

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's Plan to Break the Faith of Children

Knut Holdhus
March 6, 2025



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. Here, speaking at the International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington DC February 5, 2025

International human rights lawyer rings alarm bells in report to UN Rapporteurs about extreme measures introduced by Japanese authorities to break the faith of children, aided by anti-religious activists



[Bitter Winter](#), the leading online magazine on human rights and freedom of religion, published 4th March 2025 an article title "[A report sent by French attorney Patricia Duval to four United Nations Special Rapporteurs on an alarming part of the Japanese anti-cult campaign](#)".

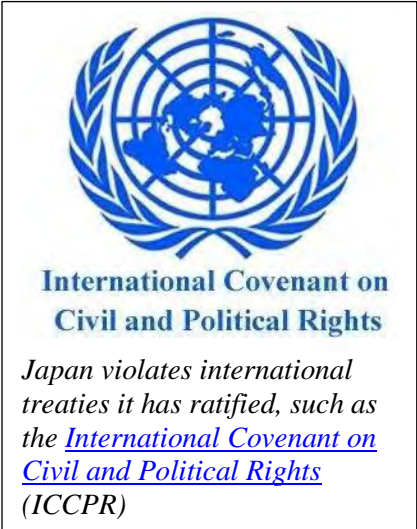
Patricia Duval is an expert on international human rights and has spent considerable time in Japan in order to understand the extreme measures that the authorities have introduced after they started using fanatical so-called "anti-cult" activists as advisors.



The French human rights expert describes how those activists have managed to introduce a distorted and hostile interpretation of Article 14, Section 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which safeguards a child's right to freedom of religion or belief. Based on this what Duval calls "a twisted and malicious interpretation", Japan has taken the stance that children from minority religious communities must be shielded from their parents' faith. With such a blatantly anti-religious, anti-minority and anti-family stance the authorities argue that children may not necessarily practice religion of their own volition, thereby justifying intervention.

Duval points out that this position directly contravenes the rights of parents to raise their children in accordance with their religious convictions, as protected under Article 14, Section 2 of the Convention and Article 18, Section 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Nevertheless, the Japanese government has formulated a new initiative specifically targeting the [Unification Church](#), in Japan since 2015 known as

the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#).



The program, titled "Support for Victims of the Former [Unification Church](#)," was officially approved during an inter-ministerial meeting at the Prime Minister's cabinet on 19th January 2024. How extreme and outrageous this initiative is, can be seen in its series of so-called "assistance" measures designed to alienate children from their parents' religious beliefs and even enable them to request new guardianship. Additionally, it facilitates legal claims - through state-funded lawyers - to reclaim parental donations made to the [religious organization](#).

The measures included in the January 2024 governmental plan consist of:

The introduction of school-based indoctrination programs at the elementary level, using cartoons and online chat boxes to associate religious upbringing with child abuse. Examples of such "abuses"

include compelling children to participate in religious activities, enforcing moral guidelines based on religious teachings (such as the concept of hell), and requiring confession.



From the "SOS Mini Letter." One example of abuse is "Because of my parents' religion I cannot participate in sport events."

The integration of "awareness" lessons within human rights education, including consumer education focused on religious donations. These sessions specifically highlight the so-called "criminal financial activities" of the [Family Federation](#), teaching children that their parents' financial support to the [religious organization](#) might harm them.

The distribution of "SOS mini-letters" to children and informational leaflets containing helpline numbers, encouraging them to seek counsel if they have concerns.

The establishment of counseling services staffed by individuals trained by former members of the [Family Federation](#).

Psychological counseling for children who express unease about their parents' religious beliefs, with referrals to mental health institutions as deemed necessary.



Legal assistance for children who claim financial hardship due to their parents' religious donations, enabling them to challenge those donations in court and seek financial compensation.

The potential suspension of parental authority and temporary custody removal in cases where religious upbringing is deemed abusive, as outlined in the "Guidelines on Responding to Child Abuse Related to Religious Beliefs".

According to Duval, the governmental plan aims primarily to create an environment in which children

and young individuals - particularly second-generation members of religious communities - are encouraged to report perceived abuses or victimization related to their parents' faith. To facilitate this, several initiatives are being reinforced, such as expanding "Human Rights Classes" from elementary schools to junior high and high schools and increasing the distribution of the "Children's Rights SOS Mini-Letter".

