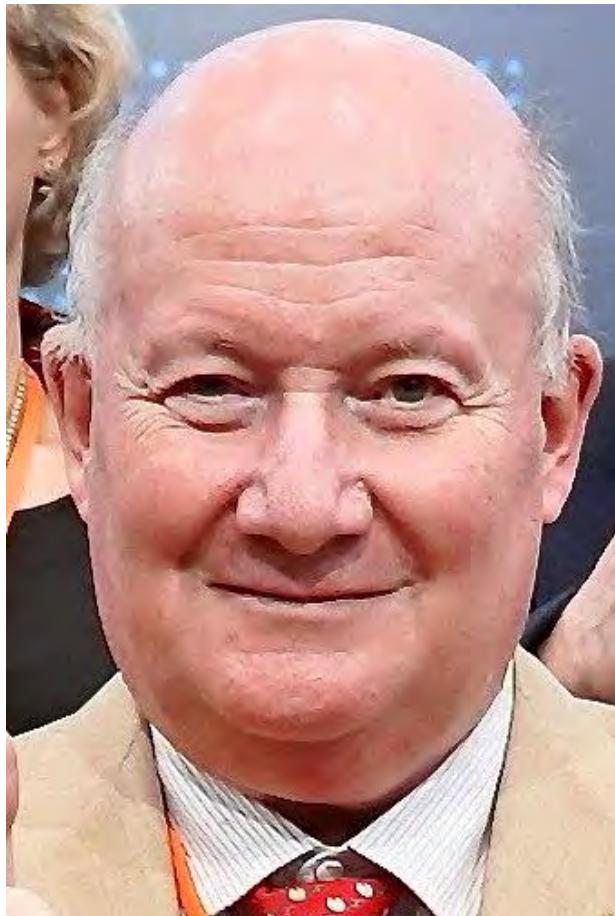


FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Scholar Warns Of Threats To Minority Religions

Knut Holdhus
April 19, 2024



Dr. Massimo Introvigne 6th April 2023

Leading scholar warns of new threats to new religious movements

A comment by Dr. Massimo Introvigne, founder of CESNUR, an independent network of scholars, and editor-in-chief of [Bitter Winter](#), a magazine on religious liberty and human rights. The comment was made during Session V, "New Religious Movements and Contemporary Threats to Religious Freedom", 12th April 2024, the second day of an international online 3-day conference on "Peace and Public Leadership: Addressing the Challenges of Our Times", organized by HJ International Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership, New York, USA.



Dr. Franco Famularo. Photo: from International Leadership Conference 18th Aug 2021

Dr. Introvigne was asked by the moderator of the panel discussion, Dr. Franco Famularo,

"I'm wondering whether you regard threats to new religious movements (NRMs) - let's use that term today - to be more serious, less serious, or about the same as threats to NRMs during the so-called 'cult wars' of the 1970s to the 1990s.

And you might think about the role of the internet and social media here, which weren't a presence in the earlier period.

But I wonder whether the situation is worse, better, or pretty much the same. That's "A". And "B" - you're known for your encyclopedic approach to new religious movements - and you did a case study of the [Family Federation](#). I'm wondering if you could briefly tick off other case studies of religious liberty crises for an NRM that you could have chosen for case studies if you had decided to."

Yes, we could have a full conference on this, but to be brief, I believe we are going back to the times of the "cult wars", but not everywhere.

The main example is what happened just two days ago in France.

In 2001, France tried to pass a law criminalizing "cults practicing brainwashing".

But after the objections of scholars - which were perhaps less important - and of the constitutional court - which were perhaps more important - they went back to the expression "mental manipulation". Then the constitutional court said, "Not good enough".

And so they passed the About-Picard law, which incriminate the "abuse of weakness" (abus de faiblesse).



Jehovah's Witnesses outside the British Museum 30th May 2017

Then, after many years, they realized they had not "captured" many new religious movements. Particularly, they lost their main case, about what in 2001 they regarded as their two main targets - the Jehovah's Witnesses and Church of Scientology.

And so, two days ago, finally, they passed a new law where they go back to something they called "psychological subjugation", which is really "brainwashing".

And it has two differences from "abuse of weakness".

First, the person should not necessarily be weak. Everyone can be a target of psychological subjugation or subjection.

