

UPF Europe and Middle East Experts Decry Japan's Human Rights Violations

Heiner Handschin and Chantal Chetelat Komagata
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Geneva, Switzerland - UPF co-sponsored a side event at the United Nations Offices about the lack of religious freedom in Japan.

The human rights defense organization CAP LC (*Coordination des Associations et Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience*), in co-sponsorship with UPF and its affiliated organization Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), held the side event on the occasion of the Universal Periodic Review of Japan at the Human Rights Council.



The Human Rights Council has been based at the UN Offices in Geneva since its founding in 2006. As the Council is directly under the UN General Assembly, the weight of its findings has become very significant. Unlike the previous Human Rights Commission, it has been strongly upgraded to focus on the implementation of human rights in each country.

It is a matter of prestige for every country not to be seen as having serious human rights issues. One of the Human Rights Council's mechanisms is to scrutinize every member state of the UN every five years, through the process of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). All nations in the Human Rights Council bring forth criticism of human rights records to the country under review, and issue (unbinding) recommendations to remedy those flaws.

On January 31, 2023, the Japanese delegation was receiving criticisms and recommendations from many nations on Japan's observance of human rights. Some were referring to the absence of an independent human rights institution in Japan, others to the problem of hate speech to which the government turns a blind eye, etc. There was, of course, an overall respect for the great donor nation of Japan, and flaws were noted but didn't cause any strong consternation. However, when a nation is criticized repeatedly for the same specific reasons, it eventually has to respond to the criticism. This was the reason for organizing a side event when Japan was under review.

While the Universal Periodic Review of Japan was taking place in the main hall of the Human Rights Council, the side event was being held in the same building in a separate hall. About 20 people were present, including a representative of the diplomatic mission of Japan to the UN Geneva, while 120 people attended online, including representatives from 15 UN missions of member states.



[Ms. Christine Mirre, Director of CAP LC](#)The event was titled “What the Abe Assassination Reveals about Tolerance of Hate Speech and the Deficit of Religious Freedom in Japan.” CAP LC Director **Christine Mirre** chaired the session.

This was the third meeting on human rights held by UPF and CAP LC at the UN in Geneva since the assassination of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8, 2022. Four prominent experts on human rights in Europe were invited to speak.



[Hon. Ján Figel Former EU Commissioner, Minister of Transport and Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion and Belief of the EU, Slovakia](#)The first speech was recorded on video by **Hon. Dr. Ján Figel**, the first EU special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion outside the EU. He mentioned that numerous members of the Unification Church have become subjects of discrimination and hate speech following the assassination of Shinzo Abe. He described the process that led to two legal initiatives by the Japanese government aimed at depriving the Unification Church/Family Federation of its status as a religious corporation, and at amending the existing consumer protection laws to protect those who donate excessively to religious organizations. He pointed out that freedom of religion or belief is under serious attack around the world, and that 79 percent of the world’s population encounter obstacles in their most essential right to religious freedom.

[Click here for the full intervention of Hon. Ján Figel](#)



[Dr. Aaron Rhodes, Former Executive Director, International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights \(IHFHR\)](#)

The second speaker was **Dr. Aaron Rhodes**, president of the Forum for Religious Freedom (FOREF Europe). Twelve years ago, Dr Rhodes was involved in the Toru Goto legal case against the kidnapping and deprogramming of Unification Church members in Japan. He explained that the abduction crimes committed in the past against the Unification Church in Japan had not been taken seriously by the Japanese authorities, and that they were followed today by “new massive assaults” on UC members after the assassination of Shinzo Abe. He appealed to Japanese leaders to take positive steps against intolerance toward minorities. He mentioned an “ugly wave of prejudice and discriminatory actions,” as well as biased legislation aiming at dissolving the church, accompanied by death threats and physical attacks on its members. He deplored the fact that other nations and large human rights groups had been silent on such violations of human rights by Japan. He implored the Japanese leaders to have the courage to address religious intolerance.

