

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's New Laws Designed to Destroy Family Federation

Knut Holdhus  
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*Family Federation flag waving in Japan*

**International human rights expert describes in report to UN how Japan has introduced a new law especially designed to rob the Family Federation of all its funds**

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Patricia Duval, French attorney specialised in international human rights law, sent on 22nd September 2024, a 29-page report titled “Japan: A Witch Hunt to Eradicate the [Unification Church](#)” to several UN offices. [Bitter Winter](#), the leading international magazine on religious freedom and human rights published 3 days later, on 25th September, an [executive summary](#) of the report. The day after, the magazine started publishing a 5-part series where Duval gives a more detailed description of the content.

Part 2 of comments on [fourth article of Bitter](#)

[Winter's 5-part series](#)



*Patricia Duval, French attorney and expert on international human rights law. She has defended the rights of minorities of religion or belief in domestic and international fora, and before international institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union, and the United Nations. She has also published numerous scholarly articles on freedom of religion or belief*

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Text: John Milton / Knut Holdhus

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### **New law targeting religious minority**

On 30th December 2023, Japan passed Law No. 89, officially titled the “Law on Special Provisions for the Operation of the Japan Legal Support Center for Prompt and Smooth Relief of Victims of Specific Torts, and Similar, and Special Provisions of the Disposition and Management of Property by Religious Corporations.”

Known as the “Act on Victims of Specific Torts” or “Special Measures Act”, this legislation introduces sweeping measures to aid “victims of specific torts” while monitoring the assets of religious corporations against which dissolution claims have been filed. Although framed as broadly applicable, this law specifically targets the [Family Federation](#), the sole organization currently facing a dissolution request from the Japanese government.

[Editor's note: Torts are acts or omissions that bring about injury or harm to another and amount to civil wrongs for which courts impose liability.]

### **Japan enacts law targeting religious corporations, focusing on**

#### **Family Federation's assets**

#### **Objectives and scope of law no. 89**

The new law aims to achieve two main objectives. Firstly, it provides support for alleged victims of specific torts, enabling them to seek damages through expedited legal processes supported by the Japan

Legal Support Center. Secondly, it grants government oversight of assets belonging to religious corporations that are subject to dissolution requests, specifically focusing on preventing potential dissipation of these assets.



Sign at the headquarters of the Family Federation of Japan in Shibuya, Tokyo

Under Law No. 89, “specific torts” include actions such as coercive solicitation tactics, which allegedly impair individuals’ judgment and disrupt public welfare. These activities have been cited by Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in its dissolution request for the [Family Federation](#). The law allows MEXT to classify organizations facing dissolution under two designations: “designated religious corporations” and “specially designated religious corporations.”

### Designated and specially designated religious corporations



The classification process is laid out in Article 7.1 of Law No. 89. Religious corporations can be designated as “designated religious corporations” if there is a “substantial” number of victims associated with them. This designation allows authorities to closely monitor their assets and financial transactions. The guidelines issued on 15th February 2024, clarify that several dozen victims, including those who may come forward later, are enough to trigger this classification.

[Editor’s note: As a point of reference here, it’s worth noting that the [Family Federation](#) has about 600,000 members in Japan.]



Okazaki Family Church of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)

Should there be concerns that a religious organization may attempt to evade asset monitoring, it may be further classified as a “specially designated religious corporation,” as per Article 12. This heightened classification permits stricter surveillance measures, including easier access to the corporation’s financial records by victims’ legal representatives. The law is intended to safeguard against any attempt by these organizations to move or conceal assets pending the dissolution process.

### Laws intended to bankrupt the Family Federation

The [Family Federation](#) (in Japan until 2015 called the [Unification Church](#)), which has been under increasing scrutiny for its solicitation practices, now faces enhanced financial monitoring and legal challenges under the new law. As the first organization likely to be designated under this statute, the [Family Federation](#)’s financial institutions have already become cautious about processing international transactions and large remittances, reflecting the law’s immediate effects.

