

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Kishida Singling Out Religion To Win Election

Knut Holdhus
October 4, 2023



Masaki Kito



Fumio Kishida

Left: Masaki Kito, one of the main activist lawyers in National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales. Right: Prime Minister Fumio Kishida 16th April 2023 at a press conference at the Prime Minister's Residential Quarters regarding the explosion incident (attack) during his election speech

Kishida in desperate collaboration with enemies, singling out religion, before expected snap election

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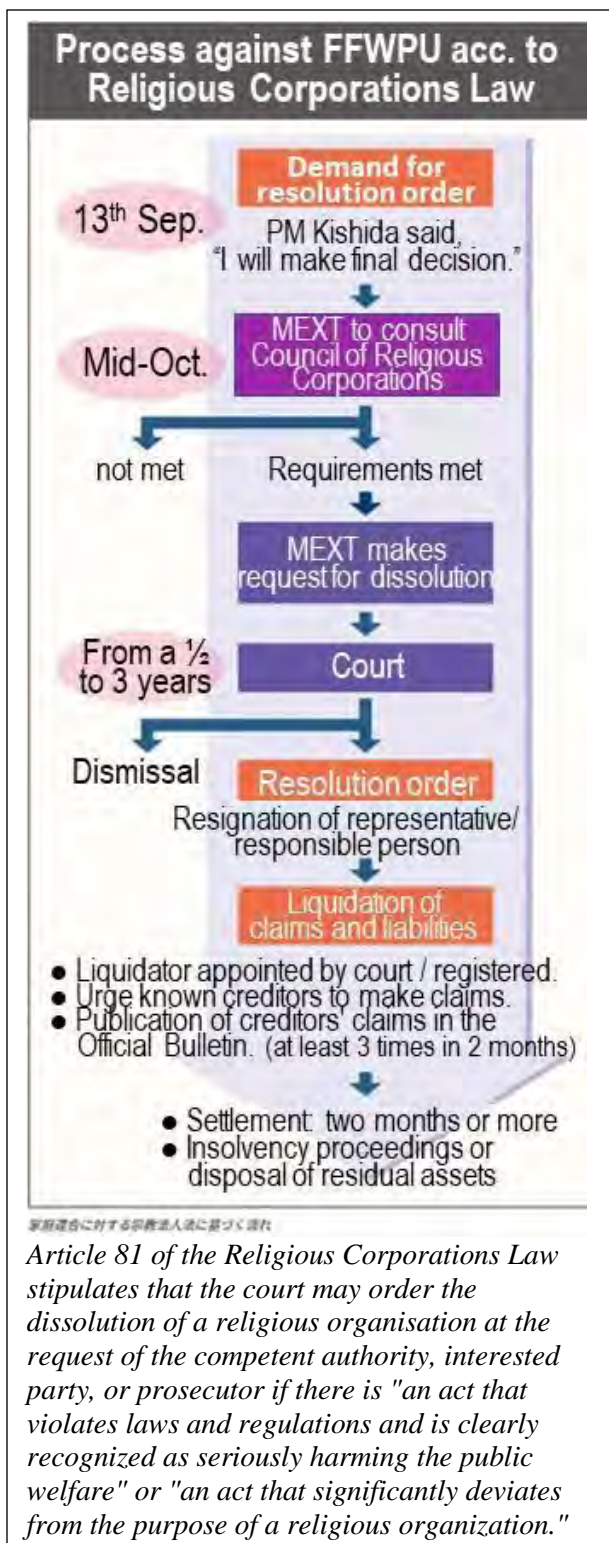
From criticism of "contact" to dissolution request - Former Unification Church

by Nobuo Kubota, 2nd October 2023

Policy of Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology:
Religious Council to be consulted soon

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), which has been investigating the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) by exercising its right to ask questions, has decided to request the Tokyo District Court for an order to dissolve the religious organisation based on the Religious Corporations Law. An interview with government officials revealed on 30th September that the Ministry will consult the Council of Religious Corporations on 12th October to make a decision.

The problem of the organisation came to light again after the shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. "Second generation religious believers" whose parents are believers, and donors have called for its dissolution.



In the wake of the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo subway sarin incident, the law was amended to create the "right to collect reports and ask questions" that can be exercised if there is suspicion that the requirements are met.

