

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's Plan to Use Schools to Brainwash the Faithful

Knut Holdhus
September 30, 2025



Attorney 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. Here, speaking at the UN Office in Geneva June 16, 2025

Japanese schools: Government Plan to "Re-Educate" Children of Unification Church Members Raises Human Rights Concerns



The head table at the side event September 26, 2025 in Room 11 in the UN Office in Geneva, Switzerland organized by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF)

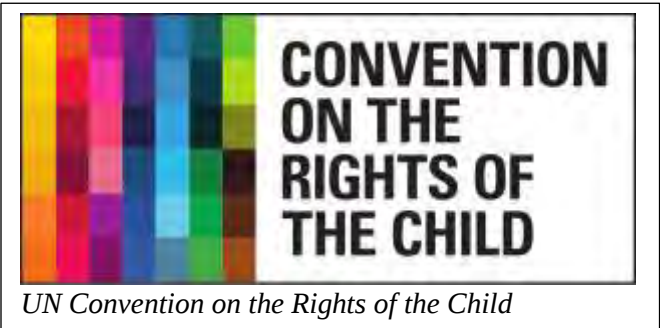
2nd part (final) of a message by Attorney Patricia Duval, a leading expert in legal matters at the intersection of religion, belief, and state regulation, delivered at a civil society side event 26th September organized by the NGO the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) in conjunction with the 60th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC60) in Geneva, and more specifically connected to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process or the human rights review of Japan from 8th September to 8th October 2025. The side event had as theme "Religious Cleansing in Japan: Eradication of an Entire Faith Community".

2) Second point of concern: The Government Plan to re-educate the children against their parents' faith

See part 1: [UN Expert: "Japan's Illegal Dissolution Request"](#)
See also: [Japan's Plan to Break the Faith of Children](#)

After Prime Minister Abe's assassination, the anti-[Unification Church lawyers' network](#) published various opinion papers in 2023 to push for repressive measures to be adopted by the government against the [Church](#) [See editor's note below].

They issued one in particular on the issue of "second-generation members" which inspired a subsequent plan adopted by the government at a cabinet meeting in January 2024 to "re-educate" the children of [Church](#) [See editor's note below] members within the Japanese public school system.



Based on a twisted and malicious re-interpretation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which protects the right of children to freedom of religion or belief, [those lawyers](#) have determined that children from minority religious groups have to be rescued from their parents' faith, since, they allege, "children may not necessarily be practicing religion out of their own free will."

Therefore, they maintain that "critical thinking" towards their parents' faith should be instilled in them.

The [lawyers](#) justify it by stating that "individuals who grow up in such environments during the formative years of their personality often remain unable to break away from the religious doctrines instilled in them, even after reaching adulthood."

It is clear from this explanation that the purpose is to prevent the children of [Church](#) [See editor's note below] members from becoming believers themselves and followers of the religion in the future.

The plan adopted by the government provides for wide-spread education of children, who have not expressed any requests or problems, on potential abuses they could be the victims of due to their parents' religious beliefs.



This includes wide-range distribution of cartoons figuring imposed religious education and verbal reprimands or mentions of hell as psychological abuse. It is coupled with distribution of "SOS mini letters" where children can ask for free information and counselling through hotlines.

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

The teachers are requested to identify and single out the children belonging to the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note below] community who would need specific "counselling" even "in the absence of explicit statements from the child".

Then, for this counselling to be effective, the government plan provides that counsellors will be trained by hostile former members in order to utilize their "knowledge and expertise" concerning the [Church](#) [See editor's note below].



Thus, the government is using former members hostile to the [Church](#) [See editor's note below] as training instructors for counselling the children of current members, once these have been singled out from the rest of the children.

This constitutes a blatant violation of Japan's duty of neutrality in religious matters and an impermissible interference with the right of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions protected under the [Covenant](#) (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Thank you.

See also: [Japan's Plan to Break the Faith of Children](#)

[**Editor's note:** Although Patricia Duval uses the name "Unification Church" and also the word "church", please be aware that the [Unification Church](#) in Japan in 2015 changed its name to [Family Federation for World peace and Unification](#).]

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UN Expert: "Japan's Illegal Dissolution Request"

- September 29, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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At Geneva side event on religious cleansing, legal expert accuses Japan of violating 45 years of UN human rights obligations in Family Federation dissolution case



The head table at the side event 26th September in Room 11 in the UN Office in Geneva, Switzerland organized by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF). Screenshot from video by UPF.

1st part of a message by Attorney Patricia Duval, a leading expert in

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legal matters at the intersection of religion, belief, and state regulation, delivered at a civil society side event 26th September organized by the NGO the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) in conjunction with the 60th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC60) in Geneva. The side event had as theme “Japan and Human Rights”.

See 2nd part: [Using Schools to Break Faith: Japan's Policy](#)

I would like to address two points here today which are of serious concern under United Nations standards.

1) The illegality of dissolution under international human rights law:

The dissolution of the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note 1 below] is based on Article 81 of the *Religious Corporations Law* which provides that a court may order dissolution if:

(i) in violation of laws and regulations, the religious corporation commits an act which is clearly found to harm public welfare substantially.

In the present case, the Ministry which oversees religious matters, filed a request for a dissolution order from the *Tokyo District Court* and maintained the following (quote):

“From around 1980 to 2023, [Unification Church](#) believers caused significant damage to many people by making them [donate](#) by [restricting their free decision](#) and preventing their normal judgment – [Comment by Duval: 'This is the accusation of brainwashing.'] – which resulted in disrupting the peaceful life of many people including the family members.”



