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## **Unification Church before the UN claiming persecution over Abe's killing**

***In the eye of the storm since the murder of the former prime minister, the Church founded by Rev Moon filed a complaint with the UN Human Rights Committee, saying that a "national tragedy" has been turned "into a bizarre narrative that makes the alleged assassin into a victim". The Church also reported that its members have been the victims of attacks. Meanwhile, the affair remains a hot political topic in the country.***

AsiaNews (06.10.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3SNiiUr> - The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, better known as the Unification Church founded by South Korean Rev Sun Myung Moon, has filed a formal complaint with the United Nations Human Rights Committee claiming that it is the victim of "a campaign of intolerance, discrimination and persecution" in Japan.

The religious group has been in the eye of the storm since last July following the death of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was shot to death by a man harbouring resentment towards the Church over huge donations his mother made to it.

The complaint, filed by the Paris-based Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience (CAP-LC), calls for the UN Human Rights Committee to address "the ongoing suffering" of members of the Unification Church in Japan during its 136th session scheduled for 10 October-4 November 2022.

The 22-page complaint alleges that the rights of its members in Japan "were seriously, systematically and blatantly violated" after the 8 July murder by a man who hated the Unification Church.

The accusations also apply to some Japanese lawyers and media for "twist[ing] this national tragedy into a bizarre narrative that makes the alleged assassin into a victim of the Unification Church and blames the Church for the assassination."

As a result, "Church members have suffered hundreds of personal attacks, assaults, death threats, acts of vandalism, and other forms of public abuse."

The complaint slams public efforts to "name and shame" Japanese politicians who have participated in events linked to the Unification Church.

It appeals to Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – to which Japan is a signatory – to protect both the right of citizens to participate in the

democratic process and the freedom of elected representatives to “consult and cooperate with leaders and members of the religions of their choice”.

In Japan, the Unification Church remains a hot political issue. On Monday, speaking before the upper house of parliament, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said he is ready to listen to the “harsh voices” of people who criticise the ties between many members of his party and the religious group.

Responding to calls for the Church’s dissolution, he noted that the issue “needs to be decided carefully in terms of freedom of religion”.

For his part, Hideyuki Teshigawara, one of the leaders of the Unification Church, held a press conference on 22 September at the Church’s Tokyo headquarters to respond to criticism over what happened to the family of Abe's murderer.

On that occasion, he explained that the Church would “take into consideration the financial situation of followers and ensure that donations are not excessive” while respecting the “free will” of its members.

*Photo: Asianews*

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## **Japan and the Unification Church: The Case Before the UN Human Rights Committee**

***The assault on the Unification Church after the Abe assassination is incompatible with several articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.***

*by Massimo Introvigne*



*Thierry Valle, President of CAP-LC, at the United Nations.*

The United Nations Human Rights Committee is the body that monitors the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) by the states parties. From October 10 to November 4, 2022, it will hold its 136<sup>th</sup> session in Geneva. Among the countries whose compliance with the ICCPR will be examined in this session will be Japan.

Among the documents submitted by NGOs in consultative status with the ECOSOC, the United Nations Economic and Social Council, which will be discussed in the session, **one has been filed by CAP-LC** (Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, Coordination of Associations and Individuals for Freedom of Conscience).

It deals with the violations of the ICCPR in Japan perpetrated against the Unification Church, now known as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification—although CAP-LC has kept the name “Unification Church” as it is the one mostly used in the media. After the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, both the corporate rights of the Unification Church/Family Federation and the individual rights of its members and those who attend events of related organizations have been violated in Japan.

As discussed in **a series of Bitter Winter articles**, Abe was killed by a man who had never been a member of the Unification Church. His mother went bankrupt twenty years ago, and he blamed it on her excessive donations to that church. He decided to punish Abe since the former Prime Minister had attended via video an event of an organization connected with the Unification Church, and sent a message to another. The assassin had also planned to kill the leader of the Unification Church, which was clearly the victim in this incident, together with Abe.

However, there is an organized opposition to the Unification Church in Japan, and it managed to persuade the public opinion that the religious group was somewhat responsible for the homicide. The twisted logic was that, had his mother not donated to

the Unification Church and gone bankrupt (in 2002), the assassin would not have killed Abe (in 2022).

Within a context of media ready to believe almost every slanderous charge against groups labeled as "cults," this faulty argument was taken seriously, and serious breaches of the rights guaranteed to the Unification Church and its members under the ICCPR followed.

CAP-LC denounces, first, a violation of Articles 17 and 19.3.a ICCPR, which protect privacy, honor, and reputation. CAP-LC noted that the Unification Church was mostly slandered by attorneys who are members of the "National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales", an organization created with the specific purpose of fighting the Unification Church. It includes lawyers who were previously involved in defending deprogrammers, i.e., "faith breakers" who tried to "deconvert" from the Unification Church adult members kidnapped and illegally detained by or on behalf of their parents. Japanese courts have finally agreed with their Western counterparts that deprogramming is illegal, but the lawyers in the Network continue both to slander and to attack the Unification Church through legal actions, accusing it of fraudulently collecting donations through what they call "spiritual sales."