In November last year, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) exercised its right to ask questions for the first time, citing a total of 22 civil judgments that had recognized unlawful acts and compensation amounting to at least about 1.4 billion yen. So far, the Ministry has asked seven times for documents and reports on more than 500 questions, including organisational management, donations, overseas remittances, court cases, and settlements. At the same time, interviews were also conducted with parties who had made large donations, and with the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (Zenkoku Benren).

Regarding the right to ask questions, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) notified the district court in September to impose a fine for refusing to answer more than 100 questions, or about 20% of the questions.

Is it a "letter of dissociation" before the election?

Commentary

It was reported that the government plans to request an order to dissolve the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) on 12th October, but Prime Minister Fumio Kishida emphasized at a press conference after the reshuffle of the Cabinet on 13th September, "I will make a final decision." Although he stated that he would make a decision "based on the law while listening to the opinions of the Council of Religious Corporations", the impression that a decision has already been made, cannot be dispelled, as NHK [Japan's state-owned public broadcasting organization] and other major media reported that the dissolution would be requested on 30th September.

A supplementary election for the House of Representatives (the Lower House) will be announced on 5th October, and the voting will take place on the 22nd. In addition, an extraordinary Diet session is scheduled to be convened on the 20th, raising the possibility of a snap general election for the House of Representatives in mid-autumn.



After the shooting incident of former Prime Minister Abe in July of last year, criticism of "contact" with a religious organisation and a related group with an anti-communist agenda became heated. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) released an investigation report and declared a "break" with the religious organisation and the related group.

Hiroshi Yamaguchi, leftwing activist lawyer from National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales. [Bitter Winter](#) writes, "The most visible lawyers of the Network, Hiroshi Yamaguchi (who represented Toru Goto's main tormenter, Takashi Miyamura), Hiroshi Watanabe, and Masaki Kito, were involved in defending those accused of having acted as deprogrammers. Some attorneys in the Network relied on deprogrammers who sent to them their deprogrammed victims. They were then persuaded to sue the [Unification Church](#),

generating significant revenues for the lawyers." (From "[The Abe Assassination. Lawyers 'Against Spiritual Sales' - or Against Religious Liberty?](#)", article by Dr. Massimo Introvigne 29th Aug. 2022. Photo: Screenshot / [Bitter Winter](#))

This is thought to be due to a decline in approval ratings following the cabinet reshuffle in August last year. Under pressure to sign a "letter of dissociation" from the religious organisation, the LDP collaborated with the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (Zenkoku Benren), which has always been strongly anti-LDP and has close ties with the former Socialist Party and the Communist Party. It can be said that the LDP moved forward with the request for the dissolution of the religious organisation in order to obtain a "purification effect" for the next national election.

As a result, in a parliamentary reply, the Prime Minister had overnight changed the interpretation of the Religious Corporations Law. It had previously been interpreted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology to mean that the religious organisation was "not subject to a request for a dissolution order".

The Religious Affairs Division of the Agency for Cultural Affairs also changed the right to ask non-investigative questions. The government unilaterally expanded its political power over religion by increasing the number of staff transferred from other agencies by five to seven times. There are concerns that this will have a ripple effect on other religious groups facing civil lawsuits in the future.

On the other hand, it can be said that the religious organisation has been slow to deal with the suffering caused to victims and former believers. Last year, the religious organisation set up a reform task force and held a press conference, but according to public opinion this was not widely understood.

If a dissolution order is filed with the Tokyo District Court, a decision will be made after hearing the arguments of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the competent authority, and the religious organisation. It is expected that it will take about six months for the decision to be finalized in the district court, and about three years for it to be finalized in the Supreme Court, after an appeal.

When the dissolution is finalized, the representative director and responsible officer of the religious corporation will resign. A liquidator appointed by the court will liquidate the claims and debts based on the assets of the corporation in accordance with the procedures of the Religious Corporations Law. In some cases, the liquidation process leads to bankruptcy proceedings, while in other cases there is a surplus of assets, and the remaining assets are disposed of. (Nobuo Kubota)

"Kishida Singling Out Religion to Win Election" - text: Nobuo Kubota

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Current threat to religious freedom in Japan may have global consequences

Aaron Rhodes, human rights expert and author, warns in a [commentary](#) in the Washington DC based news website *The Messenger* 15th August 2023, about the present threat to religious freedom in Japan since the Abe assassination one year ago. Much is at stake for religious liberty in Japan and



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globally because of what he describes as a **campaign led by Japan's Communist Party against a minority religion.**

Normally, we see such attacks in communist and totalitarian states. Although Japan is a free nation, it has one of the largest communist parties in the democratic world.

