

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Toru Goto Locked Up 12 Years - Human Rights Violations in Japan

Knut Holdhus
February 14, 2025



Toru Goto at the official launch of his book *Deadly Struggle: Surviving 4,536 Days of Confinement*



Toru Goto's new book *Deadly Struggle: Surviving 4,536 Days of Confinement*

A victim of most dehumanizing treatment, held locked up for more than 12 years, talks about the preciousness of freedom as his book is launched

Part 1 of a talk given 10th February 2025, in Tokyo, at the official launch of the book "Deadly Struggle: Surviving 4,536 Days of Confinement" by Toru Goto (後藤徹), held captive for [12 years and 5 months](#) in an attempt to have his faith broken.

Introduction to Toru Goto by Mamoru Kamono (鴨野守), the moderator of the book launch,

"Despite an unimaginable long-term confinement of [12 years, 5 months](#) - 4,536 days - he never lost his faith and fought alongside God. He has made a remarkable return and has now published his first memoir. Today, Toru Goto will deliver a commemorative lecture. Toru Goto, we look forward to your speech."

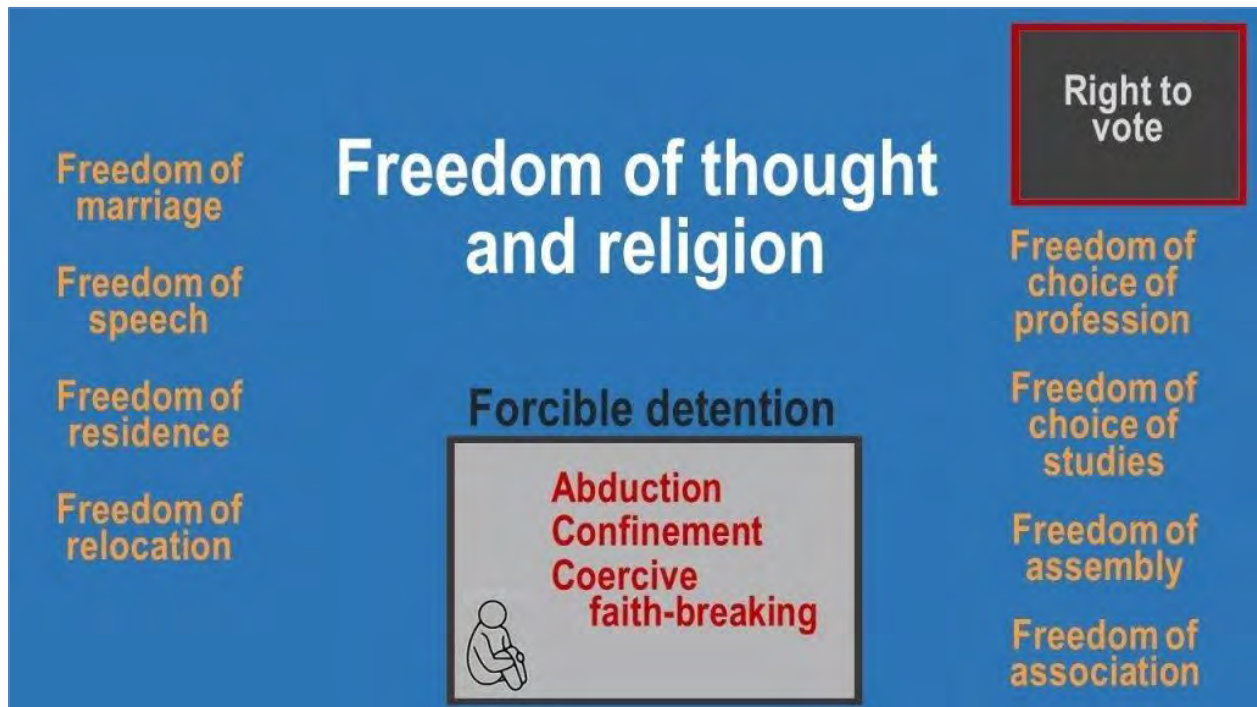
Everyone, good afternoon.

