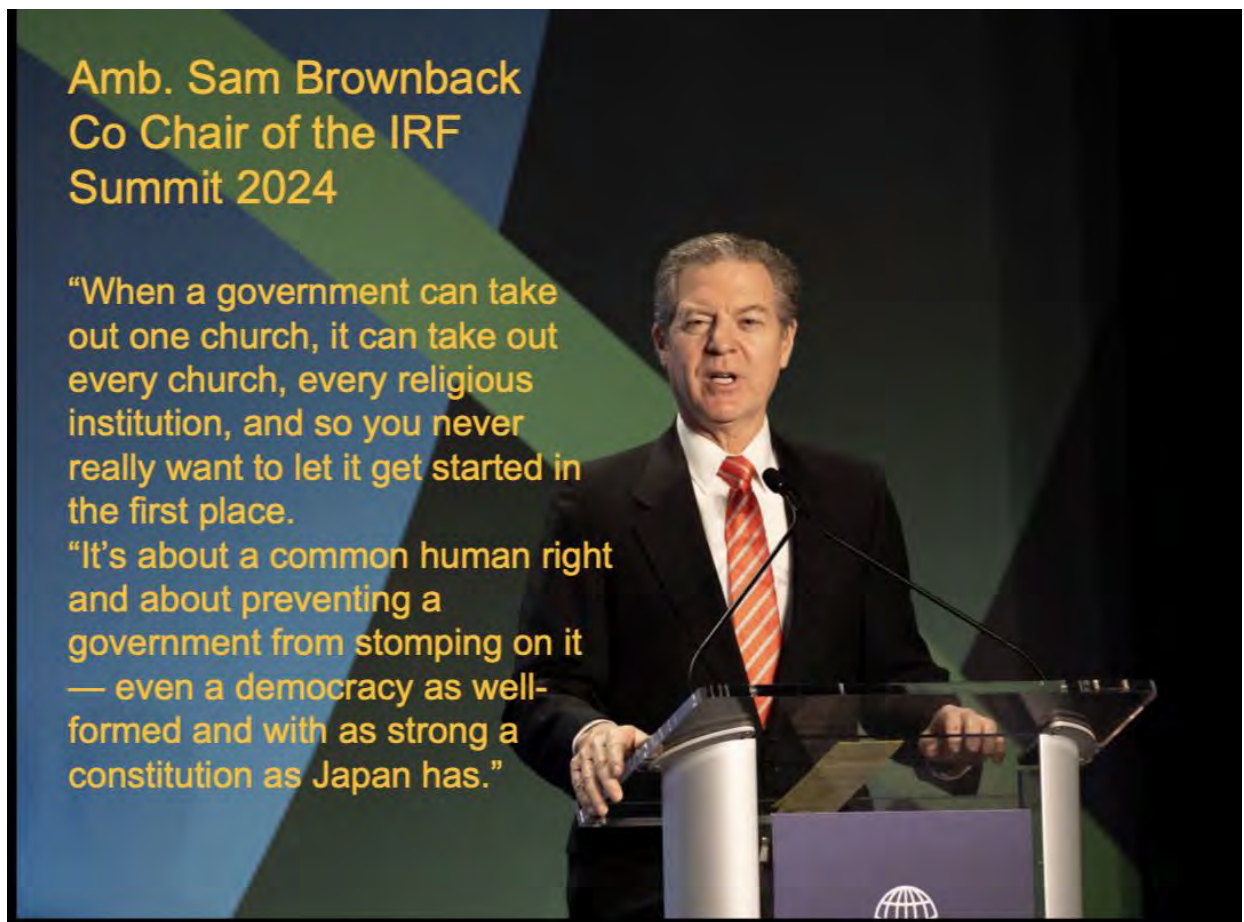


UPF USA: Defenders of Religious Freedom Speak Out in Washington D.C.

Larry Moffitt
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WASHINGTON, D.C., USA - An array of human rights experts and religious freedom leaders told a seminar audience that religious freedom requires constant protection. They shared their views during a seminar held January 31 - February 1, 2024, hosted by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) and The Washington Times Foundation.



