

Freedom Riders Seijin Tranberg and Joshua Wildman Rally in Phoenix on God's Day 2012

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Phoenix clergy and Unificationists gather on the campus of Arizona State University to rally for Faith, Freedom and Family on Jan. 23, 2012, the first day of the Lunar New Year. Unificationists celebrated the date as "God's Day" around the world.

Freedom riders Seijin Tranberg of Atlanta and Joshua Wildman from San Francisco made a slight detour from their bicycle trip to Los Angeles to come and speak to students and Unificationists to raise awareness of religious persecution of minority groups and Unificationists in particular at Arizona State University (ASU) in Phoenix.

A crowd of 60 people gathered on the campus of ASU to hear local representatives from various faiths offer words of support and encouragement to these young men who have taken up the cause of exposing the religious persecution and kidnapping of Unification Church members in Japan.

Members of the Arizona Interfaith Movement spoke out against religious persecution. Gustavo Gutierrez, a Native American Elder and founder of the Peace and Dignity Journey, gave the invocation. Luke Higuchi, a Japanese Unificationist kidnapping survivor gave a short heartfelt address. Ernie Bruss, from the Baha'i faith, shared his sympathy toward religious persecution. The Baha'is in Iran constantly face serious consequences for practicing their faith and are threatened by imprisonment and death. Les Koel, from The Church of Scientology read from the *Scientology Creed* and encouraged listeners to sign a petition to implement The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at HumanRights.com.

Reverend Ray Navarro, from Tempe Seventh Day Adventist church, stressed that, "Even though we have religious differences, none of us has the right to interfere with the religious choices of others." Mr. Singh Khalsa of the Sikh community shared that Khalsa Sikhs take a vow to protect the human rights of others and confided that it is difficult to belong to a minority religion in America.

Ray Madaghiele, author of *Ray of Hope for Peace* offered encouragement and words of inspiration from his own experience cycling 3,369 miles across America after 9/11. He shared his Four Focal Points for creating peace: Have faith, live your purpose, be of good character and serve all with love and compassion. He concluded by saying, "Each of us is a piece of the puzzle for peace."

Ethan Anderson, a junior student at ASU read a letter of support from Congressman Trent Franks who said that we have to recognize that more than two thirds of the world's population lives in countries where the freedom of religion is significantly threatened. Congressman Franks stressed that it is crucial that we take action on international religious freedom issues as more people around the globe are persecuted for their faith.

Seijin Tranberg concluded the event to remind us that religious intolerance has gone on for centuries and won't be solved unless we remain vigilant. He quoted Martin Luther King Jr. who said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Attendees were encouraged to sign a petition to raise awareness of the plight of members who are being held captive in Japan. Max Lambert, the MC, reminded us that deprogramming ceased in America when deprogrammers were prosecuted and sent to prison.

It is our hope as these young men bicycle across America that pressure can be brought unto Japanese authorities to stop the injustices and crimes against Unification Church members.