

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Civil Rights Expert Alerts On Japan's Plan to Select Children's Religions

Knut Holdhus
June 7, 2026



Second-generation [Family Federation](#) believers demonstrating for freedom of religion in Shibuya, Tokyo April 29, 2026



[Bitter Winter](#), the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights



Attorney Patricia Duval, here speaking at the United Nations Office in Geneva, Switzerland June 16, 2025

**European human rights expert warns against state-led faith-breaking project aimed at children of large religious minority
Family Federation**

On 2nd June 2026, in the [second installment](#) of her [Bitter Winter](#) series examining the consequences of Japan's campaign against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - formerly known as the [Unification Church](#) - international human rights attorney Patricia Duval argues that the assault on the [religious organization](#) has moved beyond the [dissolution](#) and entered a far more sensitive domain: the relationship between parents, children, and the state. Her [analysis](#) contends that recent policies and public statements reveal an effort not merely to regulate a religious movement but to reshape the beliefs and identities of the children raised within it.

On the first installment in Duval's series: [Beyond Dissolution: A Religious Purge in Japan?](#)

On the first installment in Duval's series: [Next Target After Dissolution: Believers' Rights](#)

More from Duval: [Religious Freedom in Jeopardy After Dissolution](#)

Duval situates the debate within a broader struggle over religious freedom, parental rights, and state neutrality. According to her, the issue is no longer whether the [Family Federation](#) should retain legal status as a religious corporation. Rather, it is whether the Japanese authorities, encouraged by "anti-cult" activists and some academics, are justified in treating the religious upbringing provided by believing parents as a form of harm requiring

government intervention.

The [article](#) highlights statements made by sociologist and Buddhist priest Yoshihide Sakurai (櫻井義秀),

who has been involved in several campaigns against the [Family Federation](#). He welcomed the [dissolution](#) of the [religious organization](#) but argued that the measure alone would not solve what he considers the underlying problem. From this perspective belonging to the camp that wants to eradicate the [religious organization](#) completely, even if it loses its institutional structure, many believers will continue practicing their faith.

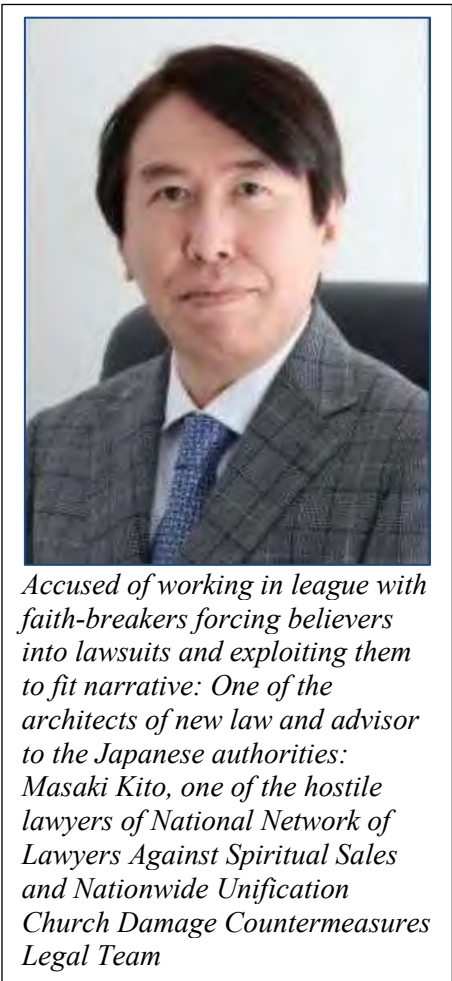


Hostile activists point out that children raised in such families may remain influenced by the worldview transmitted by their parents. National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales claim that this influence can affect a child's ability to make independent choices and to adopt what they regard as the accepted norms of Japanese society.

