

## **Protests Signed with Real Names: The Discrimination Against Second Generation Believers of the Unification Church/Family Federation in Japan**

Masumi Fukuda

*Investigative Journalist, Hanada magazine*

edit@asukashinsha.co.jp

**ABSTRACT:** Sociologist and award-winning journalist Masumi Fukuda continues her investigation of the controversies about the Unification Church, now called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, which erupted in Japan after the assassination of Shinzo Abe in 2022. The former Prime Minister was shot by a man who claimed he wanted to punish him for his cooperation with the Unification Church, which the assassin accused of having ruined her mother. She was a Unification Church member who, her son claimed, went bankrupt in 2002 because of her excessive donations to the movement (see Introvigne 2022). Rather than blaming the assassin, Japanese politicians and media launched a campaign against the Unification Church/Family Federation. Having first investigated the use of “apostate” second-generation ex-members in this campaign (Fukuda 2023a), Fukuda published in the April 2023 issue of the magazine *Monthly Hanada* this new article (Fukuda 2023b). She examines how the second-generation Family Federation believers who, unlike the “apostates,” remained in the church as loyal members are slandered and discriminated by Japanese media, politicians, and bureaucrats.

**KEYWORDS:** Unification Church, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, Unification Church in Japan, Assassination of Shinzo Abe, National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, Anti-Cult Movement in Japan.

### *A Clear Case of Discrimination by the Government*

On December 9, 2022, an online petition with 204,588 signatures was submitted to the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs, asking that it should promptly order the former Unification Church [“former” because it is now called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification] to dissolve.

On that day, angry second-generation ex-members of the former Unification Church, including Sayuri Ogawa (a pseudonym) [see Fukuda 2023a] and Keiko

Kaburaki (another pseudonym), freelance journalist Eight Suzuki (a pen name), and a group supporting the disgruntled ex-members visited the Agency for Cultural Affairs. On behalf of them, Ogawa handed the petition with the signatures and a letter addressed to Hiroaki Ishizaki, the Director of the Religious Affairs Division of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, which is part of the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology.

The meeting was widely broadcast on TV news that evening. As Ishizaki solemnly received the petition from Ogawa, probably in a room of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, in the presence of several media, dozens of camera shutters sounded and flashlights flashed all at once. It was a great ceremony. According to Eight Suzuki, Director Ishizaki promised everyone, “I would make sure to gather enough evidence to avoid that the request [for legally dissolving the former Unification Church] will be overturned in court.”

Twelve days later, on December 21, another petition concerning the former Unification Church was submitted to the Agency for Cultural Affairs. In this case, signatures had not been collected online, but the petition had been hand-signed by 23,486 current believers of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification. However, this petition was sent by postal mail rather than being hand-delivered. Why?

The Family Federation wanted to hand it directly to the person in charge at the Agency for Cultural Affairs. A representative of the legal division of the Family Federation, who has a good relationship with the Agency, asked them to arrange a visit. At first, they were told that the Agency would prepare a meeting room quietly, because the Family Federation delegation would cause a fuss if they would enter the Agency for Cultural Affairs through the main entrance.

Later, however, when the Family Federation’s representative called again his contact at the Agency for Cultural Affairs, the attitude of the bureaucrat hardened. He said that, “Journalists are always around the Prime Minister’s official residence [which is located near the Agency]. To avoid trouble, please send the petition to us by mail.” The Family Federation’s spokesperson insisted, “We want to submit it in person,” but the Agency officer would not allow this.

The Family Federation’s representative was upset and ashamed, but he would not insist further because he had been instructed by the senior leadership of his

religious movement that, “We do not want to get into trouble with the Agency for Cultural Affairs.”

This was a clear case of discrimination. Moreover, it was discrimination by the government.

Online petitions have recently become quite popular. Traditionally, petitions were hand-signed by each individual petitioner. In the case of online petitions, the same person can sign more than once by creating multiple email accounts. It is also possible to sign anonymously or use pseudonyms. It is thus clear that online petitions are less reliable than traditional hand-signed petitions. In an online petition, petitioners are not requested to disclose personal data, nor can these be verified.

