

Tokyo Court Rules in Favor of Unificationist Held Captive

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New York, NY – Unificationists in Japan are applauding the verdict of a Tokyo District Court that decided in favor of a member of their religion held against his will for 12 and a half years.

Mr. Toru Goto, 50, sued two professional deprogrammers, his brother, his sister and his sister-in-law for kidnapping him in September, 1995 and holding him in various condo prisons until releasing him in an emaciated condition in February, 2008. The court on January 28, 2014 fined Goto's relatives and deprogrammer Takashi Miyamura an amount equivalent to \$47,000.

The verdict was greeted with enthusiasm by human rights activists, who expressed hope that the verdict will represent an important precedent. "I am so very happy for him and all the victims of this horrible practice against human rights!" said Kathryn Cameron Porter, President of the Washington-DC-based Leadership Council for Human Rights.

Dan Fefferman, President of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom, added:

"We are hopeful that this will be a turning point for Japan. In the United States, deprogramming didn't come to an end until the courts made it clear that the perpetrators of this crime would be punished."

"This is welcome news indeed, and it brings our religious community in Japan one step closer to closing the sad chapter on forced conversions" said Dr. Michael Balcomb, President of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) in the United States. "But the good news is that Mr. Toru Goto is a victor in the end, having recovered his dignity, found a good spouse and now has children. He is in the company of many American Unificationists who likewise survived deprogrammings—although 30 years ago—and today are watching their children get married in the Marriage Blessing of 2014."

Mr. Goto told the court he made many attempts to escape the condos where his relatives held him prisoner, but he was caught every time. In frustration, he went on three hunger strikes, each of 21 days or more. In retaliation, his captors stopped giving him solid food, and he was severely emaciated when they kicked him out of their apartment in 2008.

The ruling acknowledged that the professional deprogrammers performed a key role in guiding the Goto relatives to confine Toru Goto in an attempt to force him to recant. For decades, the professional deprogrammers have denied that they use coercion of any kind.

Following the ruling in his favor, Mr. Goto held a press conference at the Judicial Reporters Club in Tokyo together with the plaintiff's attorney, Mr. Nobuya Fukumoto and Mr. Mamoru Kamono, Director of Public Information for the FFWPU of Japan. "My heartfelt wish is that this will be of help in eradicating kidnapping and confinement," he said.

During the conference, Mr. Goto reflected on the three years since he filed the civil suit in January, 2010, saying, "In the course of the trial, I had to recall the times of my confinement, which was painful, but I am pleased by the single point that the culpability of deprogrammer Mr. Takashi Miyamura was recognized."

He also reminded reporters that abductions of Unificationists continue in Japan.

"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 to fear daily, being kidnapped and confined because of their faith."