Duval challenges this reasoning at its foundation. She argues that equating a religious worldview with an obstacle to social conformity places freedom of conscience at risk. In liberal democracies, she notes, the purpose of human rights protections is precisely to safeguard the ability of individuals and communities to hold beliefs that differ from prevailing social

attitudes. Religious liberty would lose much of its meaning if governments could suppress or discourage beliefs simply because they diverge from majority expectations.

A central theme of the [article](#) is the distinction between social norms and human rights. Duval contends that some anti-cult advocates increasingly invoke the language of social integration and normality to justify intervention in religious families. She warns that such arguments invert the logic of international human rights law. Human rights instruments were created not to enforce conformity but to protect diversity of belief and conviction. Whether a religion is popular, unpopular, traditional, new, mainstream, or controversial should not determine the extent of the protection it receives.



To support this argument, Duval points to international standards governing freedom of religion and belief. She emphasizes that the protection of religious freedom extends beyond established faiths and includes minority religions, new religious movements, nonreligious convictions, and even the right not to believe. States are expected to remain neutral among competing worldviews and to refrain from discriminating against groups merely because they are unpopular or viewed with suspicion by the majority.

Against this backdrop, the [article](#) examines proposals advanced by "anti-cult" organizations and hostile lawyers who have advised the Japanese government. These advocates argue that children raised within strongly religious environments are not genuinely free in their religious choices because they adopt beliefs before reaching maturity. Consequently, they recommend exposing such children to "information" specifically designed to challenge the convictions taught by their parents. The stated objective is to restore what they describe as the children's capacity for independent and critical judgment.

Duval sees these proposals very differently. In her view, they amount to a program of ideological reeducation or faith-breaking [See editor's note 1 below]. She argues that the assumption underlying such measures is that children from [Family Federation](#) families are victims by definition, regardless of whether they themselves claim to have suffered any harm. Their religious identity is treated as evidence of manipulation rather than as a potentially legitimate outcome of family life and parental guidance. Patricia Duval writes,

"The plan published by the government in January 2024 - titled 'Proposed Measures to Enhance and Strengthen Support for Victims of the Former [Unification Church](#)' - is entirely designed to reeducate the children of [Family Federation](#) members, who are considered victims even though they have not complained about anything. They are presumed to be under mind control [See editor's note 2 below] and must be de-indoctrinated so that they turn away from their parents' [religion](#)."

To be continued.

On the first installment in Duval's series: [Beyond Dissolution: A Religious Purge in Japan?](#)

On the first installment in Duval's series: [Next Target After Dissolution: Believers' Rights](#)

More from Duval: [Religious Freedom in Jeopardy After Dissolution](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

[Editor's note 1: 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

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.]

[Editor's note 2: In Japan, the "mind-control" myth has been a powerful tool used to stigmatize and suppress new religious movements (NRMs), particularly since the 1980s. The concept suggests that NRMs manipulate or "brainwash" their followers, depriving them of free will and rational thought. This narrative gained traction after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, when public fear of dangerous cults intensified. Although Aum was an extreme and violent exception, the incident cast suspicion on all NRMs, allowing critics, media, and the government to label diverse groups as manipulative or psychologically coercive.

The "mind-control" myth serves multiple social and political functions. It simplifies complex questions of belief, making it easier to portray converts as victims rather than as individuals exercising spiritual agency. This framing justifies legal and social intervention, including the coercive "[deprogramming](#)" of believers - sometimes involving confinement or psychological pressure to force renunciation of faith. Lawyers, ex-member groups, and certain media outlets have used the idea of mind control to construct NRMs as threats to family stability and national order, reinforcing social conformity and Japan's

preference for established, non-controversial religions such as Buddhism and Shinto.

In recent years, the myth resurfaced following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose attacker cited resentment toward the [Family Federation](#). A public outrage largely created by media reignited scrutiny of NRMs, and politicians and journalists revived "mind-control" rhetoric to explain fundraising and recruitment practices. Critics argue that this framing discourages genuine religious tolerance and critical examination of Japan's restrictive religious climate. Overall, the "mind-control" myth functions less as a scientific or psychological concept and more as a moral panic - a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority faiths and to reaffirm mainstream social norms about religion, obedience, and the boundaries of acceptable belief.]

