

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Faith Known to Defy Japanese Persecution

Knut Holdhus
December 3, 2024



Non-fiction writer Masaki Kubota delivering the keynote speech on the afternoon of 1st December 2024 in Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture, Japan

Investigative journalist and author holds up as example a minority faith known to defy persecution



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"Cultivate Religious Sentiments, Create Peace"

Rally Advocating Freedom of Religion Held in Shimane

by the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

On 1st December 2024, the "Shimane Citizens' Association for Protecting Fundamental Human Rights and Freedom of Religion" held a rally in Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture. The event was attended by 150 people, including members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), as well as representatives of other religious organizations.

A second-generation believer who works as a staff member of the [Family Federation](#) gave a speech, emphasizing,

"If people cultivate a spirit of respecting others, Japan will begin to change for the better straightaway. Religion plays an important role in nurturing the heart."

He criticized the public opinion that labels religion as evil, stating,

"Religions teach altruistic values and preach freedom and equality. It is those who believe in religion who can create peace around them. For the sake of the nation, freedom of faith and religion must be protected."

Using the example of the pre-war religious suppression of the Shinto-based Omotokyo, non-fiction writer Masaki Kubota, who delivered the keynote speech, pointed out that "the media has not changed at all since before the war." He explained that the reports which triggered the Omoto suppression came from anti-religious experts, journalists, and former believers claiming harm. Kubota commented,

"At that time, believers were criticized as 'superstitious'. They were further suspected of 'trying to replace

the emperor'. That led to the government becoming involved."

Kubota also noted that when believers tried to counter the allegations at the time, they were overpowered by journalists. He stressed,

"Today, individual believers can disseminate information. It is important for many people to understand what the believers are really like, with their diverse perspectives."



Nao Deguchi in 1916

[Editor's note: Omotokyo (大本教) is a Japanese new religious movement that originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was founded by Nao Deguchi (1836 - 1918), a peasant woman who claimed to have received divine revelations, and her successor Onisaburo Deguchi (1871 - 1948), who played a significant role in shaping the religion's teachings and structure.

Omotokyo emphasizes universal salvation, spiritual purification, and the ultimate unity of all religions. The religion stresses the importance of living in harmony with divine will and nature.

Today, Omotokyo remains a small but active religious group in Japan. It has also inspired the foundation of Aikido, the martial art developed by Morihei Ueshiba, who was a follower of Omotokyo.

Omotokyo holds a significant place in the history of Japanese religion, not only as a spiritual movement but also as a symbol of resistance to religious persecution during Japan's militaristic

period.]

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• November 19, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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Panel exhibition reveals the horrors of persecution in Japan, the land of abduction, confinement, and forcible faith-breaking

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Location of the city mentioned, located on the southern island of Kyushu.

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Confinement, and Forcible Faith-Breaking

by the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

A panel exhibition showcasing the reality of religious persecution faced by members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU, formerly known as the [Unification Church](#))

was held on 17th and 18th November on the second floor of the south exit of Kokura station in Kitakyushu. The exhibition, titled "Abduction, Confinement, and [Forcible Faith-Breaking](#)", was organized by the "Kitakyushu Citizens' Association to Protect Human Rights and Religious Freedom". Many members of the association provided explanations of the panels to passersby, highlighting the horrors of abduction and forcible detention.

Among the panels depicting the intensity of the persecution was an image of Toru Goto (後藤 徹), who was [held in confinement](#) by his relatives in a single apartment room for [12 years and 5 months](#) but still refused to renounce his faith. The panel showed his emaciated appearance. One of the organizers said,

"When people saw the panel of Toru Goto, they were shocked to realize that something like this could happen so close to home. And when we told them about cases like a woman who developed severe atopic dermatitis due to her confinement and passed away at the age of 48, they listened attentively."

On Sunday, with many tourists and shoppers passing by, 750 flyers introducing the activities of the above-mentioned association were distributed. The person in charge said,

"We want people to understand our daily activities. Currently, there is an ongoing dispute due to the Kitakyushu City Council's resolution to sever ties with the [Family Federation](#). We want people to understand the details of that issue as well."



Photo used at the panel exhibition: Toru Goto in 2008, barely able to move after being held in forcible detention by his own family in league with professional faith-breakers for more than 12 years. Photo: Kazuhiro Yonemoto / [Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion](#)

Featured image above: A panel exhibition on victims of abduction held at the south exit of Kokura Station in Kitakyushu City on the southern island of Kyushu, Japan on 18th November 2024. Photo: Kennosuke Teraguchi (寺口 露之介)

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