CAP-LC notes that the story of the so-called "spiritual sales" is told in a defamatory and tendentious way by the Network. When examined more closely, Unification Church practices about donations are not very much different from those of many other religions.

The Network is a private group but, CAP-LC notes, "It is a cause for great concern that lawyers from the Network, which is certainly not an unbiased organization, nor one friendly to religious liberty, are currently participating in official 'commissions of experts,' including one convened by the Consumer Affairs Agency and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, which are suggesting further measures against the Unification Church."

By aligning itself with a group hostile to religious liberty, the Japanese government clearly violates its ICCPR commitments, argues CAP-LC. "We are deeply concerned, it writes, by the fact that proposals in Japan that the already restrictive 2000 law [on door-to-door sales] should be amended to prohibit soliciting donations as well are seriously considered, including by the above-mentioned official commission, where voices are heard that clearly state that the aim is to prevent donations to the Unification Church." Obviously, "this would violate a number of ICCPR provisions, including freedom of religion or belief (Article 18), non-discrimination (Article 26), and unreasonable limitations of rights and freedoms of associations to self-organize themselves and obtain the necessary resources for their operations (Article 22). Donations to one particular religion would be treated differently from donations to other religions, based on the idea that this religion practices something called 'psychic marketing,' a bizarre label unknown to international scholars of religion that hides the discredited and pseudo-scientific idea of 'brainwashing.'"

Another reason for concern, CAP-LC continues, is "the inauguration on September 5, 2022, of a government-operated 'telephone consultation service,' through which officers will direct those who are 'experiencing trouble' with the Unification Church to 'professional consultation entities including those offering legal help,' by which they presumably mean anti-Unification-Church lawyers. The fact that this service is offered only with respect to the Unification Church and not to countless other religious (and non-

religious) groups whose members may be 'experiencing trouble' is a clear case of discrimination prohibited by the ICCPR."



*Local and international media covered the Unification Church protests in Seoul against slander and discrimination in Japan.*

Article 25 ICCPR guarantees the right of political participation to all citizens irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, or religion. This article is also violated in Japan by proposals that political parties should be prevented from including members of the Unification Church among their electoral volunteers, and politicians should be forbidden from attending events of organizations connected with the same church. CAP-LC adds that "The actions of political parties that, scared by media campaigns, ask their members not to cooperate with the Universal Peace Federation [the Unification-Church-connected organization to which Abe had sent a video and a written message] or the Unification Church, also violate Article 25 ICCPR. In a democratic system, political parties should also respect the ICCPR in their activities and statements."

Individual Japanese members of the Unification Church, CAP-LC continues, have "experienced violations of their rights to personal security (article 9 ICCPR) and not to be discriminated because of their belief in the workplace and in schools and other educational establishments (article 18.3 ICCPR)." This is a consequence of the hate speech liberally disseminated against them, and the situation is getting every day worse. CAP-LC reports that "In the period from Abe's assassination to the end of August 2022, the Unification Church in Japan had documented more than 400 hate incidents against its churches, organizations, and individual members. But they continue, and the number is probably higher, since not all local incidents are necessarily reported to the headquarters."

In addition to attacks against Unification Church's places of worship, individual believers are also suffering. CAP-LC offers some examples. "On July 18, a female believer in Gunma Prefecture was physically assaulted by her son and reported to the hospital with a broken rib. On July 23 in Aichi, a husband entered the premises of the Unification Church and beat his wife there. On August 16, in Nagano, a believer was badly beaten by her

husband because she refused to leave the Unification Church. In several cases, believers were threatened with divorce by spouses who are not members of the Church. In some cases, divorce proceedings have indeed started. A couple in Gunma Prefecture who lived with their son and daughter-in-law was expelled from the latter's home on July 15, because they refused to leave the Unification Church. Many believers reported their spouses or other relatives had destroyed their Unification Church literature and, in some cases, even their cell phones, trying to prevent them from communicating with the Church."

The broader context of this persecution is a widespread violation in Japan of Article 18 ICCPR, on freedom of religion or belief, by claiming that "cults" such as the Unification Church are not genuine "religions" and are not entitled to religious liberty. There are proposals that Japan should introduce an anti-cult law similar to the widely criticized 2001 About-Picard law in France, and as France did, tax donations to "cults" as revenue rather than gifts. Those who make such proposals ignore that France consistently lost cases where it tried to tax donations to "cults" at the European Court of Human Rights. It had to give back to three different movements the money of the tax bills they had already paid, plus interests and legal fees.

"All this, CAP-LC concludes, is not allowed by the ICCPR, and Japan should be reminded that the commitments it assumed when it signed the ICCPR cannot be held hostage to the shifting winds of public opinion. While respecting freedom of expression, Japan should also regulate its media, taking into account documents from the U.N. and other international institutions about hate speech and media discrimination against minority religions."

