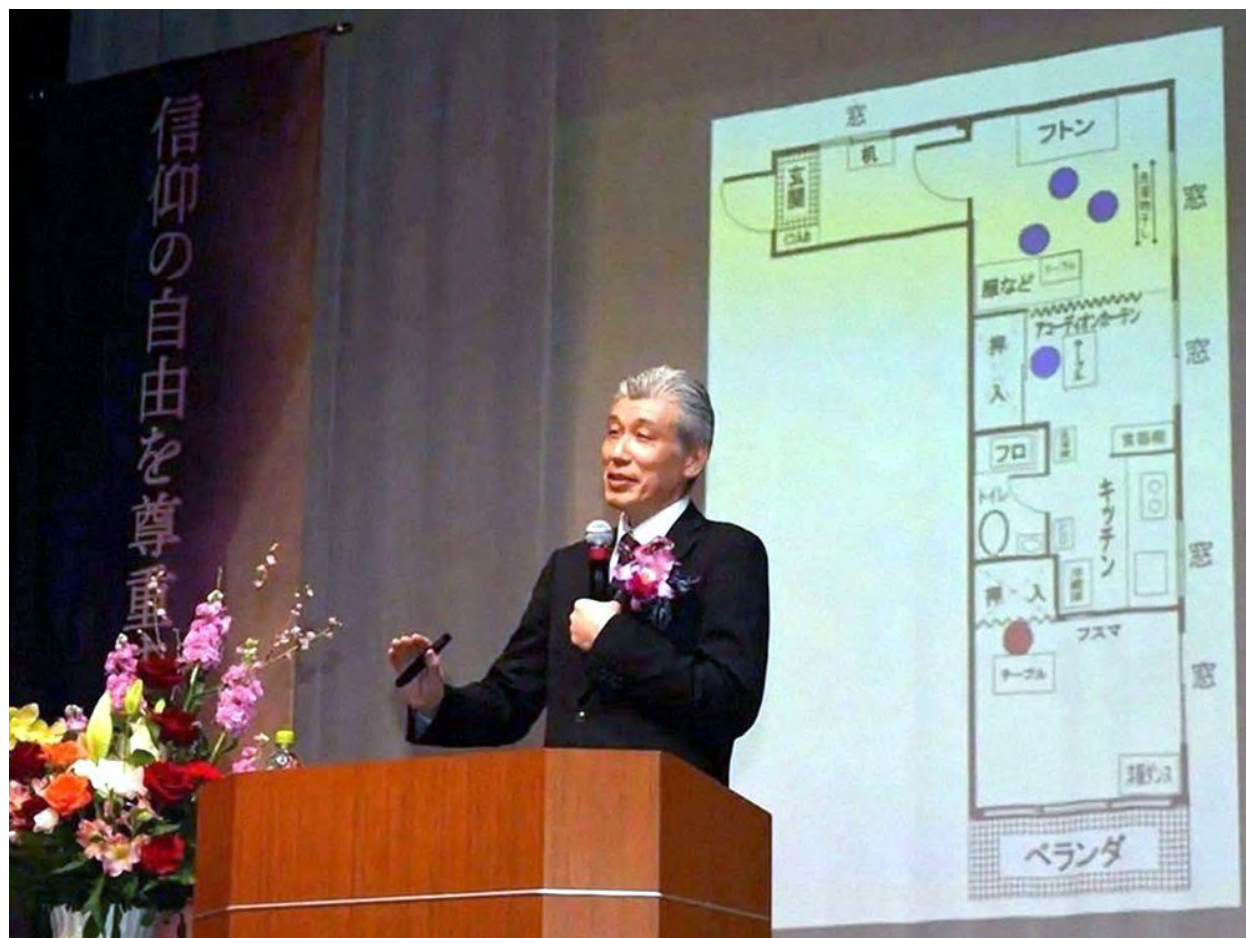


FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: 12 Years in Captivity of Coercive Faith Breakers

Knut Holdhus
February 21, 2025



Toru Goto, representing the "[National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion](#)", delivers a lecture - Afternoon of February 10, 2025, Suginami Ward, Tokyo



Survivor of an incredible 12 years of forcible detention speaks out against dirty business of faith-breakers

Tokyo, 18th February 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

[Series] **The "Deadly Struggle" to Protect Freedom of Religion - 17 Years Since Toru Goto's Release**

Part 3: Goto's Autobiography Dubbed "Japan's Version of 'Man's Search for Meaning'"

It continues to be victims of abduction and confinement

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

See [part 1](#), [part 2](#)

"All of my freedoms were completely taken away."

