

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Inhuman Japanese Government-Supported Mass Deprogramming

Knut Holdhus  
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### Extreme China-inspired leftwingers rejoicing as Kishida administration introduces laws for mass deprogramming tens of thousands with "wrong views"



In an article in Bitter Winter, the leading online magazine for human rights and religious freedom, Dr. Massimo Introvigne points out in an article 25th Jan. 2024 what extreme anti-religious measures the Kishida administration are introducing.

The headline is "Is Japan Introducing State-Sponsored Deprogramming?"

Read the [whole Bitter Winter article](#).

Kishida and his government ministers have apparently bought the anti-religious narrative of a network of radical leftwing lawyers, National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales.

The background to the proposed government-supported faith-breaking is a cabinet meeting on 19th January, where suggestions were put forth to encourage current members of the [Unification Church](#) to leave the group, aided by individuals who have left the organization, known as apostates.



The Italian sociologist of religion explains how such extreme plans stem from events starting on 8th July 2022, when former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated. The assassin's motivation was attributed to his mother's involvement with the [Unification Church](#), leading to her financial ruin due to excessive donations to the group. This incident sparked a media frenzy against the [Unification Church](#), supported by anti-cult organizations.

Subsequently, the Japanese government sought legal action to dissolve the [Unification Church](#) and passed laws targeting "cults", including measures to recover donations and prevent the indoctrination of minors. Introvigne emphasizes that these efforts are fueled by a belief in the discredited theory of brainwashing.

He mentions how the laws represent a serious infringement on religious freedom and aim to not just control the [Unification Church](#), but also other religions. Introvigne spells out how one of the laws,

"ordered religious groups not to 'indoctrinate' minors, with provisions clearly targeting not only the [Unification Church](#) but also the Jehovah's Witnesses and conservative Christian groups. A third law offered assistance to 'victims' of 'cults'. Recent draft guidelines proposed a very extensive notion of 'victim', also including those who deny having been victimized - again, because of 'brainwashing'. In practice, every member of the [Family Federation](#) is a 'victim', including those who say they are perfectly happy to remain in the movement."

Despite deprogramming being declared illegal by the Japanese Supreme Court in 2015, recent proposals suggest reintroducing a form of state-sponsored deprogramming. This proposal is based on the idea that all members of the [Unification Church](#) are victims of brainwashing and need rescuing through

deprogramming.

Introvigne describes the reasoning behind the extreme measures,

"Now, however, Japan is considering re-introducing a state-sponsored form of deprogramming. This is a logical consequence of the broad notion of 'victim' being proposed and of the Japanese government's support of the pseudo-scientific theory of brainwashing. If all Japanese [Unification Church](#) members are 'victims' who do not realize they are 'victims' because they are under the effect of 'brainwashing', the only way to 'rescue' them is deprogramming."



*Artistic rendering of Chinese communist party indoctrination*

This approach mirrors practices in authoritarian states like China and Russia, where state-sponsored deprogramming is common. Japan's plan involves collaborating with apostate ex-members to train counselors who will provide support to current members, including approaching second-generation members in schools. Additionally, there are proposals to establish "shelter homes" for second-generation members, purportedly to assist those in poverty but likely aimed at isolating them from their families and facilitating deprogramming efforts.



*For mass deprogramming: Akira Koike, 30th March 2023*

These measures draw parallels to China's "Love Homes", where individuals are subjected to Communist Party indoctrination.

Introvigne writes,

"The 'shelter homes' are very similar to the 'Love Homes' where the Chinese Communist Party deprograms 'cultists' and their children, teaching them to repudiate the 'cult' and learn to 'firmly believe in the Communist Party, love the Party and follow the Party'."

The Japanese Communist Party has expressed support for actions against the [Unification Church](#), suggesting a concerning trend towards government intervention in religious affairs reminiscent of authoritarian regimes.

