

Media Statement November 21, 2023

Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan deplore the disinformation and mischaracterization spread by a few critics about their beliefs and practices. This disinformation is the same as that spread by Russia against Jehovah's Witnesses and has been repeatedly condemned by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR),¹ the United Nations Human Rights Committee,² and the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.³

Jehovah's Witnesses have been present in Japan for nearly 100 years. They come from all walks of life and all professions. They are known worldwide for being law-abiding and peaceful citizens. It is therefore deeply offensive to the more than 214,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan and the more than 8.7 million worldwide to imply that their beliefs are in any way harmful or that individual Witnesses cannot make independent decisions. Jehovah's Witnesses are an open and transparent organization—their publications are freely accessible on www.jw.org for anyone to consult, and in more than 1,000 languages.

A. Jehovah's Witnesses are a “child safe” organization

Jehovah's Witnesses do not tolerate any form of child abuse. Child protection experts have confirmed that Jehovah's Witnesses are a “child safe” organization and that their child protection policy and practices “reflect a strong commitment to the protection of children.”⁴

The child protection policy of Jehovah's Witnesses meets or exceeds all legal requirements.⁵ Their policy, which is available in dozens of languages on the jw.org website, clearly states that elders will report an allegation of child abuse to the authorities whenever it appears that any child might be in danger of abuse, and they will do so whether the allegation involves a parent, a guardian, or anyone else.⁶ Elders also clearly inform the person making the allegation of their absolute right to report the allegation to the authorities.

Jehovah's Witnesses ensure that all congregants, not just religious ministers, are aware of their child protection policy. In July 2019, all congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan and worldwide devoted three religious services to discussing the child protection policy of Jehovah's Witnesses.⁷ This is not a new development. For more than 35 years, Jehovah's Witnesses have published dozens of articles and videos, in hundreds of languages, providing parents and their children with clear, practical, and age-appropriate advice on how to protect children from abuse.⁸

Child protection experts have commended Jehovah's Witnesses for the clarity and frankness of the material they have published on this important subject, noting that the publications of Jehovah's Witnesses “demonstrate a strong commitment to education about the problem of child sexual abuse, both to adults in their congregations and to the children themselves ... [Jehovah's Witnesses] do more to educate all their members about child sexual abuse than most mainline [religious] denominations.”⁹—(See, for example, the video [Protect Your Children](#).)

B. Education of children and family life

Parents who are Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Bible contains timeless wisdom that can assist them in training their children to become balanced adults and model citizens who contribute to society in a meaningful way and who show respect towards people of all ages, genders, nationalities, races, and religions.

The ECHR has repeatedly ruled that it is entirely lawful (and reasonable) for parents who are Jehovah's Witnesses to provide their children with a balanced religious education to so as to help their children become responsible adults. For example, in *Taganrog LRO and Others v. Russia*, the ECHR ruled that "decisions about whether to give a child a religious or non-religious education, whether to involve him or her in sports, science, arts or music, whether to provide unstructured free time or a strict daily routine, and whether to keep company with like-minded people, are to be made exclusively by the child's parents or, as the case may be, the custodial parent. Such decisions fall within the sphere of the private and family life which is protected from unjustified State interference ... [the Russian courts] did not point to any evidence showing that the organisation itself or any non-parent members of the organisation had resorted to improper methods for involving minors in its activities, whether against their own will or that of their parents. On the contrary, the involvement of children in the community's religious life appears to have been approved and encouraged by one of the parents who had been a Jehovah's Witness himself or herself."¹⁰

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Covenant) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both ratified by Japan, also guarantee that parents have the right to provide their children with a balanced religious education. The Covenant recognizes "the liberty of parents ... to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions."¹¹