[Click here for the full Intervention of Dr. Aaron Rhodes](#)



[Dr. Massimo Introvigne, Founder and Managing Director, Center for Studies on New Religions \(CESNUR\), Italy.](#)

The third speaker, on video, was **Dr. Massimo Introvigne**, founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR). Some excerpts were selected from speeches he gave at two UPF-organized Conferences of Hope in Korea, in August and November 2022. He described what happened after the assassination of Shinzo Abe, when the victims and the perpetrators were intentionally switched by greedy lawyers who already had been involved in the sequestrations of thousands of Unification Church members, and by communists who never forgave the Unification Church for being against their ideology. He pointed out their agenda to spread in Japan the

secular humanist ideology that views religion as a simple tool to make money through brainwashing members.



[Mr. Willy Fautré, CEO and Director, Human Rights Without Frontiers International, Belgium](#)

The fourth speaker was **Willy Fautré**, CEO and director of Human Rights without Frontiers. He recalled how, over a period of 45 years, 4,300 converts of the Unification Church had been abducted for deconversion through confinement with the help of evangelical pastors – which was totally contrary to Article 18.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) – signed by Japan – that guarantees the right to retain one’s religious beliefs. All criminal complaints and civil cases filed at that time by some of the victims had been dismissed, except for Toru Goto’s lawsuit, which was accepted by the judiciary and ended successfully after a six-year battle. Although no media had covered that decision, the lawsuit had a deterring effect on the abductors and put an end to the lucrative business of deprogrammers.

Mr. Fautré also emphasized the consequences of hate speech, which is at the heart of the stigmatization of Unification Church members, particularly after Shinzo Abe’s assassination. More than 400 violent incidents against churches and individuals of the Unification Church were recorded in just two months following the tragic crime. He pointed out that the Japanese government, although not instigating the hate speech, exacerbated it by undertaking "hate-filled actions," like seeking the removal of the church’s Religious Corporation Status, forbidding its members to associate with members of the Liberal Democratic Party in the National Diet, and not reporting any of their good works.

[Click here for the full intervention of Mr. Willy Fautré](#)



[Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, Chair, UPF Europe & Middle East](#)In conclusion, Dr.

Katsumi Otsuka, the UPF co-chair for Europe and the Middle East, spoke about a City Council member in Japan who had just published a book titled *Constitution and the Former Unification Church* and stood up for protecting human rights and religious freedom in Japan. He quoted from the book: “The voices of believers who are judged to be anti-social have been rejected. ... It is reported now that the root of all evil is the former Unification Church,” to the point that all legislators of the Liberal Democratic Party who had links with that church and its affiliates had to deny them. The author concluded that it was not the former Unification Church, but the way the Unification Church was criticized, that violated the Constitution.

[Click here for the full intervention of Dr. Katsumi Otsuka](#)



The violations of human rights by Japan will continue to be exposed at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. UN delegations will be informed of the ongoing witch hunt led by the Japanese government against the Unification Church, instigated by the very group of lawyers who have supported deprogrammings and hate speech campaigns against Unification Church members over the past four decades.





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Intervention of Hon. Ján Figel' at the side-event of the Human Rights Council

Written by: Hon. Ján Figel, former European Commission special envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion, Slovakia

31 January 2023



Ladies and Gentlemen,

I send my heartfelt greetings to Geneva from the 3rd IRF Summit in Washington DC. It is a Civil Society led global gathering on important, crucial and fundamental human rights in the current context on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB).

FoRB is an issue of life and death. It is true in the least developed countries of Africa and Asia or in the MENA region. It is true in totalitarian and autocratic countries. But regrettably, it is true also in developed democracies. We could see innocent victims of attacks in New Zealand, France, USA or Japan.

I am sure this UPF event in Geneva is a very timely contribution to the effort to analyze the situation and some worrying trends in Japan, and to contribute to the prevalence of peaceful coexistence and justice for all.

On July 8, 2022, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated. His murderer was Tetsuya Yamagami. His reason for killing Abe was that he had participated, through a video and by sending a message, to events organized by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF). UPF is an NGO connected with the Unification Church. It is now called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification. UPF holds general consultative status with the United Nations.