The petitions from the Family Federation are different. They include a standard part and one each individual petitioner compiled differently, although the style differs slightly from one local church to the other. At the top of the A4-size form, the names of the recipients are pre-printed: “Mr. Fumio Kishida, Prime Minister of Japan, and Ms. Keiko Nagaoka, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology.” The first sentence is also pre-printed: “Our faith is the basis of our lives, and the Family Federation is the heart of our faith. We hope that a fair decision will be made and that our [religious] corporation will not be dissolved...” In the remaining parts of the petitions, believers described with their personal words their thoughts and feelings, adding the date and each petitioner’s name and address.

“After this way of proceeding was disclosed on the Internet, explained Susumu Sato, a spokesperson for the Family Federation, some commented that the Family Federation had coached its members to repeat all the same stories. In fact, apart from the first standard sentence, the believers were free to write what they wanted and candidly express their personal feelings.

What happened was that, around last summer, the media coverage of the Family Federation became more and more biased, and the second-generation believers started to criticize our church for not answering. We received an increasing number of letters from believers concerned that our church may disappear if the situation would continue, and asking us to react and prevent the possible dissolution of our religious corporation.”

“Some twenty to thirty believers, Sato continued, wrote letters to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) and the government on their own, but most of them did not know where or to whom to address this correspondence. So, we prepared a template and told them that if they completed the petition and sent it to the head office, we would deliver it to the government, once we had collected a certain number of messages. Then, we received a great number of petitions. We indicated December 15 as the deadline, and by then we had received 23,486 petitions. It was not an expression of anger or protest, but a sincere plea not to have what for them is most precious taken away from them. More believers wanted to sign, but gave up after much hesitation, because they were afraid their children would be bullied at school if their families’ association with the Family Federation would be disclosed.”

The former Unification Church had chosen three representatives of the petitioners in advance. These three were to hand over the petitions in person and read out excerpts from them evidencing their main content. The three representatives, Yuri Saito (26), Kiaki Kojima (27), and Yoko Ueda (pseudonym, 26), were all second-generation female believers. They had obtained permission from their parents and relatives, were willing to show their real names and faces, and were ready for their difficult mission (only Ueda used a pseudonym, but was willing to show her face).

Kojima said, “I was so happy when they asked me to take on this case, and the three of us were discussing how we would like to read out excerpts from the petitions, which contained the earnest feelings of more than 20,000 believers. Having watched [apostate ex-member] Sayuri Ogawa’s performance on YouTube, we knew we would not get as much attention as she did. Still, we were hoping for a little media coverage, so it was a huge shock when the meeting did not happen.”

“I read all the petitions that they had written one by one, Kojima added, and I was almost in tears. These were the truly earnest voices and a glimpse of these believers’ lives. I was prepared to represent the thoughts and feelings they had been unable to express because they were overwhelmed by the opposition—to express emotions that had been piling up over the years. So when I heard that the meeting would be cancelled, I felt a terrible sense of rejection, and wondered why it was called off.”

Ueda was also disappointed.

The government clearly did whatever it could to downplay the petition favorable to the Unification Church/Family Federation, while promoting the one against it. Once again, I would like to say that this was a case of discrimination. Of course, Family Federation members were outraged by this incident. Even some non-members and politically conservative netizens commented that “This is a discrimination” on Twitter.

*The Lame Excuses of the Agency for Cultural Affairs*

I, the author of this article, called the Agency for Cultural Affairs both to protest and to conduct an interview. I spoke to Hiroaki Ishizaki, the head of the Division of Religious Affairs and the person who had cheerfully received the anti-Family-Federation online petition from the hands of Ogawa.

“This is unfair, I said. Why did you accept their online petition but not the Family Federation’s petition hand-signed with real names? According to the media, you answered that you did it ‘because otherwise the reporters would make a fuss.’ Is that true?”

Director Ishizaki answered that, “I got the feeling that the Family Federation did not really want a face-to-face meeting.” “This is not true, I replied. I was told they wanted to bring the petition in person.” “No, this was not the case,” he insisted stubbornly.

