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Statement Opposing the Creation of the Crime of Flag Desecration from the Perspective of Religious Communities

On June 16, four political parties—the Liberal Democratic Party, the Japan Innovation Party (Nippon Ishin), the Democratic Party for the People, and the Sanseito Party— jointly submitted to the House of Representatives the Bill on the Punishment of Damage to the National Flag and Related Acts (hereinafter referred to as the "Flag Desecration Bill"). From the standpoint of religious communities, we strongly oppose the enactment of this bill.

The bill seeks to criminalize acts such as the public destruction or defacement of the Japanese national flag. However, attitudes toward and evaluations of the national flag are inseparably connected to each individual's freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and expression. We cannot accept the criminal sanctions to regulate such matters.

When the Act on National Flag and Anthem was enacted in 1999, the government repeatedly assured the public that respect for the national flag and national anthem would not be compelled. In the years that followed, however, schools across Japan witnessed a succession of official directives and disciplinary measures concerning the Hinomaru flag and the singing of Kimigayo. As a result, many teachers and school staff were placed in situations of profound moral and conscientious conflict. Educational efforts to cultivate in children the capacity to encounter diverse values and historical perspectives, and to think and make judgments independently, have faced serious challenges. The of schools as places of free dialogue and learning has likewise been threatened.

The creation of the crime of flag desecration would further extend this trend and undermine the foundations of a society in which people holding different values and understandings of history are able to live together in mutual respect.

History offers a sobering warning. In prewar Japan, many religious believers, including Christians, were pressured to demonstrate loyalty to the state and were compelled to make choices contrary to their faith and conscience. Reflecting on this history, we affirm that freedom of thought and conscience and freedom of religion—fundamental human rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Japan—must be protected without exception.

Genuine respect cannot be imposed through criminal punishment. It should be nurtured through the free judgment and dialogue of each individual citizen.

We therefore call for the withdrawal of this bill and strongly urge that it be rejected. We seek a society that listens to the voices of minorities, safeguards freedom of thought and conscience, and enables people holding different opinions to live together while recognizing and respecting one another's dignity.

June 17, 2026

Rev. Yoshitaka Kano
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