And number two, it is not necessary, as it was in the 2001 law, that the victim of "psychological subjection" causes harm to him- or herself. It is enough that there is a deterioration in their mental health.

But according to the governmental anti-cult agency MIVILUDES, being part of a "cult" involves a deterioration in the mental health.

So, we are very much back to 2001, and of course, in Japan, we are back to the eighties, when the National Network [National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales] launched its campaign against the [Unification Church](#).

But that's not happening everywhere, even if we see the [Unification Church](#) case in Japan being referred to in countries such Italy or Germany or even Kenya or South Africa in order to pass anti-cult legislation there.

But I believe some landmark criticism of the "brainwashing" hypothesis and the notion of "cult" has been established by both US courts and the European Court of Human Rights.

So what we saw as this deteriorating situation for new religious movements is so far localized in a few countries, such as France and Japan.

And of course, it never went away under totalitarian regimes, such as China or Russia.

In terms of the most targeted movements, I believe, globally, another movement which is targeted in

many countries is the Jehovah's Witnesses. We can call it a "new religious movement", an "old new religious movement", a "religious minority".



Marked red: Countries with ban on activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses

Of course, its opponents, including the French government, simply called it a "secte", which should be translated as "cult" and not "sect".

And in Japan, a set of actions against Jehovah's Witnesses have just been started. I'm an expert witness in this case, together with my colleague Holly Folk from Western Washington University.

So the Jehovah's Witnesses are next, also in Japan. And, of course, in Russia, they are banned and have been liquidated, all their property has been confiscated, and with many of them put in jail.

But they're attacked also in several democratic countries, including Spain right now.

And so, the Jehovah's Witnesses would have been an excellent case study we could have proposed today. But, of course, there are several others, too.

"Scholar Warns of Threats to Minority Religions" - text: Dr. Massimo Introvigne, slightly edited version.

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Tokyo, 10th February 2024 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper Sekai Nippo. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#)

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rights violations of the 20th century" – the abduction and confinement of members of the Family Federation.

Interview with Sergio Redo, President of the São Paulo State Press Association (Part 1).

by Satoru Ayamura (綾村悟), São Paulo

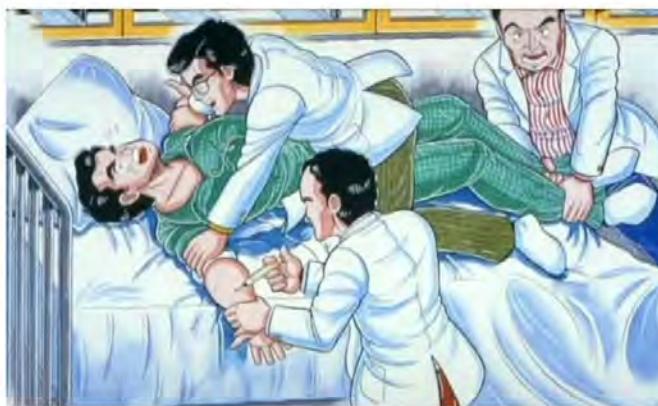
Part 2 of interview

In response to the coverage of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) in Japan, voices from overseas are beginning to call for information to be publicly disclosed to the international community from the perspective of the believers of the [religious organisation](#) having suffered human rights violations.

Sergio Redo is the President of the [São Paulo State Press Association](#) (API), a veteran figure in the Brazilian press and a lawyer long involved in issues of freedom and human rights. We interviewed him about his views on religious believers being abducted and confined in order to coerce them to leave their faith, and also asked him about his recommendations for the Japanese society regarding religious freedom. (Interviewer: Satoru Ayamura, São Paulo)

– More than 4,300 members of the Family Federation have fallen victim to abduction, confinement, and forced deconversion guided by deprogrammers and Christian pastors. However, this issue has hardly been reported by major Japanese media outlets.

It started in the 1960s and has continued to the present day. I believe it is the **worst and most significant human rights violations**. In my opinion, it ranks as **one of the largest human rights violations of the 20th century**. Even in many wars and conflicts, including World War II, we have rarely seen such a level of human rights violations.



Forcibly sent to psychiatric hospital in Tokyo: Illustration of Hideo Mima's forced hospitalization. He is a Japanese member of the [Family Federation](#). Photo: Hideo Mima. Used with permission.