Yamagami hated the Unification Church because, twenty years before, his mother went bankrupt, and he attributed her bankruptcy to the excessive donations she had made to that church, of which she is still a member. Almost overnight, the opponents of the Church launched a massive attack against the religious movement. Their twisted arguments persuaded most of the media and Japanese public opinion that the Unification Church was responsible for the crime. This intense agitation led to two legal initiatives. The first aimed at depriving the Unification Church/Family Federation of its status as a religious corporation. The second at amending the existing consumer protection laws to protect those who donate excessively to religious organizations. Church members are subject to attacks and discrimination.

L&G:

Faith and reason, religion and science are two motors moving our societies and civilizations forward. According to the Pew Research Center in Washington DC, 84% of the global population claim a religious affiliation and the number is growing. We speak here about:

1. The overwhelming majority of the world population! The UN is here to serve all people, people with their diverse identities and justified rights.
2. Peace is the fruit of justice: justice for all. The modern understanding of justice is based on the respect of

fundamental human rights. Religious freedom is defined as freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Article 18 of the UDHR is a very central right, important for both believers and non-believers, for people from A to Z (atheists to Zoroastrians).

FoRB is a litmus test for all other HRs! This is the reason for the importance and existence of the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB. I was the first ever EU FoRB Special Envoy. After my nomination in May 2016, many similar envoys, ambassadors and governmental plenipotentiaries have been established in a dozen countries, including HU, UK, DE, NL, PL, DK, LI, EE, CZ, SK, IT...

3. FoRB is under severe pressure: 79% of the global population live in countries with high or very high obstacles to RF. These obstacles are produced by social hostilities, violent extremism or terrorism or they represent government restrictions. The intensity and character of these pressures rank from intolerance through discrimination to persecution, even genocide.

We need urgent global action: FoRB climate change!

Freedom without responsibility is not sustainable, it will cease to exist. Like rights without duties, it represents one side of the coin. Whenever we speak about or demand freedom, we should dwell on responsibility as well. This was my principal attitude during my years of service when I met the highest religious representatives.

We need to listen to the representatives of the millions of people! Many of them are lifelong and influential authorities respected by their fellow believers. When they speak, the auditorium is usually crowded and attentive. In time of crisis, divisions and growing conflicts, the international community needs to engage all important forces of peace and goodwill for a more humane XXI Century.

The time is ripe for the Millennial initiative of the UN Inter-religious Assembly.

How to establish this?

One stream of action is the IRF Global Movement: Communication, cooperation and coordination among governments, parliamentarians, civil society and faith-based organizations. Since 2014: IPP FoRB, since 2018: Annual IRF Ministerial Conferences, since 2020: Int'l Religious Freedom and Belief Alliance with 40 members and observers, since 2021: Civil Society led IRF Summit based on IRF Roundtables. It is time to make the voices and actions of the FBOs more influential.

One other stream of patient effort: We need a Special Purpose Action Committee (Task Force) with expertise and trust and with a mandate to speak to decisive authorities. On one side would be the major global religions; on the other, important state and UN representatives. This idea should be explicitly supported by the religious authorities and, equally, by the newly established IRFBA Alliance and IRF Summit (Civil Society led forum), and IPP FoRB. A broadly consulted initiative and thoroughly drafted text of the UN Resolution must be tabled to the UN General Assembly by several active and committed governments.

FoRB is a very central human right. All HRs stem from human dignity, which is their foundational principle. In 2018, I helped to initiate and draft the "Punta del Este Declaration on Human Dignity for Everyone Everywhere". It is supported by both religious and secular humanists and serves as an instrument of recommitment to the UDHR. In HD for all, dignity is the point of departure and an objective criterion of measurement!

Anybody may join the growing list of its signatories at www.dignityforeveryone.org.

I am convinced that this initiative and message can deepen respect for dignity for all in Japan and elsewhere.

Thank you for your attention. And greetings again from Washington DC.

