

Media Statement
July 5, 2024

United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteurs' joint opinion on the Q&A Guidelines

On June 30, 2024, four United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteurs publicly released a joint opinion addressed to the Government of Japan regarding the guidelines, “Q&A on Responses to Child Abuse Related to Religious Beliefs, etc.” that were issued by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare. (See [link](#) to joint opinion.) The UN experts expressed serious concerns about (1) an unconventional definition of abuse that appears to target internationally accepted and harmless family worship practices protected by freedom of religion or belief, and (2) a subsequent marked increase in hate speech and hate crimes against our faith community and other religious minorities.

The joint letter sent to Japan on April 30, 2024, was signed by the Special Rapporteurs on freedom of religion or belief; the right to education; the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. These four highly respected international rights experts respectfully offered the following observations:

- “We are concerned by the fact that measures ostensibly taken to ensure that child abuse can be identified and effectively addressed, while commendable in principle, may in fact undermine the rights of children, especially those from religious or belief minorities... and of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions, as set out [in international human rights standards].”
- “We are also concerned that in the context of heightened suspicion of religious or belief minorities, the Q&A Guidelines in their current form may facilitate stigma, social pressure, or bullying of children belonging to religion or belief communities.”
- “The Guidelines were drafted in consultation with the Japanese Society for Cult Prevention and Recovery (JSCPR), whose Chairperson called for the recognition of a new type of child abuse by religious groups in October 2022, and had previously made public statements denigrating the Jehovah’s Witnesses and other religious or belief minorities. While the Jehovah’s Witnesses are not mentioned in the Q&A Guidelines as such, their practice and activities appear to be targeted by the new policy.”
- “We wish to express our serious concern about what appears to be an emerging pattern of attacks and threats against the Jehovah’s Witnesses, against a background of heightened stigma and negative attitudes towards religious or belief minorities in Japan.”

Without a doubt, the protection of children against abuse is of the utmost importance. However, Jehovah’s Witnesses agree with the Special Rapporteurs in that the government has inadvertently put children at risk by basing the Q&A Guidelines solely on the misleading assertions of anti-cult organizations and former believers, internationally known for going to great lengths to target religious minorities.

Jehovah's Witnesses welcome the opportunity for productive dialogue with Japanese officials to address the misinformation spread by anti-cult organizations and former believers and to ensure children continue to have the right to peacefully worship with their families as protected by the Constitution of Japan and international human rights covenants, to which Japan is party.

For more information, please contact the Japan Public Information Department of Jehovah's Witnesses at pid.jp@jw.org or go to our official website, <https://jw-japan.org>, which includes several more authoritative opinions by international experts who, like the Special Rapporteurs, have serious concerns with the Q&A Guidelines.