

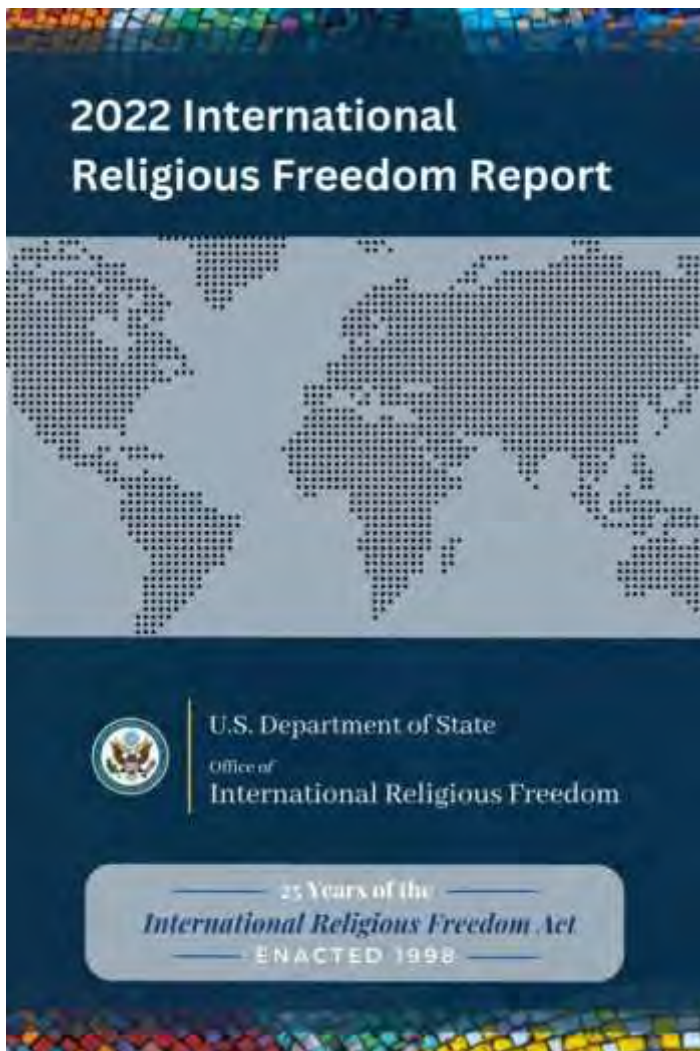
FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan given bottom rank for religious freedom in a democratic nation

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Dr. Massimo Introvigne

Renowned Italian sociologist of religion Dr. Massimo Introvigne states that Japan is experiencing the most dramatic crisis for religious freedom in a democratic nation.



Introvigne made his claim in an opinion piece in *The Washington Times* 24th May 2023, where he commented the U.S. Department of State's yearly report on religious liberty. He praises the report as the most comprehensive of its kind published internationally and says its coverage of the situation in China and Russia is outstanding.

He points out, however, that this year's report clearly suffers from a political bias. Countries regarded as allies of the USA and supportive of the Ukraine, have been dealt with in an unusually soft manner in spite of having serious issues when it comes to religious liberty. Japan is one such country. It is at the same time a key country for U.S. security interests in Asia.

Introvigne claims that the U.S. Department of State makes an effort not to irritate the Japanese government, even though it clearly has done its part to create "the most dramatic religious liberty crisis in a democratic country."

He writes,

"The report by the Department of State mentions that 'Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, (CAP-Freedom of

Conscience), a Paris-based NGO, submitted a series of statements to the UN Human Rights Committee that said that the [Unification Church](#) had become a victim of 'a campaign of intolerance, discrimination, and persecution' in Japan since Abe's assassination. The [church](#) stated its members suffered attacks, assaults, and death threats as a result of negative media attention.' The report also mentions concerns about the new regulations."



Rashad Hussain 15th May 2023

So the report does describe the dramatic situation for religious freedom in Japan. The report's criticism is however to a large extent being cancelled out by the fact that an equal amount of space is granted to traditional anti-religious claims that religions may be harmful. Hence religious liberty ought to be restricted. Those are claims we normally find in communist and totalitarian countries, where religious freedom is seriously curbed in order to "protect the citizens against the harmful aspects of religion".

Introvigne comments this,

"I do not believe that positions favorable and hostile to religious liberty should be given 'equal coverage' in a report about freedom of religion."

Certainly, false anti-religious claims do not belong in this kind of report. To include them may well be in order not to upset the current Kishida administration in Tokyo, that seems to have been swayed by the [communist-orchestrated campaign](#) against the [Family Federation](#). The main organization behind the campaign, National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, was founded by communist and leftwing activist lawyers in order to destroy the [Unification Church](#).



Masumi Fukuda

Award-winning Japanese author and investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda exposed in several articles earlier this year in the [monthly magazine Hanada](#) how allegations made by and promoted by the network proved to be false. The story of the network's star witness, ex-member Sayuri Ogawa (pseudonym), was "debunked as largely false" by Fukuda. And yet Ogawa's testimony may in fact be what swayed the government led by the Liberal Democratic Party to implement measures against religious groups.

Introvigne is critical of this year's Department of State report's section on Japan. According to him, the report ought to have confirmed "the traditional American position that regards stigmatization of certain groups as 'cults' as bigotry, a position reiterated on the sections on Russia and China [...]."

The Italian scholar says,

"And I know for a fact that American ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, Rashad Hussain, had been fully briefed about what is happening in Japan."

Dr. Massimo Introvigne is a former Representative of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) for combating racism, xenophobia, and intolerance against Christians and members of other religions.