When I asked him, “An online petition should carry less weight than a hand-signed one, isn’t it?” he answered, “No, for me they are the same.” He then asked unpleasantly, “Why are you calling me? The Unification Church should contact me directly.” He must have known that the Family Federation had decided to keep a low profile in its dealings with the MEXT, which is the very body that will take a decision on the dissolution request. I believe he was aware of this when he answered me.

Yet, this was the same Director Ishizaki who cheered and encouraged those who brought to him the petition full of pseudonyms, and told them, “I would make sure to gather enough evidence to avoid that the request [for legally dissolving the former Unification Church] will be overturned in court.”

I was left with the impression that, while knowing that their position is unreasonable, the MEXT officers have already decided that, no matter what the

results of their investigation will be, they will go on and seek the dissolution of the Family Federation.

### *The Despair of Second-Generation Believers*

Let us listen to the earnest feelings of three second-generation believers who are active members of the Family Federation.

Yuri Saito has a regular job outside of the Federation. “Belonging to this church, she said, has been my reason for living and my joy, so before the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe, I used to tell my friends in my workplace that I was a believer.”

The Unification Church has been criticized since before Saito was born. However, it seems that her friends did not have a bad image of the church. “Whenever my friends were worried about their life or needed for help, she told me, I suggested they should learn about the Unification Principle, because it might change their life. Some freely accepted to come to the church. The people I met through the volunteer work I did with my church friends also seemed to have a good impression of us, and I think we were able to build trustworthy relationships with them. But after the Abe assassination it became difficult for me to tell others that I am a Family Federation believer.”

Saito is a “blessed” second-generation child, meaning she is born of parents who participated in a collective wedding. “I went through a wild time during my school years, she reported, and I kept away from the Family Federation for a long period of time. But I came back, because I thought this was the place where I belonged. Now this place may disappear. It would mean losing my home and my family. This is why, when the idea of the petition came up, I wrote my text and signed it, hoping to show what the Family Federation is really all about, despite all the bad things that are said in Japanese society. I did not think of any disadvantage that might come to me from signing the petition. Rather, I was willing to do whatever I could do.”

This is what Saito wrote in her petition: “I was born and raised as a blessed second-generation believer of the Family Federation, formerly known as the Unification Church. To be honest, there was a period in my life when I kept away from it and I too wished it would disappear. But then I told myself that I did not

want to come to conclusions about the church based only on my own superficial feelings, without studying the issue more deeply. I did not want to rely on what my parents told me either. So, I started studying the doctrine and history of the church on my own, because I wanted to understand things more clearly. And I came back. That is why the idea of a dissolution of this organization is now so distressing to me. I think it may be true that in the past some in the church might have caused social unrest and trouble. It might have happened before I was born. Even so, I want to take responsibility for the future as a young believer. Maybe I will not do great things. However, the Family Federation is my family and the place that made me strong, protected me, loved me in the time of need, even when I distrusted those around me and wanted to die. I respectfully ask you not to dissolve the organization.”

Saito’s generation has never been involved in the so-called “spiritual sales” the fraudulent business practices some members of the Unification Church have been accused of. Nor have they been involved in any missionary work where the true identity of the church was concealed, another frequent accusation against the movement. Nor have they ever been forced by their church to reach a quota for the donations.

They are not responsible for incidents of the past. However, because of the tremendous slander by the anti-Unification Church camp and the media, they are now concerned about things that might have happened before they were born, and even feel guilty about them. It is too much.

Kiaki Kojima is another blessed child, a second-generation believer whose parents were married in a collective wedding. Her mother is Japanese and her father is Korean. She currently works as an employee for a Family Federation church. She also expressed her thoughts in her petition: “I am a second-generation churchgoer. I am deeply distressed by what I read and watch in the media day after day. My parents met and married in a ‘blessed marriage’ of the Unification Church. Without the church, I would not have been born. Whenever the church’s dignity is denied, I feel as if my parents’ way of life and my existence are also denied... I respect my parents, who speak out for Japan and for the world. Since I was a child, I looked forward to going to church on Sundays. The church members always treated me well, like family. Don’t take this comfort of the heart away from us. I was really shocked to hear from the leader of Japan, Prime Minister Kishida, that ‘the former Unification Church is an anti-social

organization.’ Please, please do not think that the information spread now by the media tells the real story of the church. I hope you will listen to both sides and come to a fair judgment.”

