

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Exhibition of Inhuman Treatment of Faith in Japan

Knut Holdhus
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Visitors listen attentively to explanations at the panel exhibition 8th December 2024, Tamana City, Kumamoto Prefecture, Kyushu, Japan



[Sekai Nippo](http://www.sekainippo.com)

Exhibition reveals decades of inhuman treatment of members of minority faith at the hands of faith-breakers in league with activist lawyers, some of whom are advisors to the authorities

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"Something That Should Never Happen to Human Beings"

Panel Exhibition Highlights Abduction and Confinement Issue in Kumamoto

by the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](http://www.sekainippo.com)

The Kumamoto Prefectural Association for the Protection of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedom of

Religion - led by Chairman Isao Tonomi (主海偉佐雄) - held a panel exhibition 8th December 2024 in Tamana City, Kumamoto Prefecture. The event shed light on the issue of [abduction and confinement](#) targeting members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)). The organization condemned [forced de-conversions](#) involving abduction as a violation of human rights and aimed to raise awareness among visitors, including local city council members and journalists.

A woman in her 60s, who listened to about an hour-long explanation at the exhibition, remarked,

"It's heartbreaking. I hope this truth gets reported on television and other media."

A city council member, who was invited by a friend to attend, expressed surprise, saying,

"I had no idea such actions were being taken to [force members to leave](#). This is something that should never happen to human beings."



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

Chairman Tonomi emphasized,

"Visitors to the panel exhibition often ask, 'Is this really happening in Japan?' Without these photos and panels, it's difficult to grasp the reality of [abduction and confinement](#). We need to spread this awareness nationwide."

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Japan: 4300 Abductions And Forcible Detentions

• February 1, 2023 • Knut Holdhus

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Unification Church in Japan suffered 4300 abductions and forcible detentions for faith-breaking purposes

Willy Fautré, CEO and director of Human Rights Without Frontiers, presented grim facts about Japan's bad human rights and religious freedom records. The Belgian human rights expert told the audience at the UN Office in Geneva 31st January, of 4300 abductions and forcible detentions, how 4,300 members of the **Unification Church**, over a period of 45 years, had been forcibly abducted and held in confinement for faith-breaking purposes.

Fautré also explained about the more than 400 violent attacks on churches and members of the **Unification Church / Family Federation** during the two months after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in July. The Japanese authorities are actually worsening the hate speech situation by seeking the removal of the movement's Religious Corporation Status, forbidding church members to



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contact members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in the national parliament and not mentioning any of the good works of the [Family Federation](#) and its members.



Willy Fautré

Here is Willy Fautré's address:

The right to retain one's religious beliefs and the [Unification Church](#) in Japan

An address by Willy Fautré, CEO and Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers, at an information meeting on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process in Japan at the 42nd Session of the UPR Working Group at the UN Office in Geneva (Palais des Nations), Switzerland 31st January 2023.

"No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice," says Art. 18.2 of the ICCPR [International Convention on Civil and Political Rights].

Freedom of religion or belief includes the right to have, not to have, to change but also to retain one's religious beliefs.

This last aspect of the individual right to keep one's religious or non-religious beliefs despite forceful attempts to change this choice, whether the individual belonging is new or not, is usually underreported and is therefore insufficiently defended.

Several actors can threaten this right:

- a state exclusively supporting and promoting one official religion or non-religious worldview such as atheism
- state and non-state actors creating a hierarchy of religious and belief groups with unequal rights, especially in the lowest category including non-traditional or non-historical movements usually of foreign origin and recently established in a country
- families and the broader social environment of converts
- extremist groups or mobs incited by political parties or nationalist movements

The objectives of these actors are

- either to create unity and uniformity in the national population
- or to preserve the existing identity of a social or ethnic group
- or to protect the existing cohesion of a family
- or to forcefully deconvert individuals or groups who changed their religion.

A few concrete examples.

In China, the official ideology is atheism and violent policies, including in school education, have been put in place to make the current and future generations of Buddhist, Muslim and Christian Chinese citizens more and more atheist.

Other states having Islam as the official religion imprison converts to another religion and sentence them to prison terms if they do not recant their new religion.

In India, attacks against tribal and Dalit converts to Buddhism and Christianity have increased since radical Hindu groups launched a campaign in 2020 to stop the mass conversion wave of those populations and to forcefully deconvert them.