On 10th February 2025, Toru Goto (後藤徹), representing the "[National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion](#)", [held a lecture](#) in Suginami Ward, Tokyo, on the occasion of the [publication of his autobiography](#) "Deadly Struggle: Surviving 4,536 Days of Confinement" (published by Sogeisha). The event drew approximately 300 attendees, including major media outlets. Goto repeatedly emphasized the torment of isolation, stating, "During those painful and lonely times, I had no choice but to pray earnestly." Alongside recounting his harrowing [12 years and 5 months of confinement](#), he strongly condemned the grave injustice of [coercive faith-breaking](#), which disregards religious freedom.

Previous Article: [Toru Goto's Fight for Justice: Faith Under Siege](#)

Goto's autobiography is structured into four main parts.



Chapter 1 details his memories with his family and his encounter with the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), while also touching on his first confinement at the hands of his own family in an attempt to force him to abandon his faith.

Chapters 2 and 3 document the [more than 12 years of confinement](#) leading up to his eventual release.

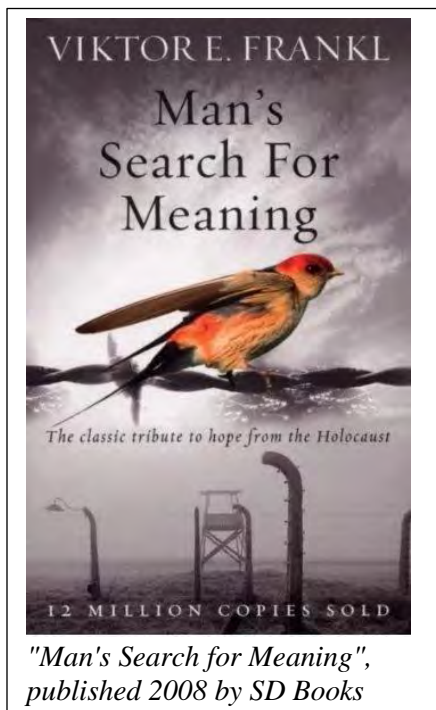
Chapter 4 covers his legal battle against his family, the Christian pastor who orchestrated his confinement, and the professional faith-breaking activists involved.

Goto vividly recalls the horrors of his forcible detention. In one passage, he describes how hearing the distant melody of the children's song "Yuyake Koyake" over the disaster prevention radio brought him a fleeting sense of comfort:

"That brief one-minute melody from my childhood gave me solace." (p.102)

On another occasion, he tried to scream for help through a bathroom vent, only to be violently restrained by Takashi Miyamura (宮村峻), a faith-breaking activist:

"He grabbed me by the collar, dragged me out of the bathroom, and I desperately grabbed anything I could reach to resist." (p.113)



During the event, attorney Shinichi Tokunaga (徳永信一) compared Goto's book to Viktor Frankl's "Man's Search for Meaning", a world-renowned account of survival in Nazi concentration camps. Tokunaga stated:

"Inside Nazi concentration camps, even the smallest aspects of daily life gave people a reason to keep going. While we cannot fully grasp Goto's suffering, his autobiography carries his heartfelt cries."

At its peak, more than 370 cases of abduction and forced confinement for religious deconversion were reported annually. Goto's legal battle played a significant role in reducing such incidents, but they have not been completely eradicated. According to "Deadly Struggle", in January 2021, a young believer in his 20s was [confined at home for a month](#) and managed to escape through a bathroom window. In 2024, another believer in Tokyo, also in his 20s, was reportedly abducted and forcibly deconverted.

Goto's book warns:



"If the [[Family Federation](#)] is forcibly dissolved, the wave of abductions and confinements may once again spread across Japan." (p.236)

Among those most concerned about this resurgence is undoubtedly Goto himself.

At the lecture, Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広), president of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, also spoke. He condemned how parents, influenced by "anti-cult" pastors and activists, have used their parental bonds to justify [abduction and confinement](#). He further revealed that such cases have led to tragic consequences, including suicides and sexual assaults. Tanaka made a heartfelt plea:

"If parents truly want their son or daughter back (to leave the [church](#)), I will personally persuade them. But please, just stop the abductions."

Independent YouTuber and pastor Tatsuhiro Iwamoto (岩本龍弘) also took the stage, emphasizing that while Christianity teaches "love your enemies", the [Family Federation](#) must take a firm stand against those responsible for these abductions. He declared:



Tatsuhiro Iwamoto

"Until the honor of the victims is restored, and their suffering is properly compensated, this issue cannot be considered resolved."

It is estimated that over 4,300 individuals have been victims of coercive faith-breaking through abduction and confinement. Even Goto's case is believed to be just the tip of the iceberg, suggesting that many untold tragedies remain hidden. This issue must not be allowed to fade into obscurity.

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Toru Goto's Fight For Justice: Faith Under Siege

• February 19, 2025 • Knut Holdhus

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Justice prevails when victim of 12 years of horrendous abuse by anti-religious activists wins defamation case against one of them



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“This case has shed light on the grave human rights violations of abduction and confinement.”