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South Korean headquarters of the [Family Federation](#) to the media on 5th June 2026, in response to a report in the weekly current affairs magazine *Sisa Journal* (시사저널). Translated from the [text on the Korean language website](#) of the [Family Federation](#).



Issuing statement on media allegations: The Korean HQ of the [Family Federation](#) in Cheongpa-dong, Seoul, here at the inauguration in May 2005. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Response and Factual Clarifications by the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification Regarding the Sisa Journal Article (29th May 2026)

The Korean chapter of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (hereinafter “the Korean [Family Federation](#)”) expresses regret that significant portions of the 29th May 2026, *Sisa Journal* article titled “‘Drug-Gate Funds Shared’ in [Unificationism](#) Internal Documents... Signs of Involvement by Senior Paraguayan Officials” were reported through distorted and exaggerated interpretations that differ from the facts.

Accordingly, the Korean [Family Federation](#) presents below the clear facts and legal grounds concerning the major allegations raised in the article.

- 1. The Chaco property where the drug airstrip was discovered is being occupied without authorization by the UCI side; there is no evidence that [Family Federation](#) personnel were involved, and the [Federation](#) itself proactively requested a drug investigation.**

Allegation in the article

The property of [Unificationism](#) (통일교) was allegedly used for drug-related crimes.

Facts and Legal Basis

- Illegal occupation of the property:**
The land in question (the Chaco property in Paraguay) is indeed owned by the South American [Family Federation](#). However, it had previously been leased to **Victoria S.A.**, a corporation affiliated with [UCI \(the side associated with the third son, Moon Hyun-jin\)](#), for the period from 1st March 2001, to 1st March 2021. Although the lease has officially expired, the [UCI side](#) is allegedly continuing to occupy the property unlawfully without authorization.
- Proactive request for investigation by the [Family Federation](#):**
The [Family Federation](#) states that it was the first to detect suspicious illegal activity on the airstrip located on the property. On 5th April 2022, it formally filed a criminal complaint with Paraguay’s anti-drug agency (**SENAD**) and the specialized anti-drug prosecutor’s office, requesting an investigation. The [Federation](#)



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argues that it was not involved in criminal activity but was instead among the most active parties cooperating in efforts to combat drug trafficking.

• **Objective reporting by Reuters:**

According to a Reuters report dated 10th August 2023, Reuters found no evidence that **Unificationism** (통일교) or its members were involved in the drug-smuggling activities targeted by the operation. Reuters also reported that it found no evidence that **Unificationism** (통일교) controlled the airstrip in the Chaco region, which Paraguayan authorities have described as a lawless area.



The Chaco Region (Western Region) of Paraguay.
Illustration: Chat GPT, 6th June 2026, edited.

Supporting Document 1: Copy of the complaint filed with Paraguay’s anti-drug agency and specialized anti-drug prosecutor’s office. [See [original Korean article](#)]

2. **Allegations that **Family Federation** leaders shared drug money were concluded with a final finding of no wrongdoing by Paraguayan judicial authorities in March 2024.**

Allegation in the article

Religious leaders were allegedly involved in laundering drug money connected to former congresswoman Cynthia Tarragó.

Facts and Legal Basis

• **Malicious defamation and orchestrated accusation:**

The **Federation** asserts that these allegations stem from a false complaint maliciously organized by an individual affiliated with the **UCI side**, which is allegedly occupying **Family Federation** property unlawfully, with the purpose of defaming regional leaders in South America.