Law 89 is seen as a tool for victims’ lawyers, particularly the network of leftwing activist lawyers who have campaigned against the Family Federation / [Unification Church](#) for decades. Those hostile lawyers can now access the [Family Federation](#)’s financial records more efficiently. The lawyers have naturally expressed support for this legal approach, calling for a flexible implementation of these provisions to allow more individuals to claim damages without financial burdens.

Many of these individuals may already be associated with the hostile leftwing lawyers’ network, which for more than 50 years has worked in league with professional faith-breakers who have coerced forcibly deprogrammed members of the minority religion to become claimants in lawsuits against the [Family Federation](#) / [Unification Church](#).



*One of the architects of new law and advisor to the Japanese authorities: Masaki Kito, one of the hostile lawyers of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales and Nationwide Unification Church Damage Countermeasures Legal Team*



*Taro Kono, the government minister who personally appointed hostile lawyers as advisors to the government, is known as a maverick politician*



*Another advisor to the Japanese government vehemently opposed to the [Family Federation](#): Shiori Kanno*

Critics of the new law naturally say that the laws are tailor-made for the hostile lawyers to seize all the assets of the [Family Federation](#). That becomes more apparent when we know that representatives of those same lawyers have served as advisors to the administration that had the laws enacted. In fact, one of the lawyers, Masaki Kito, was personally appointed by a government minister to be a key architect of the steps taken by the authorities against the religious minority called the [Family Federation](#).

### **Laws unheard of in the rest of the world**

To assist potential claimants, the law mandates that the Japan Legal Support Center provide legal aid to those seeking compensation. This includes removing financial barriers, allowing “victims of specific torts” to pursue claims without incurring legal expenses.

The Special Measures Act extends beyond economic damages from donations, opening the doors wide for broader claims for alleged family and relational damage allegedly caused by the [Family Federation](#)’s practices. In this respect, families “affected by” the conversion of loved ones to the [Family Federation](#) are being encouraged to pursue both refunds and punitive damages, citing family separations.

Critics claim that such laws make it virtually impossible for a religious organization to exist. Such extreme laws are unheard of in the rest of the world. It certainly seems like in the current witch hunt against the [Family Federation](#) reason has gone out the window. The new laws are designed to bankrupt the [Family Federation](#). But with such a legislation enacted, the above-mentioned lawyers would love to embrace claims against any religious organization. Laws allowing for legal claims for alleged “family and relational damage” make it easy to go after unpopular minority religions and could prove very lucrative for lawyers already hostile to new religions.

### **Controversy surrounding Law 89’s implementation**

While the Japanese government presents Law 89 as a measure to protect victims, critics argue that its broad provisions against “specific torts” may lead to targeted discrimination against new religious movements, particularly those seen as “socially unacceptable”. By creating a legal framework that scrutinizes the financial activities of designated religious corporations, the law could potentially weaken their financial structures and reduce their influence within Japanese society.

### **Potential misuse**

As Japan enforces Law no. 89, religious freedom advocates express concerns about the potential misuse of these provisions to stigmatize non-mainstream religious groups. The [Family Federation](#)’s current legal battle against monstrous laws readily exploited by activist lawyers will likely set a precedent for how this new law will impact the financial and operational stability of many religious corporations in Japan.

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# BITTER WINTER

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## Japan and the Unification Church: The Duval Report. 4. Enactment of New Laws

09/30/2024 PATRICIA DUVAL

A+ | A-

After the Abe assassination, statutes limiting the freedom of “controversial” religions to solicit donations further endangered religious liberty.

by Patricia Duval\*

\*A report sent to several United Nations offices on September 22, 2024.

Article 4 of 5. Read [article 1](#), [article 2](#), and [article 3](#).



