concern, Nakayama compares the situation to earlier episodes in Japanese history in which public fear and social prejudice contributed to unfair treatment of marginalized groups. Introvigne writes,

"Nakayama cites physician Tetsu Nakamura, who once described the hysteria surrounding Hansen's disease [See editor's note 3 below] as 'faceless cruelty'. He warns that Japan may now be entering a similar cycle: a tragic game of Old Maid, where no one knows who will be targeted next."

The attorney's point is not that the cases are identical, but rather that societies sometimes allow collective emotions to influence legal institutions in ways that become regrettable in hindsight. He warns that when legal decisions appear to follow public opinion rather than established legal standards, the consequences may extend far beyond a single [religious organization](#).

Ultimately, Introvigne presents this interview not simply as a discussion about the [Family Federation](#) but as a broader reflection on the health of democratic institutions. Regardless of

one's opinion of the religious organization itself, Nakayama argues that the essential question is whether unpopular groups continue to receive equal protection under the law. If governments, courts, and the media become mutually reinforcing forces that shape outcomes before legal processes have run their course, he believes the rule of law itself is placed at risk.

The article therefore invites readers to consider a larger constitutional question: how should democratic societies balance accountability for alleged misconduct with procedural fairness, judicial independence, and religious freedom? Nakayama's account raises important issues about the relationship between politics, public opinion, and the administration of justice - issues that extend well beyond Japan and resonate in many democratic societies today.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

[Editor's note 1: Aum Shinrikyo (オウム真理教), 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. "Aum" (オウム - alternatively anglicized as Ōmu) is the phonetic spelling of the Sanskrit syllable "Aum" (or Om). "Shinrikyo" means literally "religion of truth".

[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" (霊感商法) 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](#).]

[Editor's note 3: Hansen's disease is the medical term for what was historically called leprosy. It's a chronic infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium leprae* (and in some cases *M. lepromatosis*).

The term "Hansen's disease" comes from Gerhard Armauer Hansen, the Norwegian scientist who identified the causative bacterium in 1873. The modern name is preferred to reduce the stigma historically associated with "leprosy."

In the above article, Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹) references Hansen's disease because of its social and historical impact, especially in countries like Japan, where patients were once isolated in sanatoria due to fear and misunderstanding, even after effective treatments existed.]

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Japanese volunteer group loses city registration after 15 years amid concerns over affiliation to persecuted faith minority



Tokyo, 15th July 2026 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original*

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Experienced Volunteer Group Excluded

Registration Not Renewed, Possibly Due to “Former Unification Church” Ties – Tokorozawa City

by Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)

Cleanup Participants Say They “Feel Outraged”



Applications for registration in the environmental beautification program “Adopt Program” were accepted at Tokorozawa City Hall, Saitama Prefecture. Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)

Following the court decision [ordering the dissolution](#) of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)), criticism and scrutiny of the [religious organization](#) and its affiliated groups have intensified. The volunteer organization “APTF Tokorozawa,” which had participated in an environmental beautification program run by Tokorozawa City (所沢市) in Saitama Prefecture, has been unable to continue as a registered participant since April.

See also [Dissolution Case: Attorney Reveals Inside Story](#)

After a *Japanese Communist Party* city council member raised concerns during a city council session last September, arguing that the group was affiliated with the [religious organization](#), the city declined to renew APTF Tokorozawa’s registration in the environmental program. The group’s representative stated,

“I feel anger that a public institution is attaching a negative label to us.”

Tokorozawa City operates an environmental beautification initiative called the “Adopt Program”, through which the city supports citizen groups that clean roads, parks, rivers, and other public spaces. Participating groups receive supplies such as garbage bags and are covered by insurance against accidents that occur during activities. Organizations wishing to participate are registered by signing an agreement with the mayor regarding their activities.

APTF Tokorozawa, a branch of APTF (*Association for the Promotion of a True Family Movement – 真の家庭運動推進協議会*), which is described as an association affiliated with the [religious organization](#), began monthly cleanups of station areas and parks in May 2009. It joined the Adopt Program in 2010 and had carried out activities without issue for more than fifteen years.

According to representative Masami Soma (相馬正美), most participants are members of the [religious organization](#), but the activities are not intended for proselytizing or religious



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purposes, and no complaints about the group have ever been reported to the city.

Influenced by a Communist Party Council Member

However, APTF Tokorozawa became a topic of discussion at a *Tokorozawa City Council* session in September of last year.