*“Why Do You Listen to Angry Ex-Members Only?”*

Yoko Ueda grew up with parents who were blessed only after Yoko’s birth. She currently works for a church-affiliated company. This is the statement Ueda prepared, hoping she would be able to read it as a representative of the believers.

“I am a second-generation believer, born and raised by parents who are faithful members of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (the former Unification Church). For as long as I can remember, going to church has been a part of my life. I have been observing the church for about twenty years until today. We all know that the church has flaws and problems. In fact, I think we second-generation members know better than others what needs to be fixed in our church. Of course, the church has changed a lot in the last twenty years. The change is still ongoing. I have watched my parents strive to improve their mutual love and characters through the teachings of the church. I truly respect them, and believe they have a great personality like no one else. I truly believe that it is because of the Unification Church and the Family Federation that today I have a family filled with happiness.”

“What is being said and reported in Japanese society today, Ueda’s text went on to say, does not represent the church as it really is. Why are some trying to dissolve a church which brings so much joy to our hearts while eliciting public sympathy for the assassin who took the life of former Prime Minister Abe? Why do you only listen to some lawyers and ex-members whose ideology conflicts with ours, but not to the voices of those who remain in the church? Are we church members second-class citizens? Are we a group of evil people comparable to the indiscriminate murderers of Aum Shinrikyo? Are we not even allowed to exist? Some churches were forced to move out of their premises, and some stores that we used to do business with stopped selling goods to us. And that is not all. Some of us have been rejected by higher education institutions, had their job offers cancelled by the companies that made them, were forced to resign from their jobs, and even were divorced or attempted suicide. Since we are religious people, many believers grit their teeth and bear the situation, no matter how unreasonable the



treatment they receive is. However, when I think of the church that has taken care of me since I was a child, and of many lovely church members, my feeling is that I cannot remain silent and do nothing about it. For this reason, I am submitting a petition signed by 23,000 believers today.”

*“The Media Do Not Represent the Church as It Really Is”*

As Ueda claimed in her petition, the extremely biased media coverage of the former Unification Church has deeply hurt the Family Federation members, both first-generation and second-generation.

“We hear from believers of our parents’ generation that watching TV really makes them feel distressed, depressed, hyperventilating, and mentally tortured, Ueda said. Also, some first-generation believers feel sorry for the second-generation members, for letting all this happen to them.”

“At first, Kojima told me, when I watched news that were so different from the reality of the Family Federation, I thought that they misunderstood us, that I had to clear up the misunderstanding quickly, and I wondered how I could tell the truth. So I have been on YouTube, and have been sending out information earnestly. But gradually, I began to realize that it was not just a misunderstanding in good faith. They had a clear idea of what message they wanted to convey, and were only looking for witnesses who would confirm that idea. What we, second-generation members favorable to the Church, would say would not matter.”

Actually, disgruntled ex-members, both first- and second-generation, are everywhere in the media. They all use pseudonyms and are extremely critical of the church. The media present a stereotypical image of the ex-members, and manage to keep the current members invisible from the public opinion.

“But the media, Kojima said, are aware of the criticism that current active believers are nowhere to be seen in their reports, so they are actually looking for some of them to be interviewed. It seems that the believers who are on Twitter are being contacted one after another.”

However, the media try to pick and choose believers fitting their agenda. They can be a little bit positive about the church. But their words and actions should express some doubts, and they should absolutely mention something negative too. Otherwise, the media would quickly cut them off, or would edit their

comments. This is how they operate. Some current believers may be happy to break free of their invisibility and become visible for one moment only, even if the media would quote only one remark out of context. But this is not the reality of them.