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Intervention of Dr. Aaron Rhodes at the side-event of the Human Rights Council

Written by: Dr. Aaron Rhodes, former executive director of the International Helsinki Federation
31 January 2023



Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over ten years ago, while taking part in a human rights conference in Tokyo, I had an opportunity to hear directly from members of the Unification Church about how Japanese authorities were ignoring crimes committed against them. Thorough and impartial investigations by Mr. Willy Fautré and his associates provided an objective record of the violation of Japan's international legal human rights obligations, which were presented in reports to the United Nations Human Rights Committee and other international bodies.

The reaction of the Japanese authorities to these reports was generally one of denial, stonewalling, and dissembling.

As a human rights advocate, I try to concern myself with how the behavior of governments comports with universal standards that define how authorities should protect individual freedom within their jurisdictions. The reasons **why** local and national authorities

violate their obligations is a complex matter of political culture and, with regard to protecting the freedom of religion, religious traditions. But culture is no excuse for violating basic freedoms. We pay special attention to the freedom of religion, what we consider the "first freedom," but this area of human rights practice is, paradoxically, one frequently pushed to the sidelines by religious prejudice itself. I recall vividly how colleagues once resisted defending persecuted members of a religious movement because, as they claimed, "They are crazy."

We are here to speak about a new, and massive assault on religious freedom in Japan, again concerning the Unification Church, formally speaking the Family Federation for World Peace. I want to use this opportunity to appeal to Japanese leaders, in both government and civil society, to take positive steps to address obvious and deep-seated prejudice and intolerance that threatens not only those who are associated with this movement, and members of other minorities.

The assassination of Prime Minister Abe was a terrible tragedy for Japan and for the community of nations committed to democracy, human rights and peace. It has shocked especially all Japanese people who reject violence and seek harmonious relations at home and abroad.

Japan stands out among members of the United Nations for its positive contributions to the liberal international order, and its generally responsible adherence to human rights principles.

Yet, all liberal democracies have their dark spots when it comes to human rights. There is no question that the ugly wave of prejudice against the Unification Church, and discriminatory official actions against the Church, constitute such a dark spot.

Abe's assassin blamed him for his cooperation with the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), a nongovernmental organization established within the framework of the Unification Church.

As Dr. Massimo Introvigne found, in the aftermath of the assassination, the Unification Church has been widely held responsible for it, overshadowing the perpetrator's personal responsibility; according to Introvigne,

A twisted argument was used, that if the assassin's mother had not donated huge sums to the Unification Church, her son would not have had a grudge against Abe and would not have killed him. A national campaign followed, where the assassin was almost forgotten and media and governmental campaigns targeted the Unification Church, culminating in an official investigation that may result in a legal action by the government aimed at legally dissolving the religious organization.

Blaming – scapegoating – and persecuting the Unification Church for Abe's murder is an example of how religious intolerance can have violent and tragic consequences, and be twisted in public narratives to generate a mob mentality and even more intolerance.

It is deeply regrettable that the Japanese authorities, rather than defending religious freedom, have appeased popular bigotry and propaganda generated by the Communist Party with quasi-legal efforts aimed at delegitimizing the Unification Church, making it impossible to function, and indeed ending its very existence in Japan. They have set up a biased, official “expert committee” under the influence of a network of activists whose overt objective is to “persuade the government to dissolve the [church]; to restrict its ability to raise donations; and to pass legislation rendering [church] parents guilty of “child abuse” for raising their children in the church’s faith,” according to a submission to the UN Human Rights Committee by the “Freedom of Conscience” NGO. It is clear that these actions violate the principle of nondiscrimination, and well as religious freedom standards in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

What is even more alarming are the numerous threats against the physical safety, and physical attacks against members of the Unification Church.

I am skeptical of anti-hate speech legislation that restricts speech about controversial subjects; the antidote to hate speech is more speech, and moral education in civil society. But it is common sense that clear incitement to violence must be criminalized; it is the hate speech that leads to actual hate crimes.