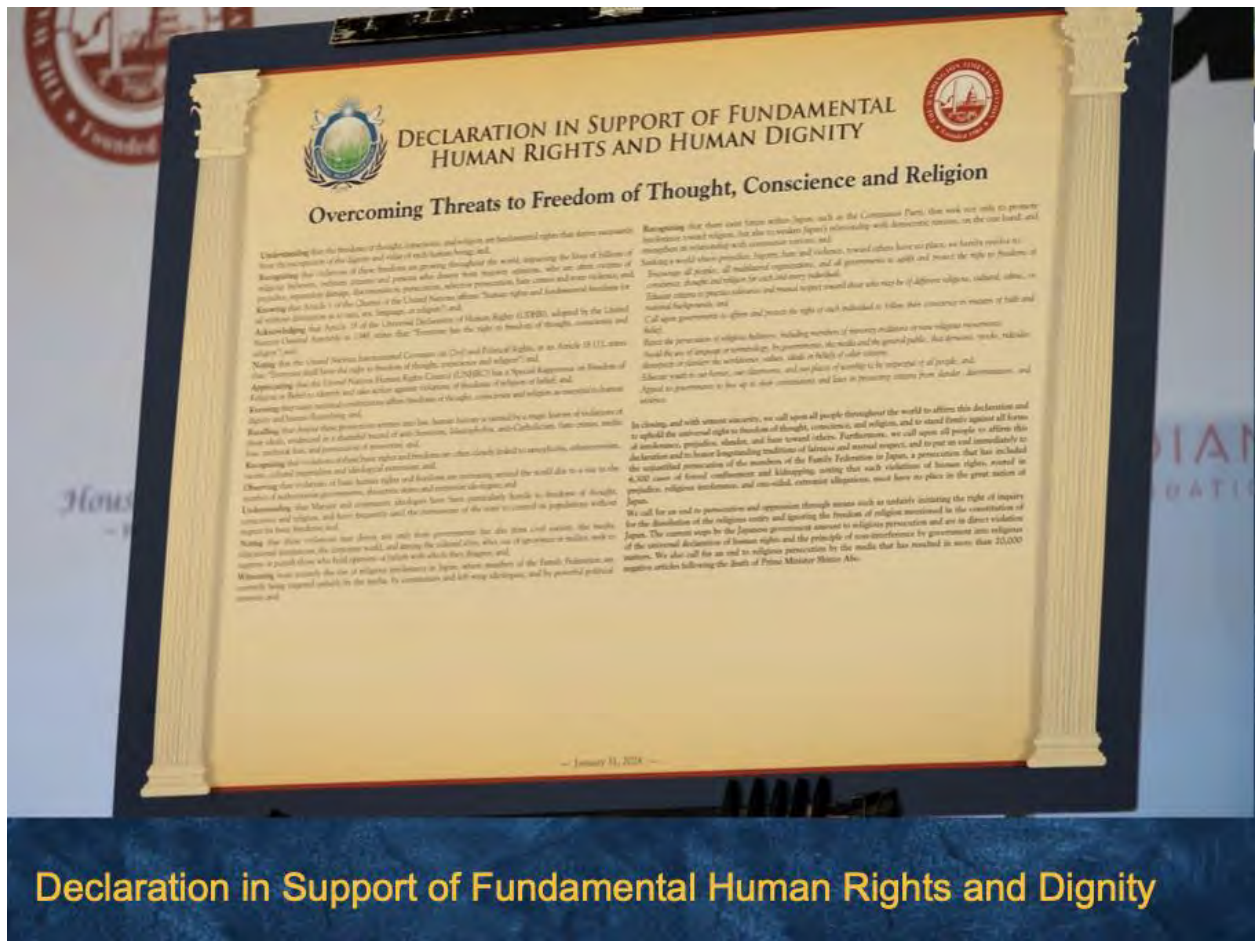
"The core value of being able to approach God without interference really underlies all freedom," said former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich during the January 31 luncheon organized by UPF and the Times Foundation, which was part of the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit 2024. "A government which can block you from approaching God can block you from anything," Mr. Gingrich said.