Kojima reported that “a friend who fights valiantly on Twitter told me that even if they contact current active members, when they realize that they have a firm faith and are not wavering, they just say, ‘Okay,’ and hang up.”

### *Victims of Hate Speech*

As a result of the news reports, believers are subjected to unjustified discriminatory labels such as “anti-social” or “cultists” every day. This is hate speech. Paradoxically, it is the anti-Unification-Church camp and the members of the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, including attorney Masaki Kito, who calls himself a “human rights lawyer,” who consistently violate human rights by spreading hate speech.

Ueda explained it in detail. “Those who had some direct contact with the Family Federation believers and have been exposed to our doctrines would never use these derogatory labels, she said. The image of the Family Federation members circulating in our society is that believers are brainwashed robots, but in reality, they are kind-hearted and humane persons. I would ask you to consider that these labels are causing unspeakable pain to second-generation believers, who are in the midst of their sensitive adolescence, and are fundamentally denied to be who they are. Current media reports are a mixture of exaggerations, lies, and speculation. Please stop hurting the members of the Family Federation. I want people to know what the church really is.”

Saito also sadly stated, “I just went overseas to do fundraising, missionary work, and volunteer for God and my fellow human beings. I have been proud of my activities, but now I feel like I have been told all I did was evil. If there have been past faults of the church, I feel sorry for them, but it is sad and distressing that the media are only telling the most negative part of the story.”

Kojima also expressed her disappointment and frustration. “We did not kill anyone, and we do not fit the definition of ‘anti-social’ at all. So I am shocked to be called anti-social. If I were not a second-generation Family Federation member

myself, after reading the media I might also have accused them and concluded I did not want to get involved with the church. However, what is being reported in the media is far from the truth, and this is very sad. I don't know what I can do now to make people understand, I am really at a loss for words."

Once, reporters followed Kojima when she went to church. Whenever she went outside of the church, reporters with cameras would follow her, asking questions such as, "Were you told how to vote in the elections?," "What do you think of large donations?," and keep following her around.

"I was very eager to tell them the truth about the church, she said. However, I knew that even if I answered these questions, my answers would be cut out of the interview if I would not tell them what they wanted to hear. I wanted to talk with them and at the same time I felt I should not. This dilemma was painful."

Serious discrimination is also taking place. As I mentioned earlier, Kojima is currently an employee of a Family Federation church. Her friend, who is also an employee, lost her room because her rental contract for the apartment was not renewed. The landlord stated that she was an employee of the Family Federation, and they could not rent to a member of the former Unification Church, so the contract was terminated. After that, she visited several real estate agencies, but could not find even a room to rent. She was desperate and asked her acquaintances, "Do you know of any place where I can stay?" Soon thereafter, she was able to find an apartment she could share with somebody else, until finally she found her own place to rent.

There are also cases of students who graduated from a former-Unification Church-affiliated university in South Korea who have had their job offers cancelled by Japanese companies, one after the other.

### *Targeting Volunteers*

The Family Federation and its affiliated organizations have long been enthusiastic about volunteer activities.

Kojima is from Hokkaido. When the Great East Japan Earthquake hit, she stayed overnight in the disaster area, and worked day after day to clear away the debris. Although the work was hard, it was very meaningful to her because she was able to put into practice the church's teaching of "living for the sake of

others,” and was able to build relationships with other people. In fact, the dedication of the Family Federation and its affiliated organizations was greatly appreciated by the local victims.

However, these activities are now discriminated against simply because the Family Federation is involved. In the African country of Mozambique, a woman from a Unification Church affiliate organization, while being continuously attacked by local bandits and suffering from malaria, managed to build a school attended by hundreds of local children.

She was highly appreciated by the Mozambican government. Her achievements over the years were also recognized in Japan, and she received the Foreign Minister’s Commendation in 2019. However, the commendation was quickly revoked when a parliament member from the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) denounced her as “problematic.”

Similarly in Japan, local governments have revoked commendations for the volunteer activities of Unification-Church-affiliated organizations. Prefectures and municipalities have returned small donations from the Family Federation and affiliated organizations, and have revoked the prefectural and municipal volunteer registrations.