It is intolerable that members of a peaceful and legal religious community are, in Japan, routinely threatened with expulsion, death and violence. My human rights colleagues have found that “death threats were received by Unification Church branches in Aichi, Hokkaido, and Osaka. In Nara, threats to kill the pastors reported to the police led to the precautionary closure of the local church.” They have documented physical attacks on members of the Church.

Based on what has happened at the Universal Periodical Review, and since this episode began, it seems the Japanese authorities and media have not been held to account. Why have not Japan’s friends and partners raised concerns? Why have not major human rights organizations raised concerns? I am not sure, but I imagine it is because Japan is a partner and donor country. Can rich countries purchase impunity for their human rights violations? If these things had happened in a small, weak country, the international community would have loudly complained. A central principle of the Rule of Law, and of liberalism, is that standards need to be applied evenly and without prejudice.

It is disconcerting and painful that these acts are met with impunity in a member state of the United Nations renowned for its democratic culture, humanistic values and positive international contributions to peace and welfare. While bringing this to the attention of international bodies, we also implore Japanese leaders to have the courage to be fair, and take positive steps to address religious intolerance. We are ready to help.

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Intervention of Dr. Katsumi Otsuka at the side-event of the Human Rights Council

Written by: Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, Chair, UPF for Europe and the Middle East

31 January 2023

Thank you very much, Madame Chairwoman, for giving me this opportunity to speak in this precious session about the issue of religious freedom and human rights in Japan. Let me first salute all the investment that the organizer put into this session. It is also my great pleasure to be together with well-known experts on human rights and religious freedom.



Since many distinguished experts have already spoken a lot about the current terrible situation in Japan, I do not want to repeat this again. Instead, let me introduce you to one human rights protector and religious freedom defender in a local city of Japan.

His name is **Norio Hosoya**, a city council member of the *Toride-city* congress, *Ibaraki prefecture*. Of course, he is not a member of the former Unification Church, but he stood up alone for protecting human rights and religious freedom in Japan.

He recently published a book on the former Unification Church and Japanese Constitution titled "**Constitution and the former Unification Church.**" *This book was published on January 26th of this year. I was very impressed by this book, so I thought that introducing this book would help you to better understand the situation in Japan.*

Let me quote a little from his book. Hosoya wrote as follows as an introduction to the book. (Let me quote!)

"The vortex of criticism against the former Unification Church (Family Federation for World Peace and Unification) that erupted from the attack on *Shinzo Abe* is flooding all over Japan. The voices of believers who are judged to be anti-social have been rejected and the voices of the 2nd generation were eliminated and drowned out! Where are their human rights? This book is a record of the struggles in a local city with a population of 100,000 which seeks to have a fair and neutral administration, thoroughly relying on the Constitution of Japan."

He also wrote in the introduction. Let me quote....

"It is reported now that the root of all evil is the former Unification Church, and there has been a loud chorus of call for politicians to clarify as to whether they had any contact with this organization, whether they attended gatherings, whether they sent messages, and so on. The Liberal Democratic Party, of which many members of the Diet are linked to the Unification Church, conducted an internal investigation into all members of parliament who belong to the party, and Secretary-General *Motegi* spokes as follows with emphasis after the investigation,

"We will not have any relationship with the former Unification Church from now on. I am convinced that there are no lawmakers who cannot follow the party's decision, but if they are, they cannot work in the same party."

The Liberal Democratic Party's remarks and investigations have begun to exert influence over local political circles....

What criteria should we use in making decisions when information is one-sided? The government must be neutral to everyone. So, I decided to look at the situation based on the Constitution. Then, I found that it was not the "former Unification Church" that violated the Constitution, but that the tone of the criticism against the Unification Church is violating the Constitution."

(Quote end)

He made a very concrete action for protecting religious freedom! Let me quote.

"In *Toride City*, a member of the communist party proposed a resolution to eliminate its ties with the Unification Church, but he (Mr. Hosoya) argued against the resolution based on the Constitution and strongly countered that the request itself was a violation of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of thought and belief. He strongly objected to the resolution on that point, and the resolution request was rejected by an overwhelming majority."

I thank you for your attention.

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