• **Final dismissal by judicial authorities:**

According to the **Federation**, after a thorough investigation, the **7th Court of Guarantees of Paraguay** (decision dated 14th March 2024) and the **First Specialized Prosecutor’s Office for Money Laundering in Asunción** concluded that former regional leader Seo [given name withheld], national president E. [name withheld], and attorney Mi [name withheld], and other **Family Federation** leaders had no connection whatsoever to the money-laundering case and that there was not a single piece of evidence supporting criminal charges. The matter was therefore dismissed and closed with a finding of no wrongdoing.

Supporting Document 2: Copy of the Paraguayan court and prosecutorial decisions dismissing all allegations against **Family Federation** personnel (non-prosecution and dismissal). [See [original Korean article](#)]

3. **Former Congresswoman Cynthia Tarragó is not the “South American Representative of **Unificationism**.”**

Allegation in the article

A subheading referred to her as the “South American representative of [Unificationism](#) (통일교) caught in an FBI undercover operation.”



Cynthia Tarragó, a former television host and politician from Paraguay who served as a National Deputy of the Republic of Paraguay from 2013 to 2018. Image: Grok xAI, 6th June 2026.

Facts and Basis

- **Not recognized as an official representative:**
The official title corresponding to the [Family Federation's](#) representative in South America is the position of **South America Continental Chair**, a formal clerical office.
- **Only held an honorary service position:**
Former Congresswoman Cynthia Tarragó was neither a public official nor a clergy member of the [Family Federation](#). The [Federation](#) states that she merely served in an honorary volunteer capacity as the South American chair of the *Inter-Parliamentarians Association for Peace*, one of many peace-related affiliated organizations. Reporting her as though she were the official external representative of the [religious organization](#) is described as a clear distortion of the facts.

4. **Allegations that attorney Caballero sought the replacement of a prosecutor unfavorable to [Unificationism](#) are entirely unrelated to the [Family Federation](#).**

Allegation in the article

The Family Federation's chief Paraguayan attorney allegedly colluded with judicial authorities to replace a prosecutor unfavorable to the legal interests of [Unificationism](#) (통일교).

Facts and Legal Basis

- **A completely unrelated case:**
The Federation states that the matter had no connection whatsoever to the [Family Federation](#). Rather, it concerned a so-called wiretapping case related to the **Electrofácil fraud scheme case**, which attorney Caballero was handling independently in a separate legal engagement.
- **No mention of the [Family Federation](#) in court rulings:**
According to the [Federation](#), neither the trial court decision, appellate decision, nor Supreme Court ruling in Paraguay contains a single reference to “Unificationism” or the “[Family Federation](#)“. The organization categorically denies any collusion with judicial authorities or any involvement in illegal lobbying or influence efforts.

Supporting Document 3: Copies of the first-instance, appellate, and Supreme Court judgments involving attorney Caballero. [See [original Korean article](#)]

Conclusion and Statement

The Korean [Family Federation](#) contends that the *Sisa Journal* article ignored clear and objective facts – including official rulings by Paraguayan judicial authorities (such as dismissals and findings of no wrongdoing) and records showing that the [Federation](#) itself initiated criminal complaints – and instead relied primarily on distorted allegations, resulting in a biased report.

The [Federation](#) states that such reporting seriously damages its reputation and credibility. It urges members of the media to conduct thorough fact-checking and to ensure fair and objective reporting based on balanced

pursue fair and objective reporting based on balanced perspectives. The [organization](#) further states that it intends to take all necessary measures, including legal action, against future reports that it considers factually inaccurate or distorted.

Thank you.

5th June 2026

Korean Chapter of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification

(In Korea known as [Unificationism](#) – 통일교)

Featured image above: An airstrip in the Chaco Region of Paraguay. Illustration: Grok xAI, 6th June 2026.

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Unification Church in Japan: After the Dissolution, the Purge. 2. Targeting Believers’ Children

by Patricia Duval | Jun 2, 2026 | [Op-eds Global](#)

New measures now focus on reshaping the upbringing of minors from believing families, raising serious concerns about parental rights and ideological neutrality.

by Patricia Duval. Article 2 of 4. Read [article 1](#).



Yoshihide Sakurai. Screenshot.