A large 2023 methodological study on Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan (involving 1,662 participants) concluded that "practically none of Jehovah's Witnesses" regretted their choice to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses (97.9 percent "never regretted" their choice while 1.6 percent "rarely had regrets"). The study found that Jehovah's Witnesses place a high priority on happy families and "are working to improve the quality of family life without neglecting it in favor of religious practices or material wealth." The study also confirmed that Jehovah's Witnesses "do not use physical abuse" nor do they use "verbal/emotional/psychological maltreatment when raising children."¹² The results of that study are consistent with earlier studies on Jehovah's Witnesses, including a 2009 study on Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany¹³ and a 1998 study on Jehovah's Witnesses in France (involving 1,025 participants).¹⁴

The ECHR has also rejected claims that the beliefs and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses negatively affect family life, ruling "as long as self-dedication to religious matters is the product of the believer's independent and free decision and however unhappy his or her family members may feel about that decision, the ensuing estrangement cannot be taken to mean that the religion caused the break-up in the family. Quite often, the opposite is true: it is the resistance and unwillingness of non-religious family members to accept and to respect their religious relative's freedom to manifest and practise his or her religion that is the source of conflict. It is true that friction often exists in marriages where the spouses belong to different religious denominations or one of the spouses is a non-believer. However, this situation is common to all mixed-belief marriages and Jehovah's Witnesses are no exception."¹⁵

C. The religious publications of Jehovah's Witnesses

The ECHR has also rejected disinformation spread by the Russian government about the publications of Jehovah's Witnesses, which is similar to the disinformation now spread in Japan by some critics.

The ECHR has ruled about the publications of Jehovah's Witnesses: "Both the applicants' religious activities and the content of their publications appear to have been peaceful in line with their professed doctrine of non-violence. It was not shown that anyone, whether members of the Taganrog LRO or third parties, had

been forced, prevailed upon or pressured into following religious injunctions against his or her will. The courts failed to identify evidence of the use of any improper methods to persuade others to prefer the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. Not one of the banned publications was found to contain calls or incitement to violence or any insulting, slanderous or discriminatory statements against members of other faiths."¹⁶

D. Medical treatment

Jehovah's Witnesses cherish and deeply respect the gift of life. They carefully consider Bible principles when making choices that affect their physical, mental, and emotional health. They collaborate with health-care professionals to obtain the best medical care available for themselves and their families.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe and teach that whether to accept any form of treatment, including a blood transfusion, is a personal decision for each person to make without being forced or pressured by others. *The Watchtower* of February 2023, pages 23-25, says: "Jehovah's Witnesses are well-known for their respect for the sacredness of blood. We obey Jehovah's law regarding blood by refusing to accept a blood transfusion ... (Acts 15:28, 29) However, that does not mean that we want to die. On the contrary, we cherish God's gift of life. We seek the help of medical professionals who are willing to provide high-quality care that does not involve a blood transfusion ... [Elders] will not make medical decisions for you. That is your responsibility. (Gal. 6:4, 5) ... [We do not] pressure others into adopting our viewpoint."

Jehovah's Witnesses do not substitute religious faith for medical treatment and are "totally within the mainstream of modern medicine."¹⁷ Expert medical associations recognize that individual congregants "are generally well informed, both about their legal position and the options for treatment."¹⁸

Based on the experience gained in treating patients who are Jehovah's Witnesses, the expert medical community has concluded "that transfusion avoidance or minimization makes sense for all patients."¹⁹ Clinical strategies initially developed to treat Jehovah's Witnesses are now known as Patient Blood Management (PMB), which refers to the use of methods to conserve and manage patients' own blood.²⁰

PBM is now widely recommended worldwide in the expert medical community:

