

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: In Japan Religious Faith is a Mental Health Concern

Knut Holdhus
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Patricia Duval - Member of the Paris Bar Association, specializing in international human rights law. Earned a degree in public law from Sorbonne University. Has defended the rights of religious and faith minorities both in France and internationally, including at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), the Council of Europe (CE), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU), and the United Nations. Author of numerous academic papers on religion and freedom of belief.

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UN alerted to Japan's extreme hostile policies against large religious faith minority, specifically targeting Family Federation families

On 5th March 2025, [Bitter Winter](#), a leading online magazine focused on human rights and freedom of religion, published an article titled "[Deprogramming Unification Church Children in Japan. 2. Psychiatric Institutions May 'Cure' Religious Faith](#)".

 UN Special Rapporteur: Clément Nyaletsossi Voule	 UN Special Rapporteur: Irene Khan 2024	 UN Special Rapporteur: Farida Shaheed 2016	 Nazila Ghanea, UN Rapporteur on Religious Freedom since February 2023
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The piece was the second part [see [comments on first part](#)] of a report by Patricia Duval, French attorney and expert on international human rights law. She had sent the report to four United Nations Special Rapporteurs in order to draw their attention to blatantly anti-religious measures in a Japanese government plan created with so-called "anti-cult" activists as advisors. According to Duval, the plan seems to be produced based on the notion that "religious belief may be considered a form of psychiatric disease." Patricia Duval has spent significant time in Japan studying the extreme measures implemented by authorities.

The French human rights expert writes that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and

Technology (MEXT) has introduced several measures as part of its broader initiative to "provide 'remedy' to the problem" allegedly arising from children's exposure to their parents' [Family Federation](#) beliefs.



One key aspect of this plan is the establishment of a robust support system for children experiencing "worries and anxieties". As outlined in the fiscal year 2023 budget, a sum of 8.2 billion yen has been allocated to expand the presence of school counselors (SCs) and school social workers (SSWs). This budget ensures that SCs are assigned to all 27,500 public elementary and junior high schools, while SSWs are placed in all 10,000 junior high school districts. Additionally, funds have been designated to allow for targeted placements where further support is necessary.

According to the [Bitter Winter](#) article, a crucial component of the initiative includes the dissemination of guidelines regarding child abuse linked to religious beliefs. This has garnered attention from the UN Special Rapporteurs. These guidelines have been widely circulated among counselors and social workers to help them recognize specific forms of abuse they are advised to look out for.

Furthermore, MEXT issued a notice on 28th December 2022, titled "Response to Child Abuse Related to Religious Faith, etc. (Q and A)." It was distributed to all educational boards and relevant organizations. This directive underscores that officials should not take a passive stance merely because a case involves religious elements. Instead, it mandates that SCs, SSWs, and other personnel be trained in the Q and A content to ensure they are well-informed. To further raise awareness, MEXT promoted this material in administrative briefings held in January, June, and September of 2023.

Beyond these guidelines, the initiative includes specialized training sessions for counselors, featuring instruction from former [Family Federation](#) members turned vocal critics of their faith. The intent behind this training is to provide deeper insight into the emotions and circumstances of individuals who have left religious groups. As part of this program, former members and second-generation adherents of religious organizations are invited to serve as instructors, offering firsthand accounts of their experiences.

Duval points out,

"It can be concluded that the training delivered to counsellors consists in indoctrination on the alleged 'criminal activities' of the [Unification Church](#) and 'mental manipulation' it arguably exercises on its followers."



[Family Federation](#) families targeted by extreme Japanese laws to "protect children from their parents' faith"

Armed with this training and the religious child abuse guidelines, counselors and social workers are expected to make decisions regarding the "protection" of children from the influence of their parents' faith. These interventions align with the broader framework of the plan, which also calls for the establishment of "one-stop consultation services" under the Japan Legal Support Center (Houterasu). These consultation services involve legal experts, psychological professionals, welfare specialists, and other advisors, and are being rolled out nationwide in a phased manner.

Patricia Duval describes that a significant part of this legal support network is the involvement of the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, a group known for its fanatical opposition to the [Family Federation](#). This network provides legal assistance through the Japan Legal Support Center, a government-funded entity

established to aid individuals considered victims of the influence of the [Family Federation](#). In accordance with the plan, the government facilitates free legal consultations and covers attorney fees in advance for individuals seeking legal recourse.

Another key legal provision under the initiative is the "Proactive Utilization of Civil Legal Aid", which is used to implement the recommendations in the child abuse guidelines. In instances where parents fail to provide adequate financial support to their children - such as by donating significant sums to the [Family Federation](#) - children are given legal recourse to challenge these donations.