The former Unification Church has become a “stain” on Japanese society. If an order to dissolve the church is issued, its believers may be stoned and expelled from our society.

“The media are irresponsible in insisting that it would not be a big deal to dissolve the Family Federation, Kojima told me. ‘Just’ the religious corporation will not exist and the churches will ‘just’ pay taxes. But once the government recognizes that a religious organization deserves to be dissolved, it will actually cease to exist. The damage would be tremendous.”

And, if the dissolution is not so important, it is difficult to explain why the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales has persistently called for the dissolution of the former Unification Church for thirty-six years since it was established.

*“Damage” as Defined by the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales: Myth and Reality*

The former Unification Church is a new religion, and it is from South Korea. This in itself has become a controversial issue. The believers suffer when they are heartlessly called “anti-Japanese” and “traitors.” The women are particularly hurt by these insults. “We are really frustrated when people call us ‘anti-Japanese,’ Ueda said. We have been educated to love our country, so we really have a passion for Japan, and we are proud to be genuine patriots.”

I have come into contact myself with many believers of the Family Federation. I feel they look very much similar to the average Japanese conservatives. And I wonder who is really anti-Japanese. For instance, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations and the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales are adamantly opposed to the Anti-Espionage Law.

The United Church of Christ in Japan has been actively involved in the abduction and confinement of members of the former Unification Church to “deconvert” them from their faith, and also systematically sides with South Korea on hotly debated issues such as the indemnification Japan is requested to pay for having recruited “comfort women” and conscripted workers during World War II. Some may argue they are the real anti-Japanese organizations.

We know, the anti-Unification-Church camp loudly proclaims that “the damage caused by the former Unification Church is serious and continues to this day.” But they have not proved this to be true.

*Is Japan Really a Country Governed by Law?*

With regard to “spiritual sales,” after the declaration of compliance with the law the Unification Church issued in 2009, the sales of goods (seals, statues of the Buddha, and others) whose price was regarded as extravagant by Family Federation believers has stopped. As for marble vases and two-stories miniature pagodas, the import and commercial companies accused of “spiritual sales” had already stopped importing and selling these items in 1987, when the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales was founded. Nevertheless, the Network claims that there are still “damages” caused by the Unification

Church/Family Federation after 2009, but what they mean when they say that “there are damages” is that “they receive requests for consultation.”

The statistics of “damages” (in fact, “requests for consultation”) supplied by the Network show that there were nine requests for consultation for seals, five for pots, and one for Buddha statues in 2020. There was only one request for consultation for seals and one for pots in 2021. The amount of the so-called “damages” was 22,786,500 yen (\$166,154) in 2020 and only 910,000 yen (\$6,636) in 2021.

Since the amount of “damages” caused by the spiritual sales, even considering all claims in the requests for consultation they received as well-founded, has been drastically decreasing in recent years, the Network has decided to add to its calculation even the “damages” (meaning, again, the claims about which they receive requests for consultation) for monetary donations. They call the latter “spiritual sales that do not involve the exchange of goods,” thereby inflating their figures of the “damages” allegedly caused by the “spiritual sales.”

However, in recent years the lawsuits to recover the alleged damages caused by those donations have almost disappeared. Tatsuki Nakayama, a newly appointed lawyer representing the Family Federation’s world headquarters, analyzed 169 civil lawsuits filed against the church. He found that 165 cases concerned donations made, or started, before the declaration of compliance. Only four cases were for donations made after the declaration of compliance. Furthermore, there have been no lawsuits over new donations the church has received from believers after March 2016.

How can the government file a request for dissolution based on these figures? If the MEXT rushes forward with the dissolution request following the inputs of Prime Minister Kishida, even without having found evidence of any definite illegal act by the Family Federation, then Japan will no longer be a country governed by the law. Japan will be stigmatized internationally as a country where religion is persecuted.

The Family Federation’s second-generation believers active in the church just want to do something useful for their country and society. Japan should not answer by humiliating, discriminating and persecuting these young women and men.

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