

Documents

The Abe Assassination Case: Supplemental Statement Submitted at the 136th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Committee

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ABSTRACT: After the assassination on July 8, 2022, of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (1954–2022), and the subsequent attacks against the Unification Church/Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, the ECOSOC-accredited NGO CAP-LC filed a statement for the 136th session (October 10–November 4, 2022) of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, which largely transcribed the research note by Massimo Introvigne published in this issue of *The Journal of CESNUR*. Since the situation continued to deteriorate, on October 13, 2022, CAP-LC filed a supplemental statement, updating the first one and showing that governmental actions in Japan now threatens the very existence of the Unification Church/Family Federation in that country.

KEYWORDS: Unification Church, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, Assassination of Shinzo Abe, Unification Church in Japan, CAP-LC, National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales.

The statement submitted by CAP-LC on the intolerance, discrimination, and persecution of the Unification Church/Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in Japan concerns an ongoing situation, whose evolution CAP-LC continues to monitor. Unfortunately, as compared to when we submitted our original statement, the situation is getting worse, and there are new elements we believe the Committee should also urgently consider.

1. The “Expert Committee” of the Consumer Affairs Agency

The Expert Committee of the Consumer Affairs Agency convened by the Minister of Consumer Affairs, Mr. Taro Kono, has now started its work (*Asahi Shimbun* 2022a). As mentioned in our submission, it is the cause of serious concern that one of the eight members of the committee is Mr. Masai Kito, a prominent member of the anti-Unification-Church National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales. He is also one of the attorneys who in the past have represented “deprogrammers” engaged in the illegal activity of kidnapping and detaining adult members of the Unification Church for the purpose of forcibly “de-converting” them from their religion (see our original submission).

The very existence of a governmental committee targeting one particular religion is incompatible with Article 18.1 ICCPR on freedom of religion or belief and Article 26 ICCPR on non-discrimination. The malevolence of the initiative is also underlined by the fact that, while including militant opponents of the Unification Church, the committee has no scholars of religion among its members.

Not surprisingly, considering its stated purposes and composition, the committee makes no mystery of its intention to target the Unification Church and to create a special discriminatory regime against it.

According to media reports, anti-cult attorney “Kito pointed out that in addition to the assessment by the Consumer Affairs Agency panel, an inter-ministry body led by the Justice Ministry was looking into how to deal with issues related to the Unification Church. ‘If it turns out that even such a body will face difficulties in tackling the issue, there will be a need to deal with the problem by naming a state minister who would go beyond ministerial boundaries and charged specifically with handling the matter,’ Kito said” (*Asahi Shimbun* 2022a).

The quote clearly indicates that opponents are using the committee as a tool to promote a “final solution” to the Unification Church issue, if necessary by appointing a state minister who will be in charge of a definitive crackdown.

The media also revealed how the committee plans to achieve its aim. First, the panel wants to “examine ways to order shady religious groups to dissolve” (*Asahi Shimbun* 2022b). The use of the adjective “shady” points to the arbitrariness and vagueness of such proposals. “Shady” means suspicious or dubious, categories

that can have no places in the laws. The Ministry of Education has clearly indicated to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs that neither the Unification Church/Family Federation as such nor any of its national leaders have been convicted of any crime. Looking for ways to dissolving the church just because some so-called experts regard it as “shady” is clearly not compatible with Japan’s religious liberty obligations under Article 18 ICCPR. It is rather reminiscent of the practice of totalitarian regimes arresting individuals or prohibiting organizations just because they are *suspected* of crimes.

In fact, the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales has already called for an order of dissolution of the Unification Church/Family Federation (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022), which is supported by the main opposition party in the Parliament (*Nippon.com* 2022). A considerable lobbying effort, supported by some media, is being made by the Network to persuade the government to file a court case to have the Unification Church/Family Federation dissolved. A formal request to the Ministries of Culture and Justice, supported by one of the usual Network’s well-publicized press conferences, was filed on October 11 (*NHK World-Japan* 2022).

Second, the committee plans to propose amendments to the law to restrict “unjust donations to religious corporations.” Committee member Shiori Kanno explained that amending the laws on donations is necessary to distinguish “decent religious corporations” from those that are not “decent” (*Asahi Shimbun* 2022b). Based on its several decades of advocacy for freedom of religion or belief, CAP-LC has learned that invariably vague language opens the door to discrimination. According to what standards would Japanese authorities decide which religions are “decent” or otherwise? What exactly does it mean that a religion is “decent”? Are administrative authorities competent to pass judgement on religions?

In fact, the committee does suggest some standards, but these only exacerbate our concerns further. The panel chair called for laws that would “ban the heinous act of demanding donations” (*Asahi Shimbun* 2022b). This would indicate that only unsolicited donations would be permitted, which would of course be both absurd and incompatible with Article 18 ICCPR.