According to the Guidelines' response to Question 4.2, a child may invoke Article 8, Paragraph 1 of the Act on Prevention of Unjust Solicitation of Donations by Corporations to cancel their parents' donations. However, for this cancellation to take effect, the child must first assert their right to financial support by making a formal claim against their guardian. Only after establishing this claim can they proceed to seek rescission of the financial contributions made by their parents.



Extreme new anti-religious Japanese laws introduced that enable children to cancel their parents' donations. Here, woman offering a donation at a Sunday worship service

To streamline this legal process, the initiative recommends that a lawyer acts on behalf of the child. When child consultation centers and other relevant institutions encounter such cases, they are instructed to collaborate with bar associations and related organizations. A special provision within the bar association allows children to appoint legal representatives without incurring financial burdens, provided that specific conditions are met.

Through this outrageous system, underage children are granted the legal authority to challenge their guardians' financial decisions, including the right to seek the cancellation of their parents' donations to the [Family Federation](#). These measures collectively form a framework designed to monitor and intervene in family situations where religious beliefs are deemed to have a potentially harmful impact on children. By leveraging psychological, legal, and social support mechanisms, the government aims to provide an extensive safety net for children perceived to be at risk

due to their parents' religious affiliations.

To be continued

Text: Knut Holdhus

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Deprogramming Unification Church Children in Japan. 2. Psychiatric Institutions May "Cure" Religious Faith

03/05/2025 PATRICIA DUVAL

A+ | A-

Second part of a report sent by French attorney Patricia Duval to four UN Special Rapporteurs: under the Japanese "Plan," religious belief may be considered a form of psychiatric disease.

by Patricia Duval

Article 2 of 2. Read [article 1](#).



The four UN Special Rapporteurs who expressed concerns about Japan's policy on "religious child abuse": left to right, above, Nazila Ghanea (Freedom of Religion or Belief) and Farida Shaheed (Right to Education); below, Irene Khan (Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression) and Clément Nyaletsossi Voule (Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association). Source: United Nations.

In order to provide "remedy" to the problem allegedly created amongst the children by their parents' Unification Church faith, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) presented the following initiatives as part of the Plan: "To ensure a support system for children with worries and anxieties, the FY2023 budget includes enhanced deployment of school counselors (SC) and school social workers (SSW) (8.2 billion yen). This allocation covers basic placements in all 27,500 public elementary and junior high schools for SCs and all 10,000 junior high school districts for SSWs, along with additional focused placements."

The [Guidelines](#) on child abuse related to religious faith, which [raised concern from the UN Special Rapporteurs](#), have been widely disseminated to counsellors and social workers so that they are aware of what kind of abuses they are looking for. "Furthermore, the notice titled 'Response to Child Abuse Related to Religious Faith, etc. (Q&A)' (issued on December 28, 2022) was disseminated to all boards of education and other relevant organizations. This notice emphasized that passive responses should not be taken solely due to the religious nature of an issue. It also instructed that SCs, SSWs, and other staff be informed of the Q&A content during training sessions to ensure proper awareness. To enhance recognition of the Q&A among SCs, SSWs, and teaching staff, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) promoted the Q&A content during administrative briefings held in January, June, and September 2023."

In addition to the Guidelines, the Plan provides for training of all the various counsellors by former members / apostates from the Unification Church: "To enhance the understanding of the emotions and circumstances of victims and others, consultation staff at various support desks will collaborate with former members and second-generation individuals in religious communities by inviting them to serve as training instructors."

It can be concluded that the training delivered to counsellors consists in indoctrination on the alleged "criminal activities" of the Unification Church and "mental manipulation" it arguably exercises on its followers.

Based on this "training" and the Guidelines on religious child abuse, the counsellors/social workers take the

subsequent decisions for the "protection" of children against their parents' faith.

The Plan further provides for the "Implementation of one-stop consultation services centered in the Japan Legal Support Center (Houterasu)."

The one-stop consultation services refer to "sessions involving lawyers, psychological professionals, welfare experts, and others, and were sequentially held across the country."

Legal consultation services have been provided by the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales—known as the anti-Unification Church lawyers' network—through the Japan Legal Support Center, which is entirely funded by the State as part of the "rescue" of victims of the Unification Church. Pursuant to the Plan, "free legal consultations and advance payment of attorney fees were provided."



Attorney Masaki Kito, a leading member of the anti-cult National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales. From X.

