

Mainichi Shimbun

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Editorial: New Japan gov't must act on slush funds scandal after Abe faction guilty verdict

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[Japanese version](#)



Officials with the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office's special investigation unit and others enter the building housing the offices of the Abe faction, also known as Seiwa Seisaku Kenkyukai, in Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward on Dec. 19, 2023. (Mainichi/Tatsuro Tamaki)

The slush funds scandal involving factions of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that has rocked Japan's political landscape over the last year is still embroiled in mystery. And now, the Tokyo District Court has found the person in charge of accounting at the offices of the Abe faction guilty.

The big question is when did it all start, and how were the funds spent?

The secretary-general for the faction, previously led by the late former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, was accused of violating the Political Funds Control Act for off-the-books redistribution to Diet members of fundraiser party ticket proceeds in excess of quotas.

The trial was hoped to shed light on the particulars of the slush funds' origins and the involvement of the faction's upper echelons, but this did not come to fruition.

That's due to a lack of claims and substantiations by the prosecution, which held that the false reporting was carried out by the faction's secretariat once the accused had taken over from his predecessor. Despite that, the trial heard from the secretary-general that Diet members may have been involved.

In 2022, it was decided that the redistribution of funds would be halted after Abe raised issues with them. After his death, however, there were calls from certain key legislators to reinstate the practice, according to the testimony of the accused. Afterward, a meeting of four senior faction lawmakers was reportedly held at which it was concluded that the continuation of the practice would be inevitable. However, three of those members had later said in the Diet that "no conclusion was reached."

The secretary-general also said that he had asked "executives in the past" to end the false entries in political funding reports on a number of occasions. One or more Diet members may have allowed the fraud to go on despite hearing that advice. Yet, the prosecutors, lawyers and judges did not deeply pursue this testimony, and the accused himself avoided a detailed explanation.

A criminal trial is where the defendant's guilty or innocence should be determined and punishment ruled on where appropriate. For that reason, the details and background of the case must be brought to light. The stance taken by the prosecution in this case remains questionable.

Other suspicions have surfaced over the course of the slush funds scandal.

An LDP poll concluded that no Diet members had used the funds for anything other than political activities, but former House of Representatives member Manabu Horii is suspected of using them to illegally pay condolence money to voters.

Meanwhile, testimony has emerged of slush funds created within the Aso faction, headed by former Prime Minister Taro Aso, despite that group's insistence until now that it was not involved in the scandal.

A new survey by the LDP is needed, but freshly sworn-in Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba has rejected the idea.

His predecessor Fumio Kishida's handling of this issue stopped short of what was needed, raising the people's sense of distrust. It is up to the current administration to unravel the whole story.

News Navigator: What's behind Japan ministry seeking dissolution of Unification Church?

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[Japanese version](#)



Agency for Cultural Affairs staff are seen taking materials to request an order to dissolve the former Unification Church in this photo provided by the agency.

The Mainichi Shimbun answers some common questions readers may have about a Japanese ministry's request for an order to dissolve the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, formerly known as the Unification Church.

Question: What leads up to a request for a dissolution order, a term often used in the news about the former Unification Church?

Answer: The former Unification Church is spreading its doctrine and gaining followers as a "religious corporation" recognized under the jurisdiction of the minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The group also receives preferential treatment in that some of its income is exempt from taxes. However, if a religious corporation

violates certain rules, it loses its special status, or in other words, is ordered to dissolve. Only administrative agencies, interested parties and prosecutors are allowed to request these dissolutions.

Q: What is the issue at hand?

A: The culture ministry, which filed the request, investigated the former Unification Church and found 32 court rulings in which the church was found liable for compensation for long-term and systematic illegal solicitation of donations and sales of goods. The ministry claims that these cases constitute "an act which is clearly found to harm public welfare substantially" in violation of laws and regulations and "an act which deviates substantially from the purpose of a religious organization" under the Religious Corporations Act, which are grounds for the dissolution order.

Q: Have there been any examples of dissolution orders issued in the past?

A: Only two organizations have previously been ordered to dissolve. One was the Aum Shinrikyo doomsday cult, which was responsible for the sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway system in 1995, and the other is the Myokakuji temple group in Wakayama Prefecture, which was responsible for fraud incidents involving spiritual sales in the 1980s and 1990s. In both cases, executives were held criminally liable. There was some debate within the Japanese government as to whether civil liability could be used as the basis for a dissolution order, as was the case with the former Unification Church, but the culture ministry decided that the dissolution order system is applicable and filed the request.

Q: Will the request be approved?

A: It is up to the courts to decide. The former Unification Church claims that it has not committed any acts that constitute a violation of the law and that it uses donations from followers for missionary activities and maintenance of the organization. It will take some time before a conclusion is reached.

(Japanese original by Ran Kanno, Tokyo City News Department)