On 31st January, Toru Goto (後藤徹) – now 61 – representing the [National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Conversion](#), shared his legal victory with supporters, who responded with applause.

This triumph came approximately one year and four months after Goto [filed a defamation lawsuit](#) against journalist Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト) at the *Tokyo District Court* in October 2023. Suzuki had previously ridiculed Goto's past abduction and confinement experience by dismissing him as a mere “hikikomori” (recluse) [[See editor's note below](#)].



Eito Suzuki in January 2024. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Background of the Case

Suzuki and attorneys from the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (Zenkoku Benren) do not recognize [abduction and confinement for the purpose of coercive faith-breaking](#) as religious persecution. Instead, they argue that it is a form of “protective persuasion” by family members aimed at rescuing believers. They claim that lawsuits alleging human rights violations are merely desperate attempts by religious organizations to avoid dissolution.

Lawyer Shinichi Tokunaga (徳永信一), representing Goto, **criticized the media for only presenting anti-religious organization perspectives and failing to report on the truth regarding coercive faith-breaking.** He stressed that this verdict could be a pivotal step in overturning **Japan's discourse, which he described as “built on lies”.**

Goto was held in captivity for [12 years and 5 months](#). In January 2011, he filed a civil lawsuit against his relatives, a Christian pastor, and an “anti-cult” activist involved in his confinement. In September 2015, the *Supreme Court* finalized the ruling, ordering the defendants to pay 22 million yen in damages.



Toru Goto in March 2011, at the start of a civil case. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

However, Suzuki, in an online article published on 13th March 2013, in *Yaya Nikkan Cult Newspaper*, downplayed Goto's ordeal, stating:

“After persuading his family, he simply stayed in the apartment, became complacent, and ended up as a mere ‘hikikomori’ (recluse).” [[See editor's note below](#)]

Even after the *Supreme Court* ruling, this article remained online. In a post on X (formerly Twitter) 1st August 2023, Goto expressed his frustration:

“Does he not understand the suffering of being forcibly coerced into renouncing one's faith?”

Despite the court ruling, Suzuki continued to call Goto a “hikikomori” in articles and television appearances. In an 15th October 2015, article in *Yaya Nikkan Cult Newspaper*, he wrote:

“After 12 years of being a hikikomori, he won 20 million yen in court.”

On 12th August 2022, during an appearance on *Miyane-ya* (a news program on Nippon TV), Suzuki described Goto's lawsuit as a case where *“the court was swayed by an unusual fervor.”* He also claimed that Goto had been *“practically in a hikikomori state, always free to leave if he wanted.”*



Logo of Miyane-ya

Ongoing Defamation and Court Ruling

The defamation against Goto continued. In July 2023, Suzuki attended a symposium hosted by second-generation members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)). When asked by nonfiction writer Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ) why he



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insisted on calling Goto a "hikikomori", Suzuki replied dismissively:

"It doesn't matter. Take it however you like."

A few days later, he posted on X:

"There is no value in covering the 'victim narratives' of anti-social groups. It's all irrelevant."



Masumi Fukuda, here delivering a speech 23rd Sep. 2024 in Chiba City, Japan. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda (豊田剛)

The Tokyo District Court ruled that Suzuki's statements in the 15th October 2015 Yaya Nikkan Cult Newspaper article and his August 2022 Miyaneya appearance constituted defamation. However, other statements, including his 2013 article, his comments at the 2023 symposium, and his X post, were not considered legally defamatory.

Goto's legal team had also argued that Suzuki's repeated use of "hikikomori" implied that Goto was a "liar and conman who is pretending to be a victim of confinement", but this claim was not accepted by the court.

Appeal and Future Battles

Lawyer Tokunaga expressed his determination to appeal, vowing to challenge all dismissed claims in the higher court. As public sentiment remains strongly against the [Family Federation](#), Goto fears that abduction and confinement cases may resurge. For him, this fight that cannot be lost continues.



Attorney Shinichi Tokunaga (徳永信一). Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)

See [part 1](#), [part 3](#)

[Editor's note: The Japanese term "**hikikomori**" (引きこもり) refers to people who completely withdraw from social life, often isolating themselves at home for extended periods – sometimes years. It describes both the phenomenon and the individuals affected by it.

Hikikomori typically avoid school, work, and social interactions, often due to anxiety, social pressure, or mental health struggles such as depression. The term is sometimes used in a derogatory way but is also recognized as a serious social issue in Japan and other countries.]

Featured image above: A press conference held after the verdict. From right: Lawyer Shinichi Tokunaga (徳永信一), Toru Goto (後藤徹), representative of the [National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Conversion](#); and Lawyer Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹) – 31st January 2025, Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo. Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀).

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