



## Scholars Urged to Investigate Human Rights Abuses in Japan by Dan Fefferman, President ICRF

September 15, 2010 – Speaking at the annual conference of the Center for Studies on new Religions (CESNUR) in Turin, Italy on September 10, ICRF President Dan Fefferman urged religious scholars from Europe and North America to conduct independent investigations into the abductions and forced de-conversions of Unification Church members in Japan. Also speaking at the event was Mr. Toru Goto, the UC member who recently escaped after more than 12 years captivity in an attempt by captors to break his Unificationist faith.



Left to right: Toru Goto, translator Shusuke Uotani and Dan Fefferman

CESNUR is the world's premier gathering of scholars dedicated to the study of new religions and religious minorities. Approximately 150 scholars attended the conference, held at Italy's prestigious University of Turin.

Mr. Toru Goto detailed for the group his terrifying experience of kidnap and torture at the hands of religious deprogrammers in Japan. "I was almost exactly 15 years ago," he explained, when I was back at my parents home in Tokyo. I was suddenly surrounded by a number of people and was pushed into a van, which drove me to an apartment arranged for the confinement. At that time I was 31 years.

Fefferman reported to conference participants that 10 to 20 Unification Church members are currently victims of forced de-conversions each year in Japan. Two new victims were abducted against their will during the month of August, and another victim was reported missing on September 13. Several more church members remain missing from earlier this year.



"I frequently attempted to escape..." Toru Goto

"I was forced to receive daily doses of abusive language against the church and its founder," Mr. Goto related. Anytime I refuted them, they called me 'Idiot! Stupid! Evil' and so on. "

"My mental pain was beyond description and I felt like dying. I frequently attempted escape, even attempting to force my way out, but each time I was overpowered by physical violence."

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Toru Goto's case is pivotal, Fefferman explained, because prosecutors have refused to indict the perpetrators, even though they are clearly known.

"The police and the prosecution office did not arrest a single person," Goto said, "nor did they even obtain warrants to search for evidence. And on December 9, last year, the Tokyo Public Prosecutor's Office decided, quite incredibly, not to indict the accused. I cannot accept such a conclusion!"

Over the past 40 years, an estimated 4,300 members of the Unification Church have been subjected to similar criminal practices in Japan.

Peter Zoehrer of the European-based Forum for Religious Freedom (FOREF) told the session that a fact-finding group of European human rights activists recently visited Japan and was shocked to discover that no Japanese human rights organizations were willing to take up this issue. Zoehrer also said that "none of the media have tracked this issue that has been going on for so many years."

While so-called "deprogramming" has been eliminated in the United States for nearly 20 years, there exists a well organized movement in Japan to kidnap Unification Church members and hold them against their will for months or even years at a time, Fefferman said. Japanese government officials turn a blind eye to these abuses and police refuse to investigate, viewing them as mere "family discussions."

Several members are currently missing, including two who were kidnapped in the last month. Some have written letters of renunciation, but apparently under duress. The police still refuse to investigate, or take the word of the victim's parents that it is simply a voluntary "family discussion."

"Deprogramming is a kind of spiritual rape involving kidnapping, false imprisonment, and a fundamental abuse of the human right to religious freedom," said Mr. Goto.



Takashi Yamaguchi

In a question-and-answer period following the panel, Fefferman's assertions were challenged by Mr. Takashi Yamaguchi of a Japanese anti-UC group calling itself the "National Network of Lawyer's Against Spiritual Sales."

He denounced the UC's attempt to draw attention to human rights violations such as Mr. Goto's 12-year ordeal, calling it "merely a campaign to thwart police investigations against the Unification Church."

Fefferman responded that he hopes western scholars will conduct independent investigations to determine the truth or falsity of the claims, and greatly looks forward to their findings.