The Italian scholar makes plain the connection to the Japanese Communist Party,

"In fact, we learn from the official website of the Japanese Communist Party that on October 16, 2023, the 'Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Masahito Moriyama visited the office of Akira Koike, Secretary General of the Japanese Communist Party, at the House of Councilors, and reported that he had requested the Tokyo District Court to order the dissolution of the [Unification Church \(Family Federation for World Peace and Unification\)](#). Koike demanded that the government and the ruling party take responsibility for the care of active believers.'

What this 'care' is all about can be easily guessed. Perhaps Koike shared with the Minister the good example of China's 'Love Homes'."



*For mass deprogramming: Masahito Moriyama, 8th Dec. 2023*

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Massimo Introvigne is an Italian sociologist of religions and founder and managing director of Center for Studies on New Religions ([CESNUR](#)), an international network of scholars who study new religious movements. Introvigne is also author of some 70 books and hundreds of articles in the field of sociology of religion.

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# BITTER WINTER

A MAGAZINE ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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## Is Japan Introducing State-Sponsored Deprogramming?

01/25/2024 MASSIMO INTROVIGNE

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At a Cabinet Meeting on January 19, proposals were made aimed at inducing current members of the Unification Church to leave the "cult" with the help of apostate ex-members.

by Massimo Introvigne



*An artistic rendering of Japanese ministers and politicians meeting with apostate ex-members and opponents of the Unification Church (AI-generated).*

It all started on July 8, 2022, when former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated by a man who claimed he wanted to punish him for having sent messages to events of the Unification Church (now called Family Federation for World Peace and Unification). The assassin explained he hated the Unification Church because his mother, a member, had gone bankrupt in 2002, an incident he attributed to her excessive donations to the religious organization.

Rather than blaming the assassin or the anti-cult propoganda that might have excited his feeble mind, the media started a campaign against the Unification Church, fueled by the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales. The latter is an anti-cult organization founded in 1987 by left-wing attorneys whose stated intent was to put a halt to the successful anti-Communist campaigns of groups associated with the Unification Church in Japan.

The Network and the media mounted such a virulent campaign that the Kishida government decided in 2023 to seek a court order that would dissolve the Family Federation as a religious organization. At the same time, the government and the Parliament passed new laws and issued directives and regulations against "cults" in general and the Unification Church in particular. One made it easy to **recover donations** to "controversial" religious groups by simply claiming that the donor had been manipulated through **brainwashing**, a discredited theory that the Japanese government seems to have embraced.

Another ordered religious groups **not to "indoctrinate" minors**, with provisions clearly targeting not only the Unification Church but also the Jehovah's Witnesses and conservative Christian groups. A third law offered assistance to "victims" of "cults." **Recent draft guidelines** proposed a very extensive notion of "victim," also including those who deny having been victimized—again, because of "brainwashing." In practice, every member of the Family Federation is a "victim," including those who say they are perfectly happy to remain in the movement.

In this Japanese saga, one has often the impression to have hit the bottom of a well full of prejudices, bigotry, and anti-religious-liberty measures, only to discover the following week or month that the government is proposing something new and even worse.





*In the 1950s, the notion of "brainwashing" was introduced by American propaganda to explain why Soviets and Chinese were able to "change the brain" of war prisoners and opponents (AI-generated elaboration of a 1950s propaganda poster). The pseudo-scientific theory was later applied to "cults."*

More than 4,000 members of the Unification Church were submitted to the criminal practice of deprogramming, i.e., they were kidnapped, confined, and submitted to physical and psychological violence until they agreed to renounce their faith and leave the church. The Supreme Court of Japan declared the practice illegal in Japan in 2015 (confirming a [High Court decision of 2014](#)) and awarded substantial damages to Toru Goto, a Unification Church member who had been confined for more than twelve years.

Some incidents happened even after that date, but the general legal consensus was that deprogramming had been outlawed in Japan, although with some delay with respect to most other democratic countries in the world, where it had been considered a crime since the past century.

Now, however, Japan is considering re-introducing a state-sponsored form of deprogramming. This is a logical consequence of the broad notion of "victim" being proposed and of the Japanese government's support of the pseudo-scientific theory of brainwashing. If all Japanese Unification Church members are "victims" who do not realize they are "victims" because they are under the effect of "brainwashing," the only way to "rescue" them is deprogramming.