Thank you all so much for gathering here today for the book launch event of *Deadly Struggle*. Chairman Tanaka, thank you for your wonderful congratulatory remarks.

Today, I would like to speak on the theme of "The Preciousness of Freedom". This may be a sudden question, but have any of you ever experienced being locked up? As a child, perhaps when you misbehaved, your parents might have said, "Stay in the closet!" I have had such an experience myself, and I remember feeling terrified.

But as an adult, experiencing forced confinement is something quite rare. Being locked up means having your freedom taken away. And losing one's freedom is truly painful, distressing, and unbearable.

For human beings, freedom is absolutely essential. As you all know, throughout history, people have fought - spilling blood - to gain their freedom.



English version of a slide used by Toru Goto during his lecture Feb. 10, 2025

As a result, even here in Japan, the constitution guarantees freedom to every citizen. Freedom of assembly, association, speech, occupation, residence, movement, academic studies, and marriage - these are all protected. And at the core of these freedoms is the freedom of thought and religion.

Freedom of the mind - if we refer to the Japanese Constitution, it is Article 19 [Editor's note: Freedom of thought and conscience] and Article 20 [Editor's note: Freedom of religion]. Looking at this on a global scale, the freedom of religion is an absolute, inviolable human right. This is firmly established under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



The location of the apartment in Ogikubo, Tokyo where Toru Goto was held captive and dehumanized

Everyone, please look at the screen. Here you can see all the freedoms we have. But what happens when all of them are taken away? Completely. This is what abduction, confinement, and coercive faith-breaking are. Every single freedom is stripped away, including the freedom of one's mind. People are confined until their faith - something more precious than their own lives - is completely destroyed.

This is my story. This is my experience.

Article 15 of the Constitution grants every citizen the right to participate in politics. However, during the [12 years and 5 months](#) I was confined, do you know how many times I

was denied this right to vote? (Screen displays the various elections held during those [12 years](#).) Nineteen times.

Without my knowledge, my residential registration was secretly moved from the confinement apartment to my family's home in Tokyo. During my captivity, there were 19 elections - national elections, Tokyo gubernatorial elections, Tokyo metropolitan assembly elections, mayoral elections, and city council elections. Do you think I received my voting ballot? Most likely, it was either thrown into the trash or left unopened in a mailbox.

And I am not the only one - many other victims of confinement have suffered the same fate.

When I was confined, I didn't even know where I was. They wouldn't tell me. I asked,

"Where am I? At least tell me that much."

Their response: "There's no need for you to know."

Then, one day, I heard a faint voice outside:

"Residents of Ogikubo 3-chome, this is Nobuteru Ishihara speaking!"

That's when I realized, "So, I'm in Ogikubo 3-chome."

It took six years of captivity before I finally learned where I was - thanks to the voice of a campaign announcer on the street.

Everyone, this didn't happen to just one or two persons. It happened to [4,300 individuals](#). That's why this is considered the [worst human rights violation in postwar Japan](#).



Toru Goto at 31

(Pointing to a slide) This was me just before I was abducted and confined - 31 years old.

At that time, just two weeks earlier, I had a [Marriage Blessing](#) with a female believer from my [church](#). My heart was full of dreams and hope.

(Pointing to a slide) The number 225 represents the abduction and confinement cases reported in just the year 1995. That means I was just one of those 225 victims.

To be continued. Part 2 coming soon

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New Book: 4,536 Days Locked Up – Deadly Struggle

• February 11, 2025 • Knut Holdhus



Surviving more than 12 years locked up in Tokyo apartment, Toru Goto publishes on the anniversary of his release his account of the ordeals he suffered



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

Tokyo, 11th February 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article.*

“Unable to Vote in 19 Elections”
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by the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

Toru Goto (後藤徹) – now 61 – representative of the [National Association of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion Victims](#), has published his autobiography “*Deadly Struggle: Surviving 4,536 Days of Confinement*” (published by Sogei Publishing). The book details his experience of being held captive by his family, the legal battle he fought after his release, and his reflections on the ordeal.