Kenta Hanaoka (花岡健太), a member of the *Japanese Communist Party* city council group, referred to the objectives stated on APTF's website and emphasized that the association seeks to realize ideals based on the teachings of [Sun Myung Moon](#) and his [wife](#). He pointed out that the Adopt Program's guidelines require participating groups not to engage in political or religious activities and argued that APTF Tokorozawa "may be in serious violation of these guidelines".

Hanaoka further stated that the group may have "conducted recruitment activities while concealing its true identity" and that "it is absolutely unacceptable for the government to effectively endorse associations related to the former [Unification Church](#)."



Japanese APTF volunteers. Photo: [APTF](#)

In March of this year, Tokorozawa City's *Road Maintenance Division* informed Soma that the volunteer group's registration could not be renewed. Soma requested a written explanation of the reasons for non-renewal, but the city declined to provide one.

Believing there was no problem with submitting an application itself and wishing to hear a fuller explanation, Soma submitted another application to city hall in April. At that time, he again requested a written explanation, but a city official responded:

"We appreciate your activities. However, the Adopt Program is a private agreement between the city and participating organizations. If the city unilaterally expresses its intention not to continue the agreement, that is sufficient. We understand that you may not accept this, but there is no need to disclose the reasons."

When Soma asked whether the registration had been denied because APTF was affiliated with the [Family Federation](#), the official replied that:

"Based on its website, APTF appears to have strong ties to the former [Unification Church](#)," and that "it is difficult for Tokorozawa City to determine whether it is a religious organization."

At the same time, the official maintained that:

"The city is not refusing to continue the registration because it is related to the former [Unification Church](#)."

Officially, the city's position is not that the decision was based on a particular belief system, but rather that the organization possesses a "strong religious character" that may conflict with program guidelines. Soma said he felt this

reflected an attitude of avoiding responsibility by leaving matters ambiguous instead of clearly stating them in writing.

In June, Soma received a voicemail message from the city stating that, following review, “the agreement (registration) cannot be continued.”

Excluding “Ordinary People”

APTF Tokorozawa also included participants who were not members of the [religious organization](#). A man in his fifties who lived in Tokorozawa until June said that he joined the activities knowing that the group was affiliated with the [religious organization](#).

“When you actually participate in cleanup activities with them, they are just completely ordinary people. Those who have negative images of the [Family Federation](#) are probably people who have never interacted with current members.”

Regarding the refusal to renew the volunteer registration, he added:

“If there had been a written notice terminating the registration, I could have sent a protest email to the mayor as an ordinary citizen. But it is difficult to protest something that exists only as a phone call and leaves no formal record.”

Soma said:

“Even though our registration was not renewed, we are continuing our cleanup activities. We want to treat this as a new beginning.”

At the same time, he expressed concern that:

“This kind of exclusionary movement could spread to other regions. I feel there is prejudice not only against the [Family Federation](#) but against religious activities themselves. The government should have exercised greater caution in making such decisions.”

See also [Dissolution Case: Attorney Reveals Inside Story](#)

Featured image above: Cleanup activities conducted by the volunteer group “APTF Tokorozawa”. Photo provided by the association.

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The Unification Church Case in Japan: Buddhist Leader Shindo Mizuta Speaks Out

by Massimo Introvigne | Jul 21, 2026 | Testimonies Global

Kongoji Temple’s Chief Priest warns that the dissolution is reshaping Japan’s treatment of religion in ways that threaten every faith community.

by Massimo Introvigne



The Ogawa-Mizuta conversation.

In a [video-recorded conversation](#) with literary critic Eitaro Ogawa, Chief Priest Shindo Mizuta of Kongoji Temple offered one of the most unusual and thoughtful religious responses to the dissolution order against the Unification Church, now called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification.

Mizuta’s background is far from typical. Before entering monastic training at Zuiganji, the National Treasure in Matsushima, he completed a master’s degree in engineering and was preparing for an academic career. His father urged him to return to the temple, and after two years of rigorous practice, he became a Buddhist priest.

Mizuta explained that the dissolution order compelled him to speak because Buddhist principles oblige religious leaders to respond when state power intrudes on spiritual life.

Mizuta began by describing a core Buddhist teaching through a comparison with science. Both Buddhism and science seek truths that remain unchanged under all conditions. In Buddhism, the purpose of knowing the truth is to reduce suffering. One essential method for doing so is to refrain from dividing reality according to subjective judgments. He illustrated this with everyday examples. People offer different amounts of money at shrines on New Year’s Day. Whether an amount appears generous or excessive depends entirely on personal circumstances. A third party cannot impose a universal standard.