Most tribals do not identify as Hindus because they have diverse religious practices and many worship nature, but Hindu extremists believe that all Indians should be Hindus and that the country should be rid of foreign religions. They use extensive violence to achieve this goal, particularly targeting Christians from a Hindu background accused of following a 'foreign faith.'

Hate speech against the [Unification Church](#)

In Japan, thousands of converts to the [Unification Church](#) and about 200 to the movement of Jehovah's Witnesses have during four decades been victims of abduction and attempts of forced deconversion in long-term confinement conditions: weeks, months and sometimes years. The Japanese media outlets always kept silent about these massive violations of human rights but were very prolific in their politically motivated campaigns stigmatizing the [Unification Church](#) as a



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dangerous cult. This is again the case with the current intense campaign against the [Unification Church](#) in the Shinzo Abe case.

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Hate speech is at the heart of the current stigmatization of the [Unification Church](#) by the media.

In the period from Abe's assassination to the end of August 2022, the [Unification Church](#) in Japan documented more than 400 hate incidents against its churches, organizations, and individual members. But they continue, and the number is probably higher now, since not all local incidents are necessarily reported to the headquarters. The human rights magazine Bitter Winter investigated the issue and revealed it is mainly a group of lawyers and leftist media outlets sharing the Communist ideology that is behind this campaign of hate speech.

The Japanese government, of course, did not instigate the hate speech but it has gone along with it and acted in so many ways to exacerbate it and to take what can only be described as "*hate-filled actions*", including seeking the removal of its Religious Corporation Status and forbidding its members to associate with LDP Diet members, etc.



Akiko Hozan. Photo: WFWP

One concrete consequence of this hate speech was the Foreign Ministry's cancellation of an award given many years ago to Mrs. Hozan [Akiko Hozan]. This Japanese lady, a member of the [Church](#) was working for The Women's Federation for World Peace-Japan in Mozambique. Under that organization's auspices, she set up a school for hundreds of local children who

would not otherwise have had access to any schooling. This fostered considerable goodwill towards Japan and the Ambassador there gave her the award.

The confiscation of that award is the kind of mean, petty, and spiteful action that the Japanese government has stooped to while not denying either the great benefit of the project to the local children or to Japan's reputation in Africa. But trying to artificially blacken the name and reputation of a group, one must also deny or suppress any evidence that they may have done good for people in Japan and around the world. This is part of the stigmatization campaign against the [Unification Church](#).

On the other hand, when thousands of people converted to the [Unification Church](#) were victims of family abduction, forced confinement for long periods and violent attempts to deconvert them in such conditions, the media, the Japanese government and relevant state institutions kept silent and passive, turning a deaf ear to their complaints and privileging impunity.

The deconversion campaign of [Unification Church](#) members

In 2011, I spent two weeks in Tokyo to meet and interview 20 members of the [Unification Church](#) and a few Jehovah's Witnesses who had been victims of parental abduction and attempted forceful deconversion in confinement conditions.

On another fact-finding mission, I also met a dozen members of the Japanese Diet, lawyers and journalists and I discussed with the authorities of a police station confronted with the abduction of a member of the [Unification Church](#).

Parental abductions and forced deconversion attempts under confinement conditions concerned 4300 adult members of the [Unification Church](#). They were perpetrated by the family, usually one or both parents, at the instigation of and with the help of Protestant pastors, from the mid-1960s to about 2010.

During that long period, both the police and the judiciary failed to follow up with these massive violations of human rights and to put an end to them. All cases of criminal complaints filed by the victims were dismissed, 24 in total. All civil cases were dismissed, 5 in total.

It is already difficult for the victims to file a complaint against a close family member, as in all the cases of domestic violence. An overwhelming majority of them had psychologically not managed to take this decisive non-return step against a father or a mother. Last but not least, the passivity of the police and the judiciary finally discouraged other victims to try to go to court. Moreover, the successive Japanese governments kept silent and passive, the Japanese media kept silent, the Japanese human rights NGOs kept silent and inactive. Consequently, the international community was not aware of this situation in Japan.

Such a situation is hardly understandable for a Westerner. That is why it is important to stress two points related to the Japanese culture.

First, parents keep their moral authority over their children, whether they are adult more intelligent or in a superior social position and they

they are seen as intelligent in a general social position, and they expect them to be obedient in return for giving them access to education or other facilities.