Goto, a believer in the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), was confined for 12 years and 5 months – from the age of 31 to 44 – by his family under the guidance of pastors and activists who considered the [Family Federation](#) heretical. He was held in an apartment in Suginami Ward, Tokyo, and was only released 17 years ago on the same date as yesterday’s book launch – 10th February. To mark the occasion, a [lecture](#) celebrating the book’s publication was held in the same district, attracting about 300 attendees.



Front cover page of Japanese edition of **Toru Goto's new book “Deadly Struggle: Surviving 4,536 Days of Confinement”**

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“Deprived of all freedom” – Goto’s testimony

In his [lecture](#), Goto described the harrowing nature of religious abduction and confinement:

“You are completely stripped of your freedom and held captive until your faith is completely destroyed.”

He also emphasized the impact on his civil rights, stating that he was unable to vote in 19 elections during his years in captivity.

Goto explained that families of believers were often instructed by pastors specializing in faith-breaking:

“The families are told, ‘It’s difficult to break free from mind control on your own. Only specialists can help.’ This so-called ‘protection’ is actually abduction and confinement, but the use of deceptive language numbs them to the fact that they are committing a crime. In some ways, my own family were also victims.”

Regarding the publication of his autobiography, he stated:

“I hope this will be an opportunity for people to truly consider what freedom of religion means.”

Family Federation leader’s perspective: the tragedy of exploiting family bonds

Among the guests at the lecture was Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広), president of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan. He criticized the practice of forcible faith-breaking, stating:

“What is absolutely unforgivable is how they exploit the deep emotional bond between parents and children. When you read ‘Deadly Struggle’, you will see the title takes on a deeper meaning.”

Tanaka also pointed out that 70% of individuals subjected to abduction and forced deconversion ultimately leave the church. However, he added:

“Only a handful of them take legal action against their perpetrators. The real question is, have they been able to mend their relationships with their families? How have they coped with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and the ruptures in their personal lives? As long as abduction and confinement persist, tragedies will continue – whether they remain in the church or not.”



Tomihiro Tanaka (田中富広), President of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, here on 5th Feb. 2025. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission



The event also featured speakers such as Tatsuhiko Iwamoto (岩本龍弘), a former pastor of

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Tatsuhiko Iwamoto. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda (豊田剛) / *Sekai Nippo*

the United Church of Christ in Japan and now an independent YouTuber, as well as attorney Shinichi Tokunaga (徳永信一).

March for religious freedom

Following the lecture, Goto and attendees marched approximately 3 kilometers to a park near the Ogikubo apartment where he was once confined. Leading the rally, Goto and participants chanted slogans such as:

- "Protect freedom of religion and



Toru Goto (second from the right, front row) and others from the *National Association of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion Victims* participating in a protest march, 10th February 2025, Sugunami Ward, Tokyo. Photo: Yasuhiro Uno (宇野泰弘)

fundamental human rights!"

- "Abduction and forced de-conversion of Family Federation believers is a crime!"

Legal victory and compensation

Goto filed a civil lawsuit against his family, the pastors, and faith-breaking activists responsible for his confinement. In 2015, the Supreme Court ruled in his favor, ordering the defendants to pay 22 million yen (approx. \$150,000) in damages.

See *Preciousness of Freedom: Locked Up for 12 Years*

Featured image above: **Toru Goto** (後藤徹), representing the National Association of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion Victims, shares his experiences at a lecture 10th February 2025, Sugunami Ward, Tokyo, marking the publication of his autobiography "Deadly Struggle". Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)

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