But, as Dr. [Figel stated](#), Article 18 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) which Japan has committed to, does not allow for such a limitation to the right to manifest one's religion or belief.



Ministry overseeing religious matters in Japan: MEXT. here, its logo. Photo: [文部科学省 \(MEXT Japan\) / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#)

Disturbing the life of many people is NOT a motive of public order [See editor's note 2 below] making state interference necessary to limit this right.

Displeasing some people is actually called freedom of belief.

I would like to underline here that for all the period of time which the Ministry is relying on in its claim, the government has given *carte blanche* to [extremist lawyers](#) and consensual religions to “deprogram” [See editor's note 3 below] [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note 1 below] members by force: kidnappings by trickery and illegal confinements by families, and imposed indoctrination against the [church](#) [See editor's note 1 below] beliefs by [protestant pastors](#).

So, my question is: **who disturbed who exactly?**



The English version of Toru Goto's new book: *Battle for Survival – 4536 Days in Captivity*. Published in Washington DC by The Washington Times Global Media Group, 2025. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Those deprogrammers and their supporters broke families by the thousands. Around [4,300 members](#) were coercively subjected to “deprogramming” [See editor's note 3 below] over the four decades mentioned by the ministry, with the [government's blessing](#) and [voluntary inaction](#) which resulted in [thousands of families](#) devastated and unable to repair.

Thousands of [parents were abused](#) and talked into

submitting their adult children believers to deprogramming [See editor's note 3 below].

The government should actually be the one held accountable for those family breakings.

In its claim of “disturbance”, the Ministry relied on 32 adverse civil court decisions in cases filed by former members some 20 to 40 years before

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decisions influenced by former members some 20 to 30 years before, after their “deprogramming” [See editor’s note 3 below]. Those members were coerced by their deprogrammers and lawyers to file financial claims against the church to prove their real intention to abandon the faith and to be released from confinement.

In each of these civil cases, the courts found torts against the church [See editor’s note 1 below] based on the allegation that it violated so-called “social norms”.

But “social norms” is a vague and arbitrary concept that has no place in matters of religious beliefs and practices and violates, alike “public welfare”, the duty of neutrality of Japan in religious matters and its commitment to abide by the Covenant (ICCPR).

The UN Human Rights Committee, which has been created by the Covenant (ICCPR) to monitor its implementation by state parties, has consistently urged Japan to stop using the notion of public welfare to limit freedom of religion or belief.



From header of the webpage of the Human Rights Committee, a subpage on the site of the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner

Japan ratified the Covenant (ICCPR) in 1979 and therefore accepted the Committee's (HRC) authority for this monitoring.

Since 1980 – so one year later – the Committee (HRC) has denounced the inclusion in Japanese law of the concept of public welfare to limit civil liberties and made the following recurrent demand:

“The Committee reiterates its concern that the concept of ‘public welfare’ is vague and open-ended [...] and urges the State party to refrain from imposing any restriction on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion unless they fulfil the strict conditions set out in article 18.”

It can be concluded that the Japanese authorities have known for 45 years that they had to review their internal laws in order to conform to the Covenant (ICCPR) but have consistently refused to do so under fake pretense and therefore have consistently violated their international commitments.

They are actually about to eliminate an entire religion on this illegal basis.



Demonstration against the court order to dissolve the Family Federation, Shinjuku, Tokyo 11th May 2025. Photo: FFWPU

Additionally, the concept of “social appropriateness” opens the door to discrimination and domination by consensual religions (like what happened with the Protestant deprogrammers).

It directly conflicts with all the standards set by the Human Rights Committee in its Comment n° 22 on article 18 (quote):

“The terms ‘belief’ and ‘religion’ are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reason, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility on the part of a predominant religious community.”

Therefore, in the absence of any statute law violation or crime, public opinion hostility can never be a justification for courts to limit the right

to manifest one's religion or beliefs on the basis of religious practices lacking "social appropriateness".

Yet, this has been the basis for the 32 civil tort decisions on which the dissolution order was issued.

Continued in 2nd part: [Using Schools to Break Faith: Japan's Policy](#)

Featured image above: Attorney 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. Here, speaking at the UN Office in Geneva 16th June 2025. Edited screenshot from UPF video.

[Editor's note 1: Although Patricia Duval uses the name "Unification Church" and also the word "church", please be aware that the Unification Church in Japan in 2015 changed its name to [Family Federation for World peace and Unification](#).]

[Editor's note 2: "NOT a motive of public order" – Duval is here arguing that "disrupting the peaceful life of many people" (the Ministry's claim) does not legally qualify as a public order justification under the ICCPR. People being upset, displeased, or harmed by someone else's religious practices is not enough for the government to dissolve a religious group. "Public order" in international law means serious threats to societal stability or safety (e.g., riots, violence, terrorism, large-scale lawlessness) – not just that some individuals suffered emotionally, financially, or socially.

So, "disturbing people's lives" is not a valid public order concern. "Public order" is a high threshold involving social peace and security. Duval is pointing out that Japan is framing the issue as harm to individuals, but international human rights law requires a much stronger reason (a real *public order* threat) to restrict religious freedom. By saying "NOT a motive of public order," the writer is underlining that the ministry's justification does not meet the legal standard for restricting or banning a religion under the ICCPR.]

[Editor's note 3: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of [Soka Gakkai](#). Here students belonging to the faith in 2001. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

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