



FROM THE DESK OF THE
ICRF PRESIDENT DAN FEFFERMAN

January 31, 2014

YOU REMEMBER MR. GOTO, right??
WELL, WE HAVE GREAT NEWS regarding his court case!



I am very happy to share the news with you that a Japanese court has ruled in favor of Unification Church member Mr. Toru Goto in a civil suit against his captors and deprogrammers. Mr. Goto was held against his will for more than twelve years in an attempt to break his faith. He sued three members of his family and two deprogrammers. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who helped bring this case to the attention of the international community.

The January 28 Tokyo District Court ruling acknowledged that the deprogrammers performed a key role in guiding the Goto family to confine him in an effort to force him to recant. It fined Mr. Goto's relatives, and deprogrammer Takashi Miyamura, an amount equivalent to about \$47,000. A second deprogrammer was found to have advised Mr. Goto's family to confine him but was not punished. Both Mr. Goto and the defendants have the right to appeal the ruling.

During a press conference after the verdict, Mr. Goto said, "I am pleased by the single point that the culpability of deprogrammer Mr. Takashi Miyamura has been recognized."

The case had received the attention of numerous international agencies, including the UN Human Rights Council, the US State Department and the US Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Although the fines were small by US standards, the verdict was greeted with enthusiasm by human rights activists, who expressed hope that it will represent an important precedent. "Finally the Japanese judicial system is waking up to religious discrimination and is a bit more ready to act despite taboos that have no place in a democracy," said Aaron Rhodes, co-founder of the Freedom Rights Project. Kathryn Cameron Porter, president of the Washington-DC Leadership Council for Human Rights, said: "I am so very happy for him and all the victims of this horrible practice against human rights!"

In Tokyo, Mr. Goto reminded reporters that abductions of Unification Church members still continue. "Among church members who visited their homes this New Year, some were kidnapped and are now being coerced to leave the Church," Goto said. He added: "With the opportunity provided by this victory, I hope that Japan, which guarantees freedom and human rights, can at least become a country where people do not have the daily fear of being kidnapped and confined because of their faith."

You can read more about the case here: www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/jan/31/man-wins-landmark-lawsuit-on-religious-oppression/

Two New Cases Reported

This good news was tempered by a report that two UC members were kidnapped during January. This is a troubling start to the new year, since last year there were only four known cases. We are hopeful that the conviction of deprogrammer Miyamura and the Goto relatives will make it more difficult for deprogrammers to recruit new clients. However, there are also reports of a growth spurt of new membership in the Japanese UC as a result of Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon's renewed emphasis on evangelism. This creates a larger pool of potential clients for deprogrammers, who naturally focus on new members whose faith has not grown deep roots.

Japanese man wins landmark lawsuit on religious oppression

Meredith Somers

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The Washington Times

A Japanese man who had been kidnapped by family members and subjected to violent attempts to renounce his religion has won a court ruling against his captors, an outcome religious freedom advocates applaud while saying more needs to be done to stop religious oppression in Japan.

Toru Goto, a member of the Unification Church, this week was awarded the equivalent of \$47,000 by a Tokyo District Court.

“My heartfelt wish is that this will be of help in eradicating kidnapping and confinement,” Mr. Goto, 50, said during a news conference in Tokyo. “With the opportunity provided by this victory, I hope that Japan, which guarantees freedom and human rights, can at least become a country where people do not have to fear daily being kidnapped and confined because of their faith.”

A spokesman for the Unification Church said Thursday that the verdict is welcome news. Michael Balcomb, president of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in the United States, said it “brings the Unification Church in Japan one step closer to closing the sad chapter on forced conversions.”

Religion in Japan is strongly represented by Shintoism and Buddhism, though newer religions such as the Unification Church and the Jehovah’s Witnesses are gaining popularity.

Last year, the U.S. Committee on International Religious Freedom cited Japan’s judicial system for turning a blind eye to the kidnapping and forced deprogramming of people in the Unification Church and other “new religious movements” over the past several decades.

“In some extreme cases, as with Unification Church member Toro [sic] Goto, individuals were confined against their will for a decade or more,” the committee said in its 2013 report. “Those abducted describe psychological harassment and physical abuse by both family members and ‘professional deprogrammers.’ Police and judicial authorities have neither investigated nor indicted those responsible for these acts, often citing lack of evidence.”

Scott Flipse, the committee’s deputy director of policy, expressed pleasure Thursday with outcome of the Goto case, saying the panel hopes “his judgment sends the signal that forced renunciations of faith cannot continue with impunity.”

The Japanese Embassy and the State Department did not respond to requests for comment. However, the State Department cited Japan for inaction in religious oppression cases such as Mr. Goto’s in its 2010 International Religious Freedom Report.

The Washington Times was founded by the Unification Church in 1982, and now operates independently of the Church.

Mr. Goto filed a lawsuit against his brother, sister and sister-in-law, as well as professional deprogrammer Takashi Miyamura, and Yasutomo Matsunaga, a Christian minister. All but Mr. Matsunaga were found liable.

Dan Fefferman, president of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom, said the ruling is important because “the top deprogrammer in Japan was held culpable in a court of law. That’s important because it makes it difficult for him to operate.”

“It’s a very important case because it’s very rare for a court to find in favor of victims of deprogramming in Japan,” he added.

Freedom Rights Project co-founder Aaron Rhodes, called the court’s \$47,000 reward “paltry,” but said it was an important first step.

“Finally the Japanese judicial system is waking up to religious discrimination and a bit more ready to act despite taboos that have no place in a democracy.”