CAP-LC expressed the "hope that in view of the ongoing suffering of the members of the Unification Church/Family Federation in Japan, these matters may be addressed urgently" by the Human Rights Committee.

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## **Abe's assassination: an anti-cult hate crime?**

***Media hysteria against the Unification Church, not the Unification Church itself, may have excited the weak mind of the killer.***

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (15.07.2022) - <https://bit.ly/30aPSAI> - Now the dust is settling, and we may start understanding why Yamagami Tetsuya assassinated the former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. Although not everything is clear, we are told that Yamagami had a grudge against the Unification Church, or rather what became its largest branch after the death of Reverend Moon Sun Myung in 2012, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) led by the Reverend's widow. Yamagami was never a member of the Unification Church or the FFWPU but his mother was. Reportedly, she made significant donations to the religious movement, which the son saw as the cause of the ruin of their family.

Yamagami test-fired his weapon by shooting at a building that had been once used as a FFWPU church before assassinating Abe. Reportedly, he told the police that he wanted to assassinate a FFWPU leader—possibly Ms. Moon herself—but since this was technically

difficult he killed Abe instead. He accused Abe of having promoted the FFWPU. Abe, in fact, sent video remarks to two events of the Universal Peace Foundation (UPF), which is legally independent from FFWPU although it has the same founders and maintains a close connection with the religious movement.

Abe was just one among dozens of world leaders who sent videos to UPF events, participated in its rallies, or officially received its leaders. As [a study of the UPF published in Bitter Winter](#) documented, these leaders include Donald Trump, former UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon (not a relative of Reverend Moon), Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen, and former Prime Minister of Portugal and President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso. Pope Francis received in a private meeting the UPF President on July 1, 2019, and the meeting was duly indexed [in the official Press Bulletin of the Holy See](#). At the United Nations, where thousands of NGOs have special consultative status, UPF is a member of the elite club of leading groups that have achieved general consultative status.

Although in public neither the FFWPU nor the police have commented on when the killer's mother donated to Ms. Moon's movement, a reliable source told Bitter Winter that significant donations stopped several years ago. Yet, her son decided to act now. Why?

Diagnosing psychiatric problems post factum is never recommended, but those who claim that Yamagami was not operating with a full deck may not be wrong. Not all the children of mothers who donated to the FFWPU protested by assassinating UPF events participants.

There are two categories, however, that may help us understanding what happened. First, "hate crimes" are defined as those committed against individual victims as a manifestation of the perpetrators' hate against a whole category. Hate crimes were an important part of my portfolio when I served in 2011 as the Representative of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) for combating racism, xenophobia, and religious intolerance, and I presided several meetings on the subject. Yamagami's resentment was not individually against Abe but against a category, the (real or imaginary) supporters of the FFWPU. In this sense, it was a typical hate crime.

The second category is the anti-cult violence. In 2018, I was asked to guest-edit a [special issue of the prestigious "Journal of Religion and Violence"](#) on the subject of new religious movements (called "cults" by their opponents and popular media) and violence. In my introduction, I explained that the relation is twofold. New religious movements, just as groups within mainline religions such as pedophile Catholic priests or terrorists who use or misuse the name of Islam, may certainly be guilty of violence. They may also be victims of violence, as I illustrated through several cases which had targeted inter alia the Unification Church.

In Japan, specific incidents where the leader and several members of a new religious movement, Aum Shinrikyo, committed horrific acts of violence, including the deadly sarin gas attack against the Tokyo subway in 1995, created a climate even more hostile to "cults" in the media than in other countries. While this is in some way understandable, media should always consider that generalizing and stereotyping is a sure recipe to create hate crimes.

A simple look at how the Japanese media discussed the Unification Church and the FFWPU, not only after Abe's assassination but also before, shows that their coverage was predominantly hostile and sometimes verged on the insult. They offered a tribune

to [apostate ex members](#) and greedy lawyers who tried to persuade relatives of those who had donated to the Unification Church to sue asking to recover the money. It is of course possible that donations, as it happens in many religious organizations (including some part of the mainline), were solicited in a pushy manner. However, the greedy lawyers did win some cases but lost others, and stereotyping the Unification movement as a “cult” went well beyond the technicalities of these cases (and ignored pushy donation techniques within mainline religions).

Of course, I am not suggesting that media anti-cult coverage of the Unification Church in Japan (which continues after Abe’s assassination and influences the media of other countries) produced the crime. After all, millions did read the same articles and did not kill anybody. If I learned something in dealing at an institutional level with hate speech, is that it does not persuade stable minds to commit crimes. For this reason, it may be easily regarded as inoffensive. A wrong conclusion, because weak minds also exist, and the effect of hate speech on them may be devastating.

While some media instill in their readers the idea that the Unification Church may be somewhat responsible for what happened, in fact what may have influenced the unstable mind of Yamagami may have been precisely the media anti-cult campaigns, and the hate speech directed for years at the Unification Church.

*Photo: Shinzo Abe’s video message to the Universal Peace Federation’s 2021 “Think Tank 2022 Rally of Hope.” Source: Universal Peace Federation.*