- In 2010, the World Health Organization (WHO) encouraged all countries to implement PBM programs in view of the fact that PBM results in "improved clinical outcome and reduced costs."²¹
- In 2017, the European Commission (EC) issued a guide for national health authorities, encouraging implementation of PBM throughout the European Union. The EC observed: "[A] large body of clinical evidence shows that in many clinical scenarios both anaemia and blood loss can be effectively treated with a series of evidence-based measures to better manage and preserve a patient's *own* blood, rather than resorting to a *donor's* blood, thus leading to a significant overall reduction of blood transfusions ... For decades the default treatment for blood loss and/or anaemia has been allogeneic blood transfusion ... However, accumulating evidence shows that particularly in haemodynamically stable patients, transfusion is another independent risk factor for adverse outcomes. For example, some systematic reviews and meta-analyses of randomized controlled trials (graded as 1A evidence) have shown some evidence of increased risks (including infection, cardiac events, re-bleeding and in hospital mortality) from liberal transfusion ... In addition, large numbers of risk-adjusted observational studies have shown an independent dose-response association between transfusion and increased morbidity, length of hospital stay and mortality."²²
- On February 1, 2018, the Japanese Ministry of Health issued a circular to all municipal governments stating that "blood transfusions have the potential risk of side effects due to allogeneic immunity and viral infections and should be performed only when there is no alternative treatment

and the effectiveness of the transfusion outweighs the risk.” Further, the circular states that due to the risks of blood transfusions, the patient’s written consent must be obtained.²³

- In 2021, the WHO issued a policy brief entitled “The urgent need to implement patient blood management,” the purpose of which is to “create a sense of urgency for health care entities to implement PBM,” which will “significantly and cost effectively improve health and clinical outcomes for hundreds of millions of medical and surgical patients ... and the population as a whole.”²⁴

With respect to pregnant women, the WHO recommends that “women should have eight contacts with a health provider during pregnancy to screen for potential complications and treat problems” and that this is a “core component of maternity care, grounded in a human rights-based approach.”²⁵ Accordingly, there is nothing unusual in the fact that Jehovah’s Witnesses recommend that pregnant women speak to their health-care providers about their individual treatment decision concerning blood transfusions. This is entirely consistent with the above recommendations of the WHO and the expert medical community.

Courts worldwide have upheld the right of Jehovah’s Witnesses to choose medical treatment consistent with their religious conscience. The Supreme Court of Japan ruled in *A.T. v. State*, No. 1998 (O) Nos. 1081, 1082, 20 February 2000: “[W]here a patient states clearly their intention of refusing a medical act accompanied by a blood transfusion for the reason that receiving a blood transfusion is an infringement of their religious beliefs, the right to decide in this manner must be respected as personal rights.”

The ECHR has also upheld this fundamental right. In *Taganrog LRO and Others v. Russia*, it ruled at paragraph 162 that “the freedom to accept or refuse specific medical treatment or to select the alternative form of treatment is vital to the principles of self-determination and personal autonomy. For this freedom to be meaningful, patients must have the right to make choices that accord with their own views and values, regardless of how irrational, unwise or imprudent such choices may appear to others. A competent adult patient is free to decide, for instance, whether or not to undergo surgery or, by the same token, to have a live blood transfusion or to prefer artificial blood substitutes.”

E. The need to avoid “negative and discriminatory stereotypes”

Jehovah’s Witnesses value open communication with responsible media and are grateful when they are given the opportunity to provide accurate information about their beliefs and practices.

At the same time, they respectfully draw your attention to the fact that Jehovah’s Witnesses are a persecuted religious minority, and as such, they are more vulnerable to discrimination and disinformation.²⁶ An October 2023 editorial in *The European Times* confirms that Jehovah’s Witnesses have suffered physical attacks as a result of hate speech and discrimination “propagated or condoned by state agencies” and spread by “mainstream media.”²⁷ The Center for Studies on Freedom of Religion, Belief and Conscience concludes that “hate speech” against Jehovah’s Witnesses and other religious minorities is now “rampant.”²⁸

