

Clergy and Rights Activists Hold Press Briefing at Japanese Consulate

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Top Image:

Religious freedom activists gathered in New York on Tuesday included the American Clergy Leadership Conference, the Universal Peace Federation-USA, the International Coalition for Religious Freedom, Survivors Against Forced Exit, and the Unification Church.

A Methodist minister and a group of human-rights activists held a press briefing on the steps of the Japanese Consulate in New York City, on October 12, 2010, to protest negligent law enforcement regarding abduction of women in Japan. Led by the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC), the briefing drew attention to a recent documentary on Japanese human-rights abuses that aired on the Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS) in Korea on October 6.

"The Japanese government is turning a blind eye to this persecution," said Dr. Luonne Rouse, a United Methodist Church Pastor. "It's time to stop