We also read that the committee plans to prohibit “demanding donations by playing on the spiritual fears of followers and demanding donations when an

individual is unable to make a rational decision” (*Asahi Shimbun* 2022b). Again, the notion of “rational decision” is vague. If the donor is mentally incapacitated, donations are already void under Japanese law. If the donors are mentally competent, calling their decision “irrational” either refers to the discredited and pseudo-scientific theory of brainwashing (Introvigne 2022; Richardson 1993, 2015), or is a case of begging the question by implying that all donations to a “non-decent” religion are by definition irrational, yet another violation of Article 18 ICCPR.

As for the “spiritual fears of followers,” the fear of losing eternal salvation is a constitutive part of monotheistic religions. Psalm 111 in the Jewish and Christian Bible teaches “initium sapientiae timor Domini,” which the prestigious Aberdeen University has adopted as its Latin motto. It means that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Muslim, Jews, and Christians certainly have a fear of going to Hell after they die. This fear is regarded as healthy, and even as “the beginning of wisdom” as it moves towards good deeds. Buddhists are also afraid that, if they misbehave in this life, they may have to spend time in the “cold hells” or experience reincarnations into lower animals. In all religions, among the good deeds to which devotees are led by “spiritual fear” are alms and donations to religious institutions. This is certainly not a unique feature of the Unification Church, and legislating against those who preach the healthiness of spiritual fear would mean legislating against most religions.

One question that is never asked is for what purposes the donations are used? The question is not irrelevant. Media and opponents imply that donations to the Unification Church simply make its leaders rich, a century-old stereotype of anti-religious controversy. In fact, money collected in Japan has also been used extensively for a variety of philanthropic purposes, including the construction, fitting out and maintenance of a hospital in Tokyo, relief for tsunami and earthquake victims in Japan and medical clinics in Africa, as well as a host of other charitable ventures.

The third tool used against the Unification Church is to claim that parents raising second-generation children in the church’s faith are guilty of “child abuse” (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022). As evidence, one case of a second-generation member who attributed a depression to the parents’ involvement in the Unification Church has been mentioned, together with instances where parents were allegedly so busy with church activities that they neglected their children.

Other Unification Church parents were accused of interfering in the romantic life of their daughters and sons (*The Mainichi* 2022).

“Child abuse” is a very specific legal category that refers to physical or sexual violence. Obviously, being too busy with their jobs or other activities, or trying to control the romantic relationships of their children, are frequent complaints sons and daughters raise against their parents—but, even when they have a factual basis, they do not amount to “child abuse.” The implication in the case of the Unification Church is that socializing children into a “non-decent” religion automatically amounts to “child abuse.” Clearly, this argument can be used against any unpopular religious minority, and acting upon it is a breach of Articles 18.1 and 26 ICCPR.

All these are indications that the committee’s real aim is to look for ways ostensibly compatible with a democracy to put the Unification Church out of business, even if it admits it has not committed any crime, and even if the proposed new legislation would end up restricting the religious liberty of all religions.

Other religions are becoming aware of this, and concerned about the fact that Japan threatens not to respect its ICCPR obligations towards religious liberty. We regard it as very significant that our first submission to this Human Rights Committee about the discrimination against the Unification Church in Japan has been presented to its readers by *AsiaNews*, the official news agency of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (*AsiaNews* 2022), which is evidence that our concerns are shared by official institutions and agencies of the Roman Catholic Church.

2. The Complaint Hotline

We also mentioned in our submission that the Ministry of Consumer Affairs was launching a hotline on which citizens can complain about “spiritual sales” and other alleged objectionable practices on the part of the Unification Church. We pointed out that this creates a situation of discrimination prohibited by Articles 18.1 and 26 ICCPR. The hotline should have functioned until September 30, but its operation has been extended indefinitely.

We are now in a position to quote data from the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and the Ministry of Justice that prove the discriminatory nature of the hotline.

The following set of data refers to complaints about so-called “spiritual sales” received by the Ministry between 2012 and 2021, both in general and with specific reference to the Unification Church/Family Federation (Ministry of Consumer Affairs 2022).

Year	Spiritual Sales Complaints (Total)	Related to the Unification Church/Family Federation
2012	3268	229
2013	2875	150
2014	2533	101
2015	1848	88
2016	1483	77
2017	1425	57
2018	1559	61
2019	1312	57
2020	1177	33
2021	1441	27

The chart below shows the number of calls on the hotline from September 5 to 22, 2022. (Ministry of Justice 2022).

	Total Number of Calls September 5 to 22, 2022	Calls related to Unification Church September 5 to 22, 2022
All Complaints included	1952	1317
Complaints related to “money problems”	919	70%

There are two inescapable conclusions supported by all this data. The first is that only a small percentage of the “spiritual sales” complaints received by the Ministry concerned the Unification Church. In 2021, the percentage was 1.87%. We do maintain that “spiritual sales” is a polemical and dubious category. Yet, even accepting it, any discussion of the subject should take into account that in

2021 *more than 98% of the complaints* concerned groups other than the Unification Church/Family Federation. Singling out this church for the “spiritual sales” phenomenon is thus grossly discriminatory and unfair.