Yoshihide Sakurai, another leading figure in the fight against heresy and “cults” in Japan, a professor of sociology at Hokkaido University, and a Nichiren Buddhist priest, recently [gave an interview](#) to the *Asahi Shimbun* on April 18, 2026. He stated that he had long recommended the dissolution of the Church and was pleased that it had been decided, but insisted that this measure was not sufficient. According to him, “the problems associated with the former Unification Church will not simply disappear. Many believers will continue practicing their faith even if the group loses its status as a religious corporation.”

In particular, he expressed concern that second generation believers “continue to suffer, well into adolescence and adulthood, from the effects of what may be called ‘religious abuse’ during their formative years”—referring to their religious education ordinary social norms may be impaired.” He added that “even when such children do not inherit the faith, they often remain strongly affected by their parents’ cognitive biases and by the worldview of the group.”

According to these advocates of thought control, the problem with parents’ religious beliefs lies in the worldview they instill in their children, which, they argue, prevents them from grasping the social norms and appropriate ways of thinking in Japanese society. This constitutes an unacceptable violation of the right to freedom of conscience and belief, as well as the right to live according to one’s chosen worldview and to raise one’s children accordingly.

It should be noted that it was precisely based on “social norms” that the civil courts ruled against the Church and that the High Court ordered the dissolution of its religious association. However, social norms must under no circumstances be used to determine whether a religion should be tolerated or not. All beliefs deserve protection, and the State has a duty to remain neutral in religious matters, as emphasized by the Human Rights Committee in its General Comment No. 22, which gives directions to State parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR): “Article 18 protects theistic, nontheistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. 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.”

In contravention of these international standards, antiheresy and anticult activists are making increasingly extreme statements, calling for measures to prevent the practice of the Unification Church faith and “worldview” in Japan. Relying on the fallacious argument that religious education exerts undue influence, they proposed—and the government adopted—measures aimed at systematically “deindoctrinating” children from the education provided by their parents.



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Privacy Policy



Second-generation Unification Church members protest for freedom of religion in Tokyo. From Instagram.

In their Opinion submitted to the government, NNLASS lawyers argued that children do not voluntarily adopt their parents’ religious beliefs because of their young age. Yet it is precisely the right of parents to educate their children in accordance with their own convictions that States Parties, including Japan, have sought to protect through Article 18(4) of the ICCPR: “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.”

In violation of this protected right, NNLASS argues that, to enable children to regain their ability to choose “freely,” they must be provided with “critical” information that challenges their parents’ beliefs, so that they can regain their “critical thinking skills.”

In their Opinion submitted to the government in December 2023, these lawyers provided the following description of the “problem” to justify the reeducation of children: “Individuals raised by parents who practice a particular religion—especially when they are forced to adopt that religion or are educated according to its teachings—are generally referred to as ‘secondgeneration religious followers.’”

“Secondgeneration followers” are viewed as victims who have not yet realized the extent of their indoctrination and who must be reeducated to turn away from their parents’ faith: “It has also become clear 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, resulting in longterm psychological instability and ongoing difficulties in daily life.”

It is clear from this explanation that the goal is to prevent the children of Unification Church members from becoming believers and followers of that religion in the future.

The plan published by the government in January 2024—titled “Proposed Measures to Enhance and Strengthen Support for Victims of the ‘Former Unification Church’”—is entirely designed to reeducate the children of Unification Church members, who are considered victims even though they have not complained about anything. They are presumed to be under mind control and must be deindoctrinated so that they turn away from their parents’ religion.

The argument that second generation followers “suffer” and need help is a fabrication designed to justify the indoctrination of these children in Japanese public schools. The following developments show that, in reality, if there is any suffering, it is the result of the Japanese authorities’ policy of stigmatization and the destruction of families.

Japan, Religious Liberty, Unification Church



Patricia Duval

Patricia Duval is an attorney and a member of the Paris Bar. She has a Master 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 religion or belief.



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