*Japanese Prime Minister Kishida meets French President Macron. Japan's anti-cult campaigns increasingly resemble those of France. Credits.*

In parallel to the dissolution request and tort cases, two new laws have been passed to target specifically the Unification Church, even though it is not expressly mentioned in the text: one to prevent “unjust solicitation for donations” and one to help the alleged victims to file for damages and freeze the assets of religious corporations subject to dissolution.

### The December 2022 Law on “Unjust Solicitations”

**Act no. 105** on “Preventing Unjust Solicitation for Donations by a Corporation” (hereafter “law on unjust solicitations” or “donations law”) was enacted on December 16, 2022, to amend the existing Consumer Contract Law.

Article 3.1 of this law makes it an obligation for those who solicit donations to make sure that they do not “suppress the free will” of donors, a provision adopted to enshrine the vague and discriminatory concept of undue influence in the law.

The new law contains a provision specifically designed for religious donations: “Article 4: When soliciting donations, a corporation, etc. must not confuse the individual who is being solicited to donate by engaging in any of the following acts: ... (vi) indicating to the individual that psychic sense or other special abilities that are difficult to be reasonably verified have shown that a serious disadvantage would occur to the life, health, property, or other significant matters of the individual or their relatives, unless the individual takes certain measures to fuel their fear, and then, informing the individual that the serious disorders can be completely avoided if the individual donates and the donation will be essential.”

The mention of hell or karma in briefings to potential donors, such as the “karma talks” by the UC, could then be considered as confusing the individual in order to obtain donations.

The Catholics and Buddhists have such practices, but needless to say this provision is not intended to be applied to traditional or “socially acceptable” religions, but only to new religious movements derogatorily labeled as “cults,” and more specifically the Unification Church.

If Article 4 is found to apply and the donors have been "confused," then the donation can be rescinded. In case they were confused after being taught about hell or karma, the time limit for rescinding is increased from five to ten years from the time when the donors manifested their intent to donate.

In addition, the law provides that rescission of the donation can also be claimed by the creditors of a regular financial support obligation such as husband, wife, children, or those towards whom the donor has a duty of support under the Japanese Civil Code, such as ascendants and brothers or sisters. Lastly, the new law provides support for the persons who donated to obtain rescission and recover damages through a special help from the Japan Legal Support Center (procurement of legal advice) and a user-friendly consultation system (a hotline for these specific victims).

In case of "unjust solicitation," the Ministry can order the religious organization to stop such soliciting of donations and in case of non-compliance with the order the individuals involved are liable to penal sanctions of imprisonment.

All these measures make it now very risky for new religious movements to solicit donations since they are liable to penal sanctions if any donor later complains to have been made anxious by a briefing on karma or divine punishment.

But above all, this State apparatus is designed at inciting those who donated to the Church to rescind their donations and claim damages, with the help of lawyers paid by the State.



*Unification Church leader Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon visiting Tokyo in 2017. Source: Family Federation for World Peace and Unification.*

## The December 2023 Law on Relief of "Victims of Specific Torts"

On December 30, 2023, Law no. 89 was enacted. It is called the "Law on Special Provisions for the Operation of the Japan Legal Support Center for Prompt and Smooth Relief of Victims of Specific Torts, and Similar, and Special Provisions of the Disposition and Management of Property by Religious Corporations."

It contains **special provisions** for the operation of the Japan Legal Support Center (legal aid) for the relief of "Victims of Specific Torts," and special provisions for the "Disposition and Management of Property by Religious Corporations." Law 89 is also referred to by Japanese Officials as the "Act on Victims of Specific Torts" or "Special Measures Act" or "Special Act."

It has been adopted to target specifically the Unification Church and has two objectives:

- one is help to the "victims of specific torts" for filing suits to obtain damages, and
- second is surveillance of the assets of any religious corporation against which a claim for dissolution has been filed by the Government, that is to say the Unification Church as it is the only one in this situation to date.