This is new in democratic states, but not in China and Russia. "Bitter Winter" and other human rights media outlets have reported on state-sponsored deprogramming routinely [conducted in China](#), where originally American deprogrammers were consulted, and in Russia, in ["rehabilitation centers"](#) for "cultists" operated by the Russian Orthodox Church in cooperation with the regime.

Japan, however, will become the first democratic state that will compel members of "cults" to submit to mandatory "counseling," aka deprogramming. On January 19, there was a Cabinet meeting planning a "Ministerial Conference on Supporting the Victims of the Former Unification Church" ("former" because it is now called Family Federation). "Nikkei Shinbun," one of the major newspapers in Japan, [reported the contents of the discussion](#). Later, the government announced the main points of its draft plan [on its own website](#).

There are three main disturbing aspects of the transcript. First. It is proposed that the government should co-operate with "apostate" (i.e., hostile) ex-members (presumably selected and introduced to the authorities by the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales), including those second-generation believers who have left the Unification Church. As "Nikkei Shinbun" [summarized it](#), they will become "training instructors to provide advice and guidance to counselors. This will lead to appropriate support for victims." These so-called "victims" are the current members of the Family Federation. We read that "victims under brainwashing are often unaware of their problems. Former believers and others will share their knowledge based on their own experiences in a course for counselors."



*"Sayuri Ogawa" (pseud.: screenshot) is the most famous "apostate" former second-generation member of the Unification Church in Japan. Her story was [debunked by award-winning journalist Masumi Fukuda](#) but she continues to appear in media and TV shows.*

Second, these "counselors" trained by apostate ex-members with the help of the government will offer their "support" to the "victims" who do not know they are "victims," which is a nice metaphor for deprogramming. They will also approach second-generation members who are happy to remain in the Family Federation—because they have been "brainwashed," it is argued—directly in the schools they attend and submit them to the same "support."

Third, a strange proposal is to create "shelter homes" for second-generation members "who cannot have their own residence because of poverty." This is a non-existing problem, as there are no reported cases of second-generation Family Federation members who are so destitute that they are homeless. However, the real and explicitly stated

family federation members who are so destitute that they are homeless, however, the text and explicitly stated purpose of the measure is to keep second-generation members "away from their parents and other believers," so that they may be "counseled" and "rebuild their lives."

The "shelter homes" are very similar to the "Love Homes" where the Chinese Communist Party deprograms "cultists" and their children, teaching them to repudiate the "cult" and learn to "firmly believe in the Communist Party, love the Party and follow the Party."

The comparison is not surprising. In fact, we learn from the [official website of the Japanese Communist Party](#) that on October 16, 2023, the "Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Masahito Moriyama visited the office of Akira Koike, Secretary General of the Japanese Communist Party, at the House of Councilors, and reported that he had requested the Tokyo District Court to order the dissolution of the Unification Church (Family Federation for World Peace and Unification). Koike demanded that the government and the ruling party take responsibility for the care of active believers." What this "care" is all about can be easily guessed. Perhaps Koike shared with the Minister the good example of China's "Love Homes."

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### Massimo Introvigne

**Massimo Introvigne** (born June 14, 1955 in Rome) is an Italian sociologist of religions. He is the founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions ([CESNUR](#)), an international network of scholars who study new religious movements. Introvigne is the author of some 70 books and more than 100 articles in the field of sociology of religion. He was the main author of the [Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia](#) (Encyclopedia of Religions in Italy). He is a member of the editorial board for the [Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion](#) and of the executive board of University of California Press' [Nova Religio](#). From January 5 to December 31, 2011, he has served as the "Representative on combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, with a special focus on discrimination against Christians and members of other religions" of the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#) (OSCE). From 2012 to 2015 he served as chairperson of the Observatory of Religious Liberty, instituted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to monitor problems of religious liberty on a worldwide scale.

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