He extended this reasoning to the Family Federation. The widespread habit of declaring the movement evil is an act of subjective discrimination. It reflects personal impressions rather than an objective criterion.

He explained that Buddhism does not define good and evil as social conventions do. An action is good when it moves a person toward truth. An action is evil when it moves a person toward ignorance. He recalled that the Buddha left his wife, child, and kingdom to pursue liberation. Social norms would condemn such behavior, yet the Buddha acted from a profound desire to understand the nature of suffering. Mizuta argued that this example shows how easily society confuses moral judgment with spiritual insight.

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Chief Priest Shindo Mizuta during the conversation.

He then examined the main accusations directed at the Family Federation. The first is the claim of large donations. Mizuta responded that the size of a donation cannot be judged without knowing the donor's situation. A sum that appears enormous to one person may be reasonable to another. He warned that imposing a single standard is a form of discrimination.

The second accusation is the use of terms such as “cult” and “mind control.” He described these words as dangerous because they lack scientific definition. He compared them to negative ions, a term used in Japanese marketing without any established meaning in physics. When undefined labels are used to attack or exclude a group, the result is discrimination. He emphasized that discrimination increases suffering and therefore contradicts the purpose of Buddhism.

The third accusation concerns the Family Federation's alleged closeness to the Liberal Democratic Party. Mizuta pointed to an accident off Henoko involving protest boats. One captain was a pastor of the United Church of Christ in Japan. Another had previously run as a candidate for the Japanese Communist Party. If proximity between religion and politics is inherently wrong, then the criticism should apply to all such cases. Singling out only one group reveals a double standard. Mizuta expressed concern that some Buddhist priests repeat these accusations without examining their meaning. He said that doing so distances them from the essence of Buddhism.

The conversation then turned to the practical consequences of a dissolution order. Mizuta described what would happen if such an order were issued against his own temple. A court-appointed liquidator could enter Kongoji and take control of all assets. This would include buildings, land, bank accounts, ritual garments, and ceremonial implements. Those living at the temple could be required to leave immediately. Since many temples also serve as the priest's family home, the priest and his family could lose their residence. Mizuta explained that more than eighty percent of Kongoji's activities involve wakes and funerals held in the main hall. If the premises were placed under restriction, these ceremonies could no longer be conducted. He could lose his position as chief priest and become unable to perform funerals for the community. The temple would cease to function.



Kongoji Temple in Shizuoka, Japan.

He compared the present situation to the Purple Robe Incident of the Edo period, when the shogunate intervened in the Imperial Court's religious authority. He called the dissolution order against the Family Federation the Purple Robe Incident of the present (Reiwa) era. He recalled how Zen master Takuan and others protested the shogunate's actions. He questioned why so many religious leaders remain silent today.

Ogawa agreed. He argued that there is no legal basis for a liquidator to restrict the freedom to hold funerals. He described the situation as religious repression on a national scale. He noted that if events from forty years ago can be used as grounds for action, consistency would require authorities to examine the conduct of the warrior monks of Mount Hiei eight centuries ago. He said this illustrates the weakness of the logic being applied.

Ogawa also criticized what he called information magic. Media amplify the voices of some who identify themselves as victims while obscuring the many believers who remain satisfied with their community.

Mizuta and Ogawa both condemned the silence of religious leaders who have not spoken out. They described this silence as a sign of moral decline. They concluded that religious leaders must return to the essence of religion, recognize that the dissolution order is a threat to all faiths, stand together, and act.

Japan, Religious Liberty, Religious Persecution, Unification Church



Massimo Introvigne

Massimo Introvigne (born June 14, 1955 in Rome) is an Italian sociologist of religions. He is the founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions ([CESNUR](#)), an international network of scholars who study new religious movements. Introvigne is the author of some 70 books and more than 100 articles in the field of sociology of religion. He was the main author of the [Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia](#) (Encyclopedia of Religions in Italy). He is a member of the editorial board for the [Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion](#) and of the executive board of University of California Press' [Nova Religio](#). From January 5 to December 31, 2011, he has served as the "Representative on combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, with a special focus on discrimination against Christians and members of other religions" of the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#) (OSCE). From 2012 to 2015 he served as chairperson of the Observatory of Religious Liberty, instituted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to monitor problems of religious liberty on a worldwide scale.

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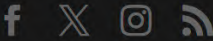
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