Additionally, the authorities' plan underscores the importance of education in broadening children's perspectives and enhancing critical thinking regarding their parents' religious beliefs. The Ministry of Justice's human rights protection bodies are tasked with instilling skepticism toward faith-based upbringing. To that end, the government plan prioritizes "strengthening awareness-raising activities" to ensure that children understand that even if their parents' actions are motivated by religious beliefs, such actions may constitute human rights violations.

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厚生労働省

Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

The [Bitter Winter](#) article mentions that this aspect of the plan introduced by the authorities aligns with the controversial guidelines issued by Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare on 27th December 2022. These guidelines - entitled "Questions and Answers on Responding to Child Abuse Related to Religious Beliefs" - prompted significant concern from four United Nations

Special Rapporteurs, who formally addressed the Japanese government on 30th April 2024. The guidelines define various religious practices as forms of child abuse, including:

Classifying a child's participation in religious activities as "psychological abuse".

Considering religious confession, particularly when it involves disclosing personal experiences, as "sexual abuse". Labeling moral teachings involving the concept of hell or verbal reprimands as "psychological abuse".



Duval reveals that effectively, these educational programs are designed to convince children that their parents' religious practices constitute a form of abuse. The government plan further encourages children to seek help from the Ministry of Justice's human rights protection bodies, school counselors, or social workers should they experience conflicts related to religion.

The document also presents data on the implementation of these initiatives. In the fiscal year 2022, approximately 12,300 human rights classes were conducted, excluding those intended for adults. Moving forward, the government seeks to increase children's access to human rights protection services, including expanding the distribution points for the "SOS Mini Letters" beyond schools to child consultation centers, welfare facilities, and after-school programs.

The plan of the authorities highlights several consultation cases and examples of how children might use these services. It lists situations such as: "I am troubled about my parent's religion." Additionally, it reports distribution figures for the "SOS Mini Letters", stating that approximately 11.25 million copies were distributed during the first and second quarters of the 2023 fiscal year. Awareness cards for online human rights consultations have also been widely distributed in various public venues.

Patricia Duval writes that in essence, this initiative represents a large-scale destabilization campaign targeting minors and infringing upon parental rights to educate their children according to their religious beliefs. It is predicated on the nebulous and subjective notion of "mental manipulation", suggesting that parents themselves are victims of coercion and, in turn, impose this coercion on their children. Despite the absence of clear evidence of abuse or specific victims, the government's measures aggressively seek to redefine religious upbringing as a human rights violation, thereby justifying unprecedented state intervention in family life and religious freedom.

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Deprogramming Unification Church Children in Japan. 1. A New "Plan"

03/04/2025 PATRICIA DUVAL

A+ | A-

A report sent by French attorney Patricia Duval to four United Nations Special Rapporteurs on an alarming part of the Japanese anti-cult campaign.

by Patricia Duval

Article 1 of 2



Unification Church families with church leader Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon. From Facebook.

Based on a twisted and malicious interpretation of Article 14 §1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the "Convention") which protects the right of children to freedom of religion or belief, Japan has determined that children from minority religious groups have to be protected and rescued from their parents' faith, since, they allege, "children may not necessarily be practicing religion out of their own free will."

In total violation of the rights of parents to educate their children in conformity with their religious beliefs protected by Article 14 §2 of the Convention and Article 18 §4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("ICCPR"), the Japanese authorities have elaborated a new plan targeting specifically the Unification Church (now called Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, but still often referred to with the old name: 30 April 2024, Ref. AL JPN 1/2024) and its believers.

The new plan, entitled "Support for Victims of the Former Unification Church," was officially adopted at an inter-ministerial meeting at the Prime Minister's cabinet on 19 January 2024. It includes a whole set of measures of "assistance" to underage children to set them against their parents' beliefs and estrange them from their parents, to a point where they are enabled to request the appointment of a new guardian and claim refund of their parents' donations to the Church in court through state funded lawyers.

The governmental measures adopted in January 2024 ("the Plan") implement the following:

1. Indoctrination of children at elementary school, through cartoons and chat boxes on the internet, about child abuses related to religious beliefs; such abuses include making a child participate in religious activities, rigid morals using the concept of hell, confession, etc.
2. "Awareness" sessions given through human rights classes, including "consumer education" on religious donations, in particular on the "criminal financial activities" of the Unification Church, in order to raise awareness of children about the financial impact they might suffer from their parents' donations to the Church.
3. Distribution of SOS mini letters to be filled by the children and leaflets with telephone numbers to call for further questions and talk with counsellors.