It is therefore vital that news outlets promote accurate information and respect for vulnerable minorities like Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe has stated: “The media, both public and private, also play an important role in shaping societal attitudes about religious or belief diversity. While respecting their independence and freedom, the media has a public obligation to provide accurate information and fair representations about religious or belief communities. By sharing positive narratives about all religious or belief communities and avoiding negative and discriminatory stereotypes, the media can contribute to a more tolerant societal discourse.”²⁹

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- ¹ *Taganrog LRO and Others v. Russia*, nos. 32401/10 and 19 others, 7 June 2022 at paragraphs 153, 157, 162-165, 172-175, 178, 201, 254, and 272 (<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-217535>) and *Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow and Others v. Russia*, no. 302/02, 10 June 2010 at paragraphs 110-112, 118-121, 125, 129-130, 132-133, 135-136, 140-141, 144-145, and 160 (<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-99221>).
- ² *Adyrkhayev and Others v. Tajikistan*, no. 2483/2014, 7 July 2022, at paragraphs 9.4-9.5, 9.7, and 9.9 (<https://juris.ohchr.org/casedetails/3555/en-US>); *Aliyev and Others v. Azerbaijan*, no. 2805/2016, 25 March 2021, at paragraphs 7.4 and 7.8 (<https://juris.ohchr.org/casedetails/3199/en-US>); and *Bekzhan and Others v. Kazakhstan*, no. 2661/2015, 30 October 2020 at paragraphs 9.5-9.6 (<https://juris.ohchr.org/casedetails/3283/en-US>).
- ³ *Solovyev and Others v. Russia*, no. 10/2020, 22 May 2020, paragraphs 58, 67-68, 71, and 77-81 ([A/HRC/WGAD/2020/10](https://www.un.org/A/HRC/WGAD/2020/10)).
- ⁴ See, for example, the August 2021 expert opinion of Professor Patrick Parkinson, at paragraph 93, available at <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/resources/jehovahs-witnesses-2021-progress-report>.
- ⁵ By way of comparison, Articles 2 and 6(1) of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act requires only that child abuse committed by “a custodian,” defined as a parent or guardian, be reported to social services.
- ⁶ See the document “Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Scripturally Based Position on Child Protection,” available in dozens of languages at <https://www.jw.org/en/gov-resources/global-information-brochures/packet-jw-scripturally-based-position-child-protection/>.
- ⁷ This was done by means of discussion of the May 2019 issue of *The Watchtower*, Study Articles 18 to 20, available in more than 235 languages at <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-may-2019/>.
- ⁸ For a list, see the box “Educate Yourself and Your Children” found on page 12 of the May 2019 issue of *The Watchtower*, (<https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-may-2019/love-justice-face-of-wickedness/>).
- ⁹ Expert opinion of Professor Patrick Parkinson, paragraphs 64 and 65 (<https://www.childsafety.gov.au/resources/jehovahs-witnesses-2021-progress-report>).
- ¹⁰ *Taganrog LRO and Others v. Russia*, paragraphs 175-176 (<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-217535>).
- ¹¹ Article 18(4) of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantees that “State Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.” Articles 14 and 18 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that parents “have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child,” including on matters relating to “freedom of thought, conscience and religion.” Similar guarantees are found in Article 5(d)(vii) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.
- ¹² “Views, Values and Beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Kazakhstan,” Astana 2023, pages 22, 38, and 50 ([Views, values and beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Kazakhstan.pdf](#)).
- ¹³ Sussan Namini and Sebastian Murken, “Self-chosen involvement in new religious movements (NRMs): well-being and mental health from a longitudinal perspective” (September 2009), *Mental Health Religion & Culture* 12(6):561-585 ([\(PDF\) Self-Chosen Involvement in New Religious Movements \(NRMs\): Well-Being and Mental Health from a Longitudinal Perspective \(researchgate.net\)](#)). The authors conclude (at page 575):
- “This empirical study longitudinally investigated well-being (life satisfaction) and mental health (depression and anxiety) in individuals who became involved with a Pentecostal parish, the New Apostolic Church or Jehovah’s Witnesses. In agreement with our hypotheses and earlier findings of primarily cross-sectional studies cited above, the data indicate that individuals experienced reduced well-being prior to joining the NRMs and that there is an increase in well-being as they become involved with the groups. Well-being and mental health during involvement with the groups proved to be relatively stable and comparable to that of other groups from the general population over the course of three years. Thus, the potentially stabilising effect of affiliation seems to be lasting ... 2002). For Jehovah’s Witnesses, Besier and Besier (2001) found that most members who participated in a survey in Germany reported that they did not experience any negative effects of membership, but that becoming acquainted with the group helped them to cope with a diversity of problems. Ellison’s (1991) American research also showed a rather positive association of involvement with Jehovah’s Witnesses and well-being.”
- ¹⁴ Sofres France, Report on Jehovah’s Witnesses (October 1998) ([Enquete_SOFRES.pdf \(temoinsdejehovah.org\)](#)). The researchers found that “98% of Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that their faith leads them to enjoy a fairly harmonious family life and respect for the law.”
- ¹⁵ *Taganrog LRO and Others v. Russia*, paragraph 178 (<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-217535>).
- ¹⁶ *Taganrog LRO and Others v. Russia*, paragraph 157 (<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-217535>).
- ¹⁷ Craig S. Kitchens, “Are Transfusions Overrated? Surgical Outcome of Jehovah’s Witnesses,” *American Journal of Medicine* 94 (February 1993):117, 118 (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8430707/>).
- ¹⁸ *Management of Anaesthesia for Jehovah’s Witnesses* (London: The Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland, 2005), 8.