"Specific torts" refers to torts that have given rise to a specific request of dissolution order, i.e., soliciting donations through "preventing the donors' normal judgment" and disrupting public welfare, per the dissolution request of MEXT.

Pursuant to Law 89, religious corporations against which a dissolution request has been filed are classified in two categories: "designated religious corporations" and "specially designated religious corporations."

If there is a "substantial" number of "victims" a group will be listed as a "designated religious corporation": "Article 71: The competent authority may designate a target religious corporation as a designated religious corporation if it finds that the target religious corporation falls under any of the following: (i) It is expected that there will be a significant number of victims of specific torts, etc., related to the target religious corporation. (ii) It is necessary to grasp the status of disposal and management of the target religious corporation's assets."

Then, if a corporation is labeled as "designated religious corporation" and if there is a risk that its assets may disappear, it will become a "specially designated religious corporation" (Article 12).

The organizations in the "specially designated" list are those suspected of disposing of their assets pending dissolution. They will be under stricter surveillance, and the victims' lawyers would have an easier access to their inventories and accounts to let them take legal action to secure their claims.



*Historically, all religions were accused by opponents of enriching themselves by milking their devotees. Here, in a print from the years of the French Revolution, a priest supported by an aristocrat rides a poor peasant whose donations made him rich and fat. From X.*

In order to clarify the designation of designated religious corporations and specially designated religious corporations by MEXT pursuant to these provisions, the Government has issued Guidelines on 15 February 2024 "Criteria for Operation Concerning the Designation of Designated Religious Corporations and Specially Designated Religious Corporations Under the Law on Special Provisions for the Operation of the Japan Legal Support Center for Prompt and Smooth Relief of Victims of Specific Torts, and Similar, and Special Provisions of the Disposition and Management of Property by Religious Corporations."

According to the Guidelines, a "victim of a specific tort" is a person who has or may have a legal right to claim damages. Victims of a specific tort are not limited to victims recognized by the claimant when requesting a specific dissolution order, but also victims of the same type of act that was not known at the time of the request.

They also include persons "whose intention to file a compensation request is not yet clear." This means potential victims which would come forward later on.

The Guidelines also provide that the "significant number of victims" will be determined on a case-by-case basis but however, in general cases, it will be enough that there are several dozens of them.

Regarding the second requirement of Article 7.1, the Guidelines provide that if the religious corporation is expected to have a significant number of victims, then it is generally recognized that there is a need to understand the status of asset disposal and management.

In summary, if a religious corporation subject to dissolution has several dozens of victims or potential victims, including all the members who have not yet complained, under Article 7.1, then it is systematically suspect of possible evasion of assets and its finances should be monitored, under Article 7.2.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the UC is considered by the Government as a designated religious corporation, which assets are under surveillance, pending the court decision on its dissolution.

As a matter of fact, financial institutions have become reluctant with any remittance abroad and other money transfers.

The lawyers of the victims, i.e., the Network of anti-UC lawyers, are watching the state of Church's assets for their claims for damages. Even the Japan Federation of Bar Associations made a **public statement** about the enactment of the new law on victims of specific torts on 14 December 2023 (Law 89): "In addition, the special provisions for the services of the Legal Support Center should be implemented flexibly so that many people, including those who have already used the Legal Support Center to request the services of the National Unification Church Victims Defense Lawyers Group, can be fairly exempted from repayment. Furthermore, the scope of civil proceedings for specific torts should not be limited

to the recovery of economic damages due to so-called donations but should also broadly cover domestic cases and other related civil cases resulting from the breakdown of family relationships.”

So, the National Bar Federation is supporting the anti-UC lawyers' Network in their fight. The potential victims, who are the lawyers' clients, are exempt from financial expenses to sue the Church. Their “burden” is alleviated in order to have more claimants to strip the Church of its assets.

Not only do these lawyers go for the refund of donations, but they also incite families to claim punitive damages for family splitting due to the conversion of their kin to new religious beliefs.



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### Patricia Duval

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