The two-day IRF Summit, held in Washington, D.C. and led by co-chairs Ambassador Sam Brownback and Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, featured testimonies and details about religious persecution from around the world, including China's restrictions on Uyghur Muslims, Nigerian Muslim herdsmen killing Christians, Hindu and Muslim battles in India, and the recent massacre in Israel.



The luncheon program further highlighted the efforts of the Japanese government to dissolve - and confiscate assets from - the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in Japan. (The dissolution case is currently before a judge in Tokyo District Court.) The pretext for attacking the Family Federation in Japan was the July 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe; the shooter reportedly said he felt "hate" and a "grudge" toward the church because his mother, a member, made large donations to it some 20 years ago.



Religious freedom serves communities as well as individuals, said Prof. Cole Durham Jr., director of Brigham Young University's International Center for Law and Religious Studies. So, if there is wrongful conduct by an individual believer, or a believer's relative, that individual should be sanctioned, "but the entire religious community should not be shut down or crippled," he said.

The Japanese Communist Party "has alleged that the church is engaged in corruption and is a threat to society," former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a video shown at the luncheon. "Nothing could be further from the truth. The church, founded by Reverend Moon, has long stood against communism and has always championed stronger ties between Japan, Korea, and the United States... We should see the [Japanese Communist Party's] attack for what it is: an attempt to undermine and weaken the vital U.S.-Japan alliance."

"It is not OK to engage in collective punishment" or use government and media power to marginalize a faith community and make it "an easy picking for state abuse," Dr. Lantos Swett said in a panel discussion led by Washington Times Opinion Editor Charles Hurt.

"Japan is at the crossroads," said Dr. Jan Figel, a renowned religious freedom advocate and member of the IRF Summit Global Leadership Council. "Religious freedom is a litmus test of all human rights," he said, recalling how half his life was spent under the anti-religious communist regime in the former Czechoslovakia. If religious freedom is disrespected in a nation, "then all other rights surely will be limited, oppressed or violated," he said.

"Religious freedom means we are friends [of every faith]," and as friends, governments can help other governments protect it, said Ambassador Suzan Johnson Cook, former ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom at the U.S. State Department.

Church lawyer Mr. Tatsu Nakayama said his research showed that the Japan Communist Party and its activist lawyers began their Family Federation Japan "dissolution campaign" in 1987 and are eager now to "get it done." After Abe's assassination, he said, the leftist lawyers aggressively worked to defame the Family Federation in Japan's mass media.

"If the Family Federation is dissolved, it will not only lose its tax exemption, it will lose its places of worship, assets, everything. It will be a death sentence," Bitter Winter Editor-in-Chief Dr. Massimo Introvigne told the panel discussion. Moreover, the Japanese laws passed to sequester the Family Federation will impact the freedom of all religions in Japan to collect donations and pass their faith to their children, he said, adding that "the Jehovah's Witnesses are already under attack."

Mrs. Moriko Hori, president of the Women's Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI), an NGO that has enjoyed general consultative status at the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1997, said their global projects have also been impacted by the inexplicable attacks by Japanese government officials, left-wing lawyers and mass media.

Dr. Michael Jenkins, president of UPF International and The Washington Times Foundation, founded by Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon and her late husband Reverend Sun Myung Moon, stated, "The protection and promotion of religious freedom is the critical responsibility of all who affirm God. UPF and The Washington Times Foundation are committed to protect, defend and advance religious liberty universally. As we join together at the IRF Summit 2024, which is the global leader in this arena, we will forge our collective commitment to fight religious persecution. Together we will roll back the tyranny of all God-denying ideologies and build a better world."

The UPF and Washington Times Foundation event was covered in a January 31 Washington Times article, under the headline, "Japan's dispute with church a test of liberty everywhere." Article link:

www.washingtontimes.com/news/2024/jan/31/key-test-japans-clash-with-church-seen-as-pivotal/