

UPF Europe and the Middle East: Japan’s Human Rights Examined at UN Side Event in Geneva

Jacques Marion
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Geneva, Switzerland – During the 60th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, on September 26, 2025, UPF hosted a side event titled “Japan and Human Rights.” This marked the fourth such event held in Geneva within a year, aimed at exposing violations of human rights and religious freedom amid the ongoing campaign against the Unification Church in Japan.



The one-hour program, moderated by **Mr. Jacques Marion**, president of UPF-Europe and the Middle East, began with a recorded address by **Dr. Ján Figel**, former EU commissioner and deputy prime minister of Slovakia, and the first European Union special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU. Dr. Figel currently serves as president of the Forum for Religious Freedom—

Europe (FOREF).

In his speech, Dr. Figel expressed deep concern over the Japanese government's case to dissolve the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly known as the Unification Church), stating that it clearly contravenes Japan's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. He argued that the case rests on dubious evidence and politically motivated accusations, pointing to its ideological roots in decades-old activities by the Japanese Communist Party. Dr. Figel also noted that many of the plaintiffs had reportedly been subjected to coercion and confinement. If the district court's ruling is upheld, he warned, it could severely damage Japan's democratic credibility and set a dangerous precedent for other minority religions.



The second speaker, **Mr. Norishige Kondo**, deputy director of the Legal Department of the Japan Family Federation, delivered a presentation titled "The Danger of Religious Eradication Based on the Manipulation of Public Opinion." He outlined how minority religions in Japan have become targets of left-leaning media narratives and described how a group of anti-Unification Church lawyers exploited the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to vilify the Church for political gain. He explained that intense social pressure in Japan has enabled the government's dissolution case to evolve into a broader campaign of organized repression. This includes systemic dismissal of legal claims by church members and widespread social exclusion.



Ms. Patricia Duval, a French attorney specializing in international human rights law and legal counsel to the Japanese branch of the Family Federation, addressed the legal implications of the dissolution case under international standards. She emphasized that the move violates international human rights law and breaches Japan's constitutional obligation of religious neutrality. Duval criticized the inclusion of the vague concept of "public welfare" in Japanese law as a justification for curbing civil liberties – a provision that the U.N. Human Rights Committee has long condemned. She also warned about government plans to re-educate children of Family Federation members to discourage them from following their parents' faith.

The final speaker was **Ms. Yoshiko Nishi**, a second-generation member of the Family Federation currently residing in Japan. Born to a Japanese father and American mother, married to a Korean husband, and a mother of five, she gave a personal account of the persecution faced by Unificationist families since the assassination of Prime Minister Abe. She described the climate of harassment: loss of employment, damaged reputations, and school bullying of children. Counselors, she said, are being trained to view children of religious families as victims. Donations are portrayed as exploitation.



She shared how her teenage son was emotionally affected after seeing his parents' church labeled as criminal on national television. She also spoke about widespread cases of forced deprogramming, in which thousands of adult Church members had been kidnapped and confined in an effort to coerce them into abandoning their faith.



“I love Japan – its people, and its spirituality,” she said. “But today, Japan stands at a crossroads. Please raise your voice for religious freedom in Japan.”