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- ¹⁹ Aryeh Shander & Lawrence T. Goodnough, “Objectives and limitations of bloodless medical care,” *Current Opinion in Hematology* 13 (2006):462, 464 (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17053460/>).
- ²⁰ Richard K Spence & Jochen Erhard, “History of patient blood management,” *Best Practice & Research Clinical Anaesthesiology* 27 (2013):11-15 (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23590912/>).
- ²¹ Patrick Meybohm et al., “German Patient Blood Management Network: effectiveness and safety analysis in 1.2 million patients,” *British Journal of Anaesthesia*, 131(3):472-481 (2023), page 473 (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37380568/>).
- ²² European Commission, Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency, Nørgaard A, Kurz J, Zacharowski K, Gombotz H, Kastner P, Choorapoikayil S, et al., “Building national programmes on Patient Blood Management (PBM) in the EU: A Guide for Health Authorities,” Brussels: EU Publications Office; 2017 [ISBN: 978-92-9200-717-1] (<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2818/54568>).
- ²³ Ministry of Health, Pharmaceutical Safety and Environmental Health Bureau, February 1, 2018 ([0000192958.pdf \(mhlw.go.jp\)](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/0000192958.pdf)).
- ²⁴ “The urgent need to implement patient blood management,” World Health Organization 2021, (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/346655>).
- ²⁵ “Promoting Healthy Pregnancy,” World Health Organization (<https://www.who.int/activities/promoting-healthy-pregnancy>).
- ²⁶ “The Global Persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses,” United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, November 2020 (<https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Issue%20Update%20-%20Jehovahs%20Witnesses.pdf>).
- ²⁷ “Tragic Bomb Blast at Jehovah’s Witnesses Meeting in India,” *The European Times*, 30 October 2023 (<https://europeantimes.news/2023/10/tragic-bomb-jehovahs-witnesses-india/>).
- ²⁸ “Still violence against Jehovah’s Witnesses: Bombing in front of a Kingdom Hall,” Center for Studies on Freedom of Religion, Belief and Conscience, April 11, 2023 (<https://lirec.net/press-release/2023/4/11/still-violence-against-jehovahs-witnesses-bombing-in-front-of-a-kingdom-hall>).
- ²⁹ “Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance,” Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (<https://www.osce.org/odihr/429389>).