4. Consultation services provided by counsellors trained by apostates from the Unification Church.

4.Consultation services provided by counsellors trained by apostates from the Onikakari Church,

5.Counselling provided to children who have become "worried about their parents' religious beliefs" and referral of anxious children to mental health institutions,

6.Referring children who complain about not having enough money for a living or "normal socializing" activities to lawyers who can act on their behalf and claim rescission of their parents' donations to the Church and damages in Court,

7.Requesting suspension of parental authority and temporary custody in cases of abuse as defined in the "Guidelines on responding to child abuse related to religious beliefs," in order to "protect" the children from their parents' influence.



Pamphlets distributed to children in Japan explain that they may be abused by being "forced to participate in religious activities" and "threatened by words like "You will go to hell.""

The Plan is first designed to "create an environment that facilitates consultations for children and youth, including second-generation individuals in religious communities, who may have difficulty recognizing or voicing experiences of abuse or other forms of victimization."

To help the children "recognize" or become "aware" that they have been abused by their parent believers, several measures are to be reinforced: "Expand the implementation of 'Human Rights Classes' from elementary schools to junior high and high schools, and distribute the 'Children's Rights SOS Mini-Letter' to elementary and junior high school students."

The Plan provides that "Education at schools, as well as consumer education conducted by the Ministry of Justice's human rights protection bodies in coordination with schools—such as 'Human Rights Classes' and outreach lectures—is extremely important for helping children and youth broaden their perspectives and develop multifaceted thinking skills."

In other words, the "human rights protection" bodies' task is to raise "critical thinking" of children towards their parents' faith.

The Plan provides for "Strengthening awareness-raising activities to ensure understanding that, even if actions are motivated by a parent's or a guardian's religious beliefs, such actions may constitute human rights violations against children."

It refers in this regard to the [Guidelines](#) that raised concern [from four UN Special Rapporteurs](#) who sent an official Communication to the Japanese Government on 30 April 2024. These Guidelines entitled "Questions and Answers on Responding to Child Abuse Related to Religious Beliefs" (the "Guidelines" or the "Q&A") were issued by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare on 27 December 2022.

Those Guidelines include, inter alia, that making a child participate in religious activities constitutes "psychological abuse," having a child disclose sexual experiences to religious ministers during confession constitutes "sexual abuse," imprinting continuous fear since childhood through severe verbal reprimands or references to "hell" constitutes child abuse, etc.

In summary, the "education" provided during the Ministry of Justice's human rights classes aims at making children realize that, due to religion, their parents have been abusing them since an early age.





The Ministry of Justice headquarters in Tokyo. Credits.

They also aim, according to the Plan, "at informing that children can seek help from the Ministry of Justice's human rights protection bodies for issues arising from their relationship with religion or consult school counselors or school social workers through schools and other institutions."

The Plan gives the following figures for what has been done so far: "Number of human rights classes conducted in FY2022 (Former Year) (excluding adult-focused sessions): approximately 12,300."

It provides the following "Initiatives by the Ministry of Justice" for the future (after January 2024): "Efforts to increase opportunities for children to easily consult with the human rights protection bodies of the Ministry of Justice. Expanding the distribution points of the SOS Mini Letters, which are distributed to all elementary and junior high school students each semester, to include new locations such as child consultation centers, child welfare facilities, and after-school clubs."

Examples of consultation cases are also being added. Example situations for using the service include "I am troubled about my parent's religion." And the Plan gives the following figures: "Distribution figures [of SOS Mini Letters] for the first and second quarters of FY2023: approximately 11.25 million copies. Awareness cards for ON LINE-human rights consultation are being distributed and made available at various locations."

In summary, what we are facing here is a vast destabilization campaign launched on underage children in violation of their parents' right to educate their children in accordance with their own faith, based, in the absence of real abuses or even "victims," on the vague and arbitrary concept of "mental manipulation" which the parents would be subjected to and could exert on their children.

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Patricia Duval

Patricia Duval is an attorney and a member of the Paris Bar. She has a degree in public law from La Sorbonne University, and specializes in 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

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