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Written statement* submitted by Universal Peace Federation, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 May 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Intolerance, Discrimination and Persecution against Members and Supporters of the Former Unification Church (UC*), Currently Known as Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) in Japan**

Introduction

Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated on July 8, 2022, by a man who justified his actions by reference to resentment he claims to have harbored against the Unification Church, a group that he was never part of. The media reported that this was caused by a very large donation the killer's mother (who was and remains a church member) had given to the church some 20 years before. It omitted to report that 13 years before, the church had refunded half of the money on the basis that the donation was overly generous, given the family's financial circumstances. It also neglected to outline the very serious mental health issues in the assassin's family that long predated any involvement by them with the Unification Church and which caused his father to commit suicide and must inevitably have affected the children before his mother had any connection to the church.

The leftist media in Japan used the assassin's explanation to turn the truth on its head and to portray him as the victim and the church as the perpetrator of the crime and ignored all other factors. This false narrative was then used by various forces in Japanese society to launch a campaign of intolerance, hatred, discrimination, and persecution against the Unification Church, now known as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification. During this campaign, the human rights of the members and supporters of FFWPU** and affiliated organizations in Japan have been systematically violated and continue to be so.

As has since become very clear through a statement by the leadership of the Japanese Communist Party in the November 6 issue of "Sunday Mainichi", perpetrating this false narrative and to eliminating the FFWPU** in Japan was part of "the final war against the Unification Church". This war had been waging for over half a century in revenge for all that the International Federation for Victory over Communism "IFVOC", a Unification Church affiliate, had done to expose the fallacies of communism.

Now, based on widespread support from the leftist media in Japan this "war" has succeeded in fanning the flames of hatred against the FFWPU** first ignited by the false narrative and, due to its plummeting poll ratings with the public, tempting the Japanese government to take draconian actions against the organization.

1/ Violations of ICCPR Articles 17 and 19.3.a: Arbitrary Interference with Privacy and Attacks on Honor and Reputation

The National Network of "Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales", created in 1987 as an Anti-Unification Church organization, were invited to participate (despite their very obvious bias against the church), in an official "commissions of experts" now being convened by the Consumer Affairs Agency and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs to review which measure are to be taken against the FFWPU**.

2/ Violations of ICCPR Articles 18 (Freedom of Religion or Belief), 26 (Non-Discrimination), 14 (Entitlement to a Fair and Public Hearing by a Competent, Independent and Impartial Tribunal):

Proposals were made by the "Commission of experts" and the Network's lobby that the already restrictive 2000 "Act on Specified Commercial Transactions" should be amended to prohibit soliciting donations with the clear aim to prevent donations to the UC*/FFWPU**. Donations to this particular religion, as it became clear, would be treated differently from donations to all other religions.

The very existence of a governmental committee targeting one particular religion is incompatible with ICCPR Articles 18.1 (freedom of religion or belief) and 26 (non-discrimination). It begs belief that as partisan a person as Mr. Masaki Kito, a prominent member of the anti - FFWPU** Network of Lawyers who is closely associated with the illegal practice of “deprogramming” of church members whereby over a 30-year period, some 4300 Unification Church members were forcibly detained and forced to renounce their faith, should have been appointed as a member of this Committee in complete disregard of fundamental principles of fairness and natural justice. The Network is lobbying to persuade the government to dissolve the FFWPU**; to restrict its ability to raise donations; and to pass legislation rendering FFWPU** parents guilty of “child abuse” for raising their children in the church’s faith.

In September 2022 the Ministry of Consumer Affairs launched a hotline on which citizens can complain about alleged objectionable practices on the part of the FFWPU but no other faith. Previously, more than 98% of the complaints to the Consumer Affairs Agency concerned groups other than the FFWPU**. The only reason to single out the FFWPU** now is that the pressures of the anti-FFWPU** lobby and the media created a political and electoral problem for the government. This is a clear violation of ICCPR Article 18.

Second, probing with a view to requesting the dissolution of a religious organization that has not been found guilty of any crime is unprecedented in Japan’s legal history and contrasts with Japan’s ICCPR obligations with respect to freedom of religion or belief.

Third, the fact that the FFWPU** has been singled out for special hostile treatment, and the attitude of politicians, points to the fact that the FFWPU** can hardly expect fair treatment, which is contrary to Article 14 ICCPR. Rather than being presumed innocent, the FFWPU** is presumed guilty from the very beginning of the process.

3/ Violation of ICCPR Articles 9 (Personal Security) and 18.3 (Discrimination and Violence because of a Religious Affiliation, in the Workplace, Schools, and Other Educational Establishments)

Members of FFWPU** in Japan are experiencing hate speech, death threats, racist slogans, physical assaults, damage to property etc.

Previously in 2022, Prime Minister Kishida told the Lower House Budget Committee that neither the FFWPU** nor its legal representatives or leaders had been convicted of any crime. He confirmed that violations of provisions of the Civil Code ascertained by courts in civil (as opposed to criminal) cases are not included among the “violations of laws” that may be a cause for dissolution.

On October 17, 2022, the Prime Minister changed his mind, allegedly on the basis of complaining calls received by the hotline, which are recorded but not verified. The government’s own data indicate that they largely refer to incidents that allegedly happened several years ago. The complaints related to the FFWPU** submitted to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs before the Abe assassination had continuously decreased to less than 30 in 2021.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology announced that it will start a probe into the FFWPU** and commence a legal case seeking a dissolution order. The “acts harming public welfare” justifying such an order are the alleged “spiritual sales” by the church. Many other faith groups in Japan and around the world are known to engage in very similar activities but those have never been questioned by the Japanese authorities, demonstrating the highly discriminatory nature of these accusations. While no members have been incriminated or arrested, a climate of intolerance and discrimination, fueled by hate speech, has caused many hate crimes against members and supporters of FFWPU** in Japan.

There is evidence of domestic violence against women who are members of the FFWPU** by husbands who do not belong to the church and who are heavily affected by slander campaigns against it, of young believers bullied in school, and of adult members harassed in the workplace. There have been threats against churches and ministers, and death threats, often accompanied by racist and xenophobic insults against a “Korean” group (FFWPU**/UC*), on social media.

Conclusion

In its submissions on September 9, October 13, and November 4, 2022, the religious freedom defender NGO, “CAP-Freedom of Conscience” has called upon the UN system to demand that discriminatory actions and persecution against FFWPU** in Japan and its supporters by the Japanese government cease immediately. However, such calls have so far had no effect. In the meantime, slander, discrimination and violent persecution are ongoing unabated and church members and supporters continue to suffer severe damage and existential threats to their faith community as well as to their ability to practice their own religion.

We implore the Human Rights Council to take action and request from Japan to immediately end these gross human rights violations against ethnic and religious minorities like the Unification Church/Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in Japan.

* "UC" is used as abbreviation for Unification Church

** "FFWPU" is used as abbreviation for Family Federation for World Peace and Unification