

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japanese Court Ruling Sparks Religious Freedom Outcry

Knut Holdhus
March 7, 2025



The entrance of the headquarters of the [Family Federation](#) of Japan in Shibuya, Tokyo



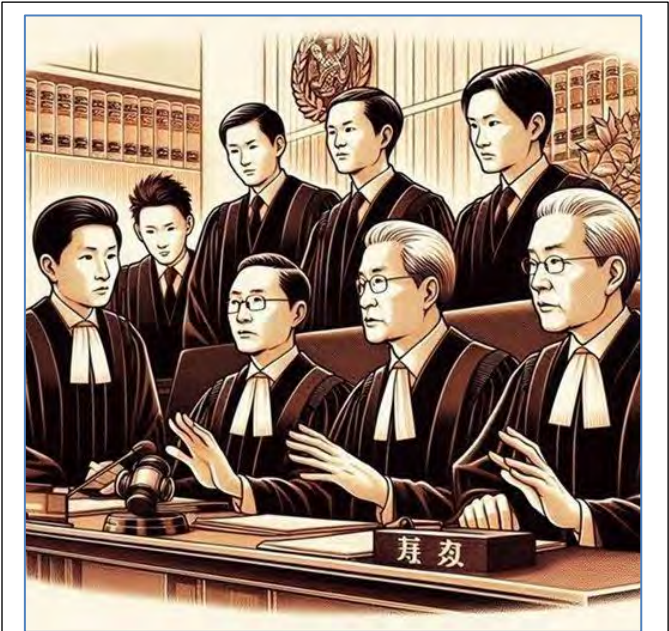
Supreme Court rejects Family Federation's appeal, sparking religious freedom outcry as government could arbitrarily cite 'past issues' to justify dissolving any religious organization

Tokyo, 6th March 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

A Major Threat to Religious Organizations

Family Federation Responds to Supreme Court Decision

by the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)



Japanese Supreme Court judges

The Supreme Court has [dismissed the appeal](#) of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) in a case where Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) sought to impose an administrative fine on the [religious organization](#). The ministry had requested the fine after the [organization refused to answer certain questions](#) related to the government's request for a dissolution order.

Following this ruling, the [Family Federation](#) released a statement on 5th March 2025 in response to the [Supreme Court's decision](#). The statement criticized the court for not making a constitutional judgment and for failing to specify which laws had been violated. The [organization](#) also warned that the ruling posed a "serious threat" to other religious corporations involved in civil litigation and

claimed that it would "damage Japan's international credibility". Furthermore, the [religious organization](#) reiterated that it had made efforts to respond to MEXT's inquiries, except for those related to the privacy of its followers.



The [Family Federation](#)'s statement, titled Our [Organization](#)'s View on the Supreme Court Decision in the Administrative Fine Case (excerpt), reads as follows:

"This decision could pose a serious threat to other religious organizations, as there are many that face civil law issues. Moreover, since there is no time limit on the grounds for dissolution under the Religious Corporations Act, the government could arbitrarily cite 'past issues' to justify dissolving any religious organization.

The fact that such a Supreme Court decision has been made in Japan, a country highly regarded as a model of freedom and democracy, damages Japan's international credibility. These

rulings, which blatantly ignore constitutional and legal principles, directly contradict established international law that does not recognize unlawful acts as grounds for dissolving religious organizations. As a result, Japan is likely to face even greater international criticism in the future."

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Japan’s Plan To Break The Faith Of Children

• March 6, 2025 • Knut Holdhus



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 United Nations

The French human rights expert describes how those activists have

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A logo of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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*.



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Japan violates international treaties it has ratified, such as the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR).

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*.

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

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

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. The distribution of "SOS mini-letters" to children and informational leaflets containing helpline numbers, encouraging them to seek counsel if they have concerns.
4. The establishment of counseling services staffed by individuals trained by former members of the *Family Federation*.
5. Psychological counseling for children who express unease about their parents' religious beliefs, with referrals to mental health institutions as deemed necessary.
6. 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.
7. 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".



Ministry of Justice Older Administration Building in Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan. Photo (2007): 663highland / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

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.

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



From the cover of a pamphlet used in Japanese schools. It explains that they may be abused by being “forced to participate in religious activities” and “threatened by words like ‘You will go to hell.’” Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

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.**

Featured image above: *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 5th February 2025. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission.

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