

Remembering a Kidnap Victim: Takako Fujita

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Unificationist Takako Fujita was a victim of kidnap, confinement and forcible conversion and took her own life after she was confined for four months.

July 13th marks the tragic anniversary of Takako Fujita's suicide. Fujita, a Japanese Unification Church member, was 27 when she took her life after family members and deprogrammers held her in captivity for four months.

Sixteen years later, kidnappings and forced religious de-conversions remain an issue in Japan, invoking physical and psychological pain on Unification Church members.

“The failure to provide the victims of such kidnappings with equal protection under the law, and the impunity of those responsible, constitutes a serious violation of the Japanese people's constitutionally guaranteed rights and the international human rights standard to which Japan is legally bound,” said Willy Fautré, the chairman of Human Rights Without Frontiers, in a report published by the Central-European Religious Freedom Institute (<http://cerf-institute.org/2012/01/06/japan-fails-to-protect-citizens-from-abductions-and-confinement-for-forced-religious-de-conversion/>).

The Unification Church Japan produced a video remembering Fujita's life.

Fujita was introduced to the Unification Church during her first year at Kacho College, Kyoto, where she was studying social welfare. She officially joined the church in June 1989, and was Blessed in marriage to Mr. Lee, a South Korean, in 1995. In 1996, Fujita officially moved to South Korea to live with her husband.

On March 8, 1997, Fujita visited Japan, excited to spend time with her family. When her husband phoned her parents' home the next evening, he reached the answering machine. He assured himself the family was on an outing. Fujita's friend later contacted her father's work, trying to get in touch. She was told Mr. Fujita was on a long vacation. Finally, a co-worker told a family friend that Mr. Fujita was on leave, working on bringing his daughter out of the Unification Church.

Lee arrived in Japan on March 15, determined to locate his wife. Fujita's grandmother, the only one still at her parents' home, refused to offer any information and local police refused to get involved. After ten days of searching, a distraught Lee returned to Korea.

Lee visited Japan again on May 21, this time to Kansai, Japan a region west of Tokyo where he believed his wife was being kept. Local police informed Lee that since Fujita lived in South Korea prior to the kidnapping, South Korean police would have to investigate the case. He went back to South Korea on May 24.

On July 15, 1997, Japanese Unification church members learned that a funeral had been held for Fujita the previous day. The woman who initially introduced Fujita to the church immediately went to her parents' home.

Family members told the woman that Fujita died of blood clots the morning before the funeral, but she could not believe that would happen to someone so young and healthy. She investigated the funeral home, and finally a worker opened up about the truth.

"I am not supposed to say this to people other than her family, but she seems to have committed suicide," the worker said.

When Unification Church officials contacted police, they finally learned Fujita attempted suicide on July 12, in the bathroom of an apartment where she was being confined. She was rushed to the hospital, but doctors were unable to save her. Fujita passed away the next morning.

Japanese police and courts do not involve themselves with forced religious de-conversions; they see these cases as a private family matter. In the most publicized case, deprogrammers kidnapped Unification Church member Toro Goto for 12 years, holding him in a small apartment. Afterward, police ignored Goto's report and prosecutors refused the case, citing insufficient evidence.

"The Japanese Constitution guarantees the freedom of religion and also protects citizens against false imprisonment," stated United States Commission on International Freedom (USCIRF) in its 2013 Annual Report (<http://www.refworld.org/docid/51826ede18.html>). "The number of abductions for the purpose of forced de-conversion has dropped dramatically since the 1990s, though they have continued to occur each year, particularly targeting Unification Church members."

Although there is substantial evidence Fujita was illegally confined, no one was arrested or indicted.