In Japan, a country that claims to be a liberal democracy, at least 4,300 members of the [Family Federation](#) have literally **suffered abduction and confinement**. They were held captive at specific locations, **deprived of their freedom and beliefs**. Some believers were [forcibly sent to psychiatric hospitals](#), while others, such as Toru Goto, endured over **12 years of captivity**. When I saw a photograph of him immediately after his release from abduction and confinement, his emaciated state, with bones protruding due to malnutrition, it left me speechless. **Journalists and lawyers should raise awareness** about this **egregious human rights violation** and bring it to society's attention.

I have been involved in the world of journalism in Brazil for 40 years, but I had no knowledge whatsoever of the truly **horrific human rights violations** that have been committed in Japan.



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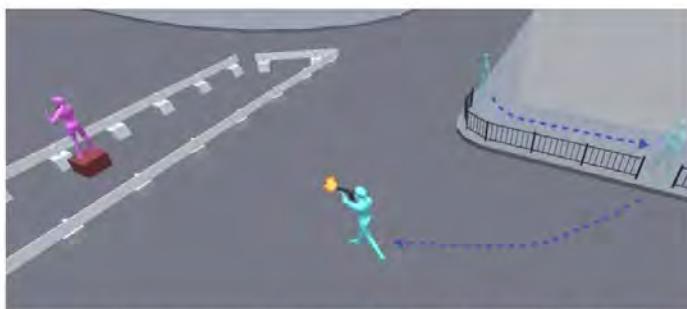
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human rights violations that have been committed in Japan. It's truly terrible. The world's major media outlets should take an interest in and expose the issue of abduction, confinement, and forced de-conversion perpetrated against members of the **Family Federation** in Japan.

As far as I can contribute, I am considering requesting through the Brazilian Press Association (ABI) some form of response from the *United Nations Human Rights Commission* regarding the issue of abduction and confinement of members of the **Family Federation** in Japan.

I would also like to suggest that all lawyers seeking social justice take an interest in this human rights issue. In addition to being abducted and confined, members of the **Family Federation** have faced numerous human rights violations, including being **treated as 'second-class citizens'**. I would like to ask the *Brazilian Bar Association* to see if there is anything that can be done to address the human rights violations, abductions and confinements, and **violations of religious freedom** experienced by members of the **Family Federation**.



Positional relationship between Shinzo Abe and the shooter at Abe assassination. Photo: Asanagi / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

– **Tetsuya Yamagami, the defendant, is believed to have assassinated former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe out of hatred for the Family Federation, as Yamagami considered Abe to have a very close relationship with the organization. What are your thoughts on Tetsuya Yamagami's motive for assassinating former Prime Minister Abe?**

From my experience as a lawyer, I believe that most of the motives for all crimes that occur around the world can be summarized in three things: power, love, and money.

I am concerned that Yamagami's motives may be based on "hatred" and "money." Think about it. Whatever you do in life, anything based on hatred will always have disastrous consequences for you and those around you.

The assassination of Abe was sparked by Yamagami's hatred. His mother's substantial donation to the **Family Federation** caused him to lose the 'money that should have been available to him,' and planted the seeds of hatred in him. But that was decades ago.

Moreover, rather than directing his resentment directly towards the **Family Federation**, he aimed it at Shinzo Abe. By doing so, he knew that it would attract more attention from the public towards himself. That's why he targeted Abe.

Continued in part 2.

Sergio de Azevedo Redo is the President of the São Paulo State Press Association (API), Vice President of the Brazilian Press Federation (FENAI), former Chairman of the Legislative Council for Press-Related Bills (an organization within the Brazilian Bar Association), and a full member of the Brazilian Bar Association (OAB) and the National Federation of Law Scholars (FADESP). He holds a Doctorate in Law. From 1993 to 1997, he served as professor and dean of the Faculty of Business Law at United Metropolitan Colleges (FMU).

With a career spanning 40 years as author, journalist, and lawyer, he hosts the television program "The Newsroom". He has a wide network of relationships in the media and political spheres, including with former Brazilian President Michel Temer and the President of the Brazilian Press Association (ABI), Oliveira. He is 66 years old.

Featured image above: Sergio Redo in February 2024. Photo: Sekai Nippo.

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