

Thailand's 21 Year Court Case against the Unification Church

Genie Kagawa
September 12, 2011



Photo date and location unknown

In December 1989, my husband, Takashi Kagawa, and I were transferred as missionaries from Malaysia to Thailand by the Continental Directors, Drs. Christopher and Julia Kim. While my husband taught Japanese to Thai people, I oversaw the public relations area and development of the Thai federations under the Church. Dr. Lek Thaveetermsakul was the Church National Leader in charge of all activities in Thailand. We had been in Thailand for one and a half years before the 21-year case exploded.

Although I was raised a Christian all my life, I never realized why it was so important for the Romans to put the placard "King of the Jews" on top of the cross of Jesus when he was crucified. Now, I know that treason was the banner that they were flaunting. That signboard cried out with this message: "Don't sympathize with this man, otherwise you will face the same fate. This man committed treason. He subverted the ruler and is setting himself as a supreme ruler." Jesus was so wrongly pushed down, humiliated, and executed, even though he taught people to "Render to Cesar what belongs to Cesar" and that "My Kingdom is not of this world."

Absolute power can be such a dangerous thing. One morning, as I watched television, five Thai army generals were making announcements every 15 minutes on TV stations that they had taken over, declaring martial law and their rule. Even the Prime Minister had disappeared and was being held in an undisclosed place. The generals claimed that they were loyal to the king and were going to straighten out the country. These were the same generals who were influenced by the newspaper that was attacking us, and they used their extreme power. They accused us of treason. On June 26, 1991, eight of our Thai church leaders were arrested. Little did we know that it would be more than twenty years before they'd be cleared of all charges.

According to Thai law, treason is subversion against the monarchy and the nation, and its penalty is life imprisonment or execution. What an unimaginable shock it was to see our names associated with this kind of accusation. Imagine the phrases repeated in the media, newspapers, and TV stations, calling out for life imprisonment and execution of eight of our very own Unification Church leaders. Day after day for three months, these phrases were ringing in our ears as the Crime Suppression Police invaded our centers nationwide. The Crime Suppression Police were not ordinary police. They carried no sense of accountability. They were rough and crude and bullied our members. They invaded our Headquarters' prayer room, and took away the holy chairs, holy salt, and our slippers, and set up an entire floor at the police headquarters to display our traitorous activities. We were even accused of intoxicating youth with "white powder," or heroin. But, they couldn't find any evidence, so they just kept invading our centers repeatedly, day after day.

Thai law is based on German law, so one is arrested first, and then has to prove his innocence in jail. The first three months, during which a preliminary investigation was taking place, the National Leader and his wife, Dr. Lek and Vipa Thaveetermsakul, and six other members of the Executive Committee of the Church were jailed in a very small cell with many other prisoners. They had no room to move around, and the hot air was stifling, as there was just one tiny window. When prisoners get heavy sentences and feel that they will not get out of jail easily, their pastime is tattooing each other. Our clean-cut, innocent church leaders were surrounded by heavily tattooed prisoners, some of whom were hardened criminals who had committed serious crimes. The military junta meant to terrorize us into fear, desperation, and helplessness. Unlike American jails, the conditions were dirty, primitive, overcrowded, and degrading.

We had 300 fulltime members who were dispersed because of the center raids. However, the police got a hold of their names at our Headquarters, and called them in for questioning one by one. They tried to trick our members into saying something derogatory against the monarchy, but not one member could be enticed to say anything negative. Associate members and parents were then called in one by one for questioning. They were looking for disloyal and treasonous statements, but again, they found none. After one month, slowly, the fulltime students and members began to regroup themselves in small apartments of 10-12 persons each, and stayed together to pray, make conditions, and maintain their life of faith. Within one year, the church foundation mysteriously remained intact, due to the courageous and brave attitude of the Thai leaders outside the prison.

Even though there was no evidence of treason found after three months, a case was filed and no bail was allowed. All of our leaders were transferred to a larger prison facility. A leader shared with me that one of the difficulties of living in that prison was that during the night, they could hear the loud and terrifying shouts of prisoners being whipped by the guards for not cooperating.

In Southeast Asia, whipping is inflicted most effectively with flexible, long bamboo sticks, covered at the end with rubber bands formed into a ball. We could visit that prison, but it was such a painful experience. The prisoners were brought to one area and stood behind bars, while visitors could only shout at them from a long distance, many feet away. It was such an inhumane system. I was told that once someone enters the prison in Thailand, they lose their spouse, children, family members, and friends. Gradually, people don't visit them less and less, then not at all. The prison guards grew to admire our leaders and the relationships they saw in them with our church members greatly. Luckily, our members suffered no physical harm. There was extreme discomfort in the jail, but they executed their work assignments and cooperated with the prison officials and therefore, they were not treated badly.

We saw the light when the King of Thailand took unprecedented action to relieve the top dictatorial general of his duties as head of Thailand and replaced him with a Prime Minister who would formulate a constitutional system for the country. The era of tyranny had ended, and our precious Ambassadors for Peace stood up to demand bail for our eight leaders. The President of the Foundation for Development and Peace (FDP), an organization formed by Ambassadors for Peace to raise money, was the head of the Commission on Human Rights, and together, with university presidents, a Minister in the office of the Prime Minister, academicians, and NGO leaders, submitted a petition for bail to the court, which was finally granted. I cannot forget the day that Dr. Lek Thaveetermsakul, the secretary-general of the Universal Peace Federation in Thailand, and the others were released from prison. Jack Hart, the first American missionary of Thailand, and I went to the jail at the appointed time, and the first person I saw, standing alone in the outside court, was Dr. Lek. After almost two long years, I saw him standing there like a bird released from its cage and ready to take flight. He was free, and it was so liberating. We shed a lot of joyful tears together with the Thai church leaders that day.

There are a lot of hidden stories woven into history that are played out by women, as in this case. After the release of Thai leaders, Mrs. Julia Kim, wife of Dr. Christopher Kim, entered Thailand discreetly and met a very distinguished Thai woman, Mrs. Khamontip Phayakvichien, who played an important role in the resolution of this case. For years, she reached out unceasingly to the media, government leaders, judges, lawyers, commissioners, and human rights activists. She came to the center almost every day and gave her sincere, motherly heart to all the leaders and members. Parallel to the legal initiatives, she laid important foundation stones in the public relations until we could witness victory in the lower and intermediary legal courts. Despite all the lobbying efforts, the Supreme Court had delayed issuing a final resolution until the recent conclusion on September 1st, 2011.

September 1st is a day of liberation, not only for our members, but for God himself, True Parents, and for humanity as a whole. True Father is someone who had personally tasted the terrifying tyranny of evil power, and he knows well what kind of world awaits mankind if we cannot succeed in our mission to build God's Kingdom. We see his tremendous passion. We see his inexplicable energy and drive. We see his magnificent love. We are baffled by the arduous conditions that True Parents are laying even at the age of 93. He cherishes the words "complete liberation" and "freedom" more than any of us, and there is the true meaning of power.