"Proactive Utilization of Civil Legal Aid" has been used to implement the recommendations contained in the Guidelines. In case of neglect (not providing the children with sufficient financial means), the child can claim the rescission of the donations made to the Unification Church by the parents (Answer to Question 4.2 in the Guidelines): "a child may have the right to exercise the right of cancellation under Article 8, Paragraph 1 of the Act on Prevention of Unjust Solicitation of Donations by Corporations, in order to protect their right to financial support from their guardian. To actually exercise this right, the child must first make a financial support claim against their guardian and establish a claim related to the guardian's duty of support before exercising the right of cancellation."

The Plan provides further: "in order to facilitate the application process, it is advisable for a lawyer to act on behalf of the child. Therefore, when child consultation centers and other relevant institutions handle such cases, they should work in collaboration with the bar association and related organizations. The bar association has a system that allows a child to appoint a lawyer without bearing the financial burden, provided certain conditions are met."

With this system, underage children are entitled to make financial claims against their guardian and claim rescission of their parents' donations to the Unification Church.

The Plan further recommends application of the Guidelines, in particular (Guidelines: Question Q6-1): "Children who may be experiencing child abuse related to religion may be strongly influenced by the beliefs and values derived from their guardians' religious doctrines. As a result, they may find it difficult to recognize their situation as problematic or to report it. It is essential to conduct an objective assessment of their circumstances, and if child abuse is suspected, it is required to provide explanations and guidance to both the child and the guardians based on the definition of child abuse."

However, the Guidelines indicate that "it is anticipated that in some cases, parental actions and beliefs based on religious doctrines regarding their child may be difficult to change through guidance alone. Additionally, there is a concern that efforts to provide guidance may trigger an escalation of abusive behavior by the guardian, or that religious organizations may increase their influence over the family. Therefore, ensuring the safety of the child must be the top priority, and if necessary, immediate protective measures, including temporary custody, should be taken without hesitation."

Therefore, if parents are reluctant to follow the advice given, for example to stop making the child participate in religious activities, temporary custody should be considered as a possible "remedy."

When children apply on line for a one-stop consultation from the Legal Support Center as mentioned above, they have one-stop "sessions with lawyers, psychological professionals, welfare experts, and others." They are then referred to the relevant support organizations, pursuant to the Plan: "Under the one-stop consultation system centered on the Japan Legal Support Center (Houterasu), consultations from victims and others are widely accepted, with appropriate referrals made to relevant support organizations and tailored responses provided based on individual needs."

As part of the Plan, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare presented the following initiatives: "when mental health and welfare centers receive consultations related to concerns about mental health stemming from issues involving the Former Unification Church, including referrals from consultation desks established at Houterasu, they should ensure that they do not respond passively solely because the issue involves religion. They are also instructed to appropriately respond by, for instance, referring individuals to psychiatric medical institutions and coordinating with relevant

organizations as necessary."

"This guidance was disseminated via an administrative notice dated November 10, 2022, and during the FY2022 Disability Health and Welfare Principal Section Chief Meeting held on March 10, 2023. In August 2023, the disability health and welfare departments of prefectures and designated cities were provided with Q&A materials and were reminded of the above-mentioned response policy."

So, when children solicit one-stop consultations at the Legal Support Center Houterasu and talk to psychologists, they might be referred to psychiatric institutions, at those latter's discretion.

The health services have received the Guidelines and have been instructed accordingly.

The repressive Plan elaborated and implemented by the Japanese authorities aims at State "deprogramming" of the children of Unification Church believers against their parents' will.

It is based on the **unscientific and debunked theory** of mind control (brainwashing), which equates faith with undue influence and views deprogramming as the means to undo the alleged "programming" of the minds.



How popular media imagine that new religious movement leaders "brainwash" their followers. AI-generated.

Under this rationale, the State would replace the parents in their educational religious choices for their children like in totalitarian States, which infringes Japan's duty of neutrality in religious matters stemming from its commitment to protect freedom of religion or belief.

The Plan constitutes an outright violation of the parents' right to educate their children in conformity with their own convictions protected by Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that Japan has signed and ratified: "4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions."

It also violates the parents' rights under Article 14 of the Convention on the rights of the child, in spite of the malicious interpretation that Japan gives of this Article in the Plan: "2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child."

The Plan and policy implemented by the Japanese Authorities create a dramatic situation for the Unification Church believers and require urgent attention and action from the UN human rights institutions.

The Guidelines were targeting religious movements in general. If nothing is done, the Plan established for the Unification Church might be extended to other religious denominations in the future.

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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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