Rhodes is a long-time campaigner for human rights and religious freedom and served from 1993 to 2007 as *executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights*. In the article headlined "**Japan's Threat to International Religious Freedom**", he points out the dangers posed to believers not just in the land of the rising sun, but all around the world, if the communists in Japan were to succeed in their decades long war against the **Family Federation**, formerly the **Unification Church**.



Shinzo Abe March 2022. Photo: US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel / Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image. Cropped

The communists, aided by leftwing activist lawyers, **exploited politically the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe** 8th July 2022. In a well-orchestrated campaign, they succeeded, as Rhodes points out, in telling the story that the **Family Federation** is to be blamed for the terror attack on Abe.

It is quite amazing how the **media took this story at face value** and focused on Japanese lawmakers' connection to the **Unification Church**, especially within the governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in spite of such connections often being slight.

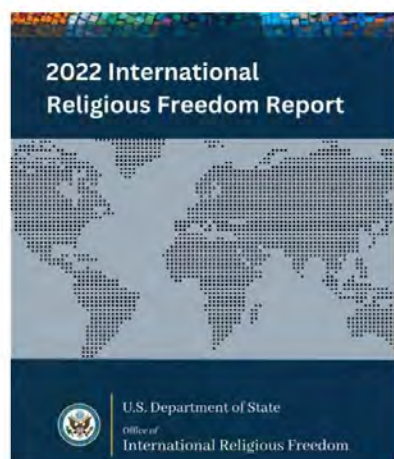
Not only that, the story told by the leftwing activist lawyers that "cults are dangerous", clearly was allowed to colour the articles of many a Japanese journalist and editor. And they printed the extreme claims unquestioningly even though those claims came from a body founded in order to destroy the **Unification Church**, now called the **Family Federation**.

Award-winning Japanese investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda makes this perfectly clear,

"Almost all of the lawyers in the Network were affiliated with the former Socialist Party and the Communist Party, who strongly opposed the enactment of the Anti-Espionage Law, were connected with extremist groups and North Korea, and were ideologically leftists and self-styled atheists. In contrast, the former **Unification Church** is an anti-communist and conservative organization that opposes atheism. It is clear that this was an ideological battle between the two camps." (*The Truth About the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales*, article by Masumi Fukuda in the monthly magazine *Hanada*, republished in English in *Bitter Winter* 30th March 2023)




Masumi Fukuda. Photo: FOREF



Rhodes describes his disappointment that such extreme anti-religious claims from a body initiated by communists were given abundant space in the US Department of State's *2022 International Religious Freedom Report*. He writes,

"the U.S. government's report

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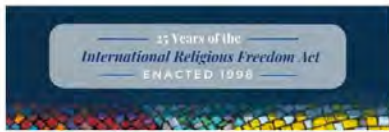
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on international religious freedom gives equal coverage to the

typical anti-cult position that the attack against the [Unification Church] and the Jehovah's Witnesses 'was not about religious freedom' but about 'harm' caused to members and society."

Rhodes describes this as disappointing lack of action taken by the United States, "the champion of religious freedom around the world". Last year's report on the condition for religious freedom globally was however exceptionally "soft" on Japan, even though the Japanese government clearly has done its part to create what leading religious freedom expert Massimo Introvigne calls "the most dramatic religious liberty crisis in a democratic country."

In spite of serious issues with freedom of faith in Japan, the country has been dealt with in an unusually soft manner. Rhodes, and Introvigne attribute this to political bias as Japan is one of the key allies of the USA in the Far East.

Rhodes is also critical of *Freedom House*, the Washington DC based non-governmental organization that measures the degree of civil liberty in each nation. The US human rights expert claims that *Freedom House* bypassed the Japanese "government's threat to religious freedom in its report."



Because of the lack of reaction by the United States and the international human rights community, Rhodes fears that the Japanese government may face little criticism even though it continues to ignore the constitutionally granted religious freedom of a religious minority.

And this may well become a much larger problem and affect other religious minorities not only in Japan, but potentially around the world. As Rhodes emphasizes,

"authoritarian states may see a green light for further assaults on Christians, Muslims, minorities such as the Ahmadi Muslims, Jews, the Baha'i and others. [...] With so much at stake, human rights monitors and friends of Japan should help ensure that the principle of religious freedom is not corroded."

Featured image above: Dr. Aaron Rhodes, executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights 1993-2007. Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

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