Second, there are many parental abductions in the context of marital separation or divorces in Japan, and ... there is no law criminalizing such acts. They are considered private family matters and so are family abductions for deconverting one of their members. Bringing back a lost sheep to the flock.

The US Department of State was the first to mention this sort of forced change of religion in its annual report in the first decade of this century. This was the very beginning of a process which led to a solution of the [Unification Church](#) problem. Instrumental was the famous case of Toru Goto, who was kidnapped and confined for 12 years and 5 months.

The case of Toru Goto

In 1986, Toru Goto, then twenty-three years old, became a member of the [Unification Church](#).

In 1987, the first attempt of abduction and confinement by his father and other relatives was unsuccessful, as he managed to escape about a month later. In order to avoid another similar experience, he cut off all the links with his family.



Toru Goto after more than 12 years of forcible confinement.

Eight years later, in September 1995, Mr. Goto's parents, his elder brother and his sister-in-law kidnapped him from their home in Hoya City (currently West Tokyo City). They carried out his abduction under the instructions of a deprogrammer, Takashi Miyamura, and an Evangelical minister, Pastor Yasutomo Matsunaga, as they called themselves. Mr. Goto was then confined in an apartment in Niigata City for approximately one year and nine months. During this period, Pastor Matsunaga regularly came to this apartment to urge him to leave the [Church](#).

Between 1997 and 2007, Mr. Goto was confined in several apartments in Tokyo where a so-called exit counselor regularly visited him together with former members of the [Unification Church](#) (UC) in order to forcibly convince him to leave the [Church](#).

During his confinement, Mr. Goto attempted to escape several times but every time he was caught and held by his relatives. He also held three hunger strikes of three to four weeks. To no avail.

Around November 2007, it seemed as though the family members had started arguing about whether to continue his confinement or not, due to the financial burdens it imposed.

On 10 February 2008, at around 4:00 PM, his brother, sister-in-law, mother, and sister suddenly ordered him to leave the apartment. He was then emaciated and suffering from a serious state of starvation. Dressed in his lounge wear, he was thrown down on the floor of the concrete corridor in front of the entrance without any belongings or identification documents.

On his way to the [Unification Church](#) headquarters, he came across a member of his church who gave him money so that he could take a taxi to reach a safe haven.

That evening, he was diagnosed with malnutrition and admitted to a hospital. For a while, he could barely stand on his feet.

The legal battle of Toru Goto

After his release in 2008, Toru Goto filed complaints against his family members, his kidnappers and unwelcome exit counselors. His criminal complaint was rejected but six years later, he won a civil lawsuit against them at the Tokyo High Court.

All the accused but one had to pay financial compensation for damages:

- 150,000 EUR for the brother and sister-in-law
- 75,000 EUR for the exit counselor Takashi Miyamura
- 30,000 EUR for the Evangelical Pastor Yasumoto.

There was no media coverage of this landmark victory in Japan but this decision had a deterrent effect on the actors making financial and

spiritual benefits from the exploitation of parents' concerns and fears intensified by media hype about so-called heretical movements labeled 'dangerous cults'.

After Toru Goto's victory in court, the sole lawsuit accepted by the judiciary in 50 years in Japan, the Protestant pastors and other actors abusing the psychological weakness of vulnerable families quickly put an end to their lucrative business. According to some testimonies I collected from the victims, their parents paid between 40,000 EUR and 100,000 EUR for a so-called 'rescue operation!'"

Featured image above: Willy Fautré at the UN Office in Geneva 31st Jan. 2023. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission.

More about 4300 abductions: [Father Tricked by Deprogrammers to Kidnap Son](#)

Mr. Willy Fautré is CEO and Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers. He is a member of the International Consortium on Law and Religious Studies. He was chargé de mission at the Cabinet of the Belgian Ministry of Education and at the Belgian Parliament.

He started defending religious freedom of Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox in communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe during the Cold War in the mid-70s.

In December 1988, he founded Human Rights Without Frontiers. He is a lecturer in the field of human rights and religious freedom. He develops advocacy in international institutions, UN, OSCE, EU. He has published many academic articles.

Mr. Fautré is also press correspondent and member of the editorial board of the European Times in Brussels, a member of the Press Club and contributor to various media in Brussels, and associate editor on the editorial board of Bitter Winter, a magazine on religious liberty and human rights.

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