The second conclusion is that the measures the Unification Church took to make sure that its members understood the existing laws and complied with them, rather than being merely cosmetic as the opponents maintain, have been remarkably effective. Except in 2018, when numbers had already become small, the complaints concerning the Unification Church continuously decreased, from 229 in 2012 to less than 100 since 2015 and less than 30 in 2021.

Opponents can object that, on the contrary, the hotline instituted in September 2022 gathered a higher number of complaints. Not all those who called the hotline complained about the Unification Church/Family Federation. Others mentioned grievances about other groups. However, the hotline had been advertised as a specific anti-Unification-Church initiative, as confirmed by the fact that out of 1,952 complaints received from September 5 to 22, 1,317 were about the Unification Church. According to the Ministry’s website, 70% were about “money troubles,” and this should include the “spiritual sales” (Ministry of Justice 2022).

How was it possible that complaints about the Unification Church, which had constantly decreased from 2012 to 2021, a year when they were reduced to 27, suddenly grew to 1,317 (or 922, considering only the “money troubles”) in one single month of 2022? In fact, this is further evidence of the discriminatory practices of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and of the violation of Articles 18 and 26 ICCPR.

If undergraduate students conducted a survey and adopted the methodology for it being used by the hotline, they would rightly be ridiculed by their teachers. Not only does the hotline by definition create a self-selected sample but it is easily open to manipulation by the enemies of the Unification Church. Furthermore, there is no means to verify whether those who call the hotline are who they say they are, or whether their complaints are true, exaggerated or merely made up. If we take the Ministry’s data at face value, we see that 7.5% of those who called claimed to be members of the religious movement they criticized, 24% said they were ex-members, and the rest, i.e., the majority of the callers, identified themselves as relatives or friends or just concerned citizens. Also, 65% of the

complaints mentioned incidents that happened more than 10 years ago or did not specify a date.

But there is no reason to accept these data at face value. Anybody who wanted to slander the Unification Church or support calls for its dissolution might simply have organized a small army of trolls calling the hotline and reporting imaginary wrongdoings. This would not have been something new in the field of campaigns against “cults.” In 2020, the results of a Dutch survey conducted via the Internet, to which anybody could participate, about unreported cases of sexual abuse among the Jehovah’s Witnesses were quickly dismissed by scholars and politicians when it emerged that anti-cult websites both in the Netherlands and abroad had called their supporters to participate in the survey and create a majority of negative reports (Folk, Introvigne, and Melton 2020).

Assuming that some reports to the hotline were true, their proliferation in contradiction to pre-2022 Ministry data simply proves that, when the media and the government itself excite feelings of hostility against a minority, as happened after the assassination of Abe, some citizens react and start complaining about that group, which in turn perpetuates animosity and discrimination.

Accordingly, calls to the hotline do not prove anything, except that a witch hunt against the Unification Church, which is given no means in the course of the committee’s procedures to defend itself, is taking place in Japan, ignoring the fact that the Ministry’s own data prove that the number of complaints about “spiritual sales” in general overwhelmingly concerned groups other than the Unification Church, and that the latter had taken effective measures leading to a substantial decrease of the cases throughout the years.

3. Discrimination and Violence Against Unification Church/Family Federation Members

We do acknowledge that the government of Japan is not directly responsible for the continuing acts of discrimination and violence against devotees of the Unification Church/Family Federation. However, we respectfully suggest that these incidents should be considered by the Human Rights Committee as poisonous fruits of the tree of slander and hate speech, for which the government

is responsible by virtue of its promotion of the “expert committee” and of the lawyers associated with the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales.

Indeed, the list of such incidents is impressive. Many have targeted the Women’s Federation for World Peace International (WFWP), an organization founded by the leader of the Unification Church/Family Federation, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, which is in general consultative status with ECOSOC at The United Nations. These incidents are particularly disturbing because they add a gender element and discriminate against a group whose aim is to promote women internationally, and whose good work has been repeatedly acknowledged by the United Nations.

Because of its connection with the Unification Church, the WFWP has been slandered in no less than 3,000 tweets since the Abe assassination. As a result, companies that had sponsored the WFWP in the past, withdrew their sponsorship, hotels and municipalities refused to rent halls for its events, and even Tokyo Flower, a company that for several years had supplied flowers to WFWP, has informed the organization that it will be denied its services in future. Some universities have asked their students not to participate in WFWP activities, and some women were abused by their husbands and threatened with divorce if they continued to be involved with WFWP.

The witnesses we interviewed feel strongly that the government is not effectively protecting their rights. One of the slanderers on social media is the same attorney Masai Kito who is a member of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs’ committee. According to the abused women of the WFWP, the attitude of the government suggests it has more sympathy for the slanderers and for those committing acts of discrimination than for the victims of such abuse.

4. Conclusions

Most unfortunately, every day the situation in Japan is becoming worse. The hysteria about the Unification Church/Family Federation is breaching the protective walls erected by the ICCPR to protect human rights and freedom of religion or belief in Japan. We reiterate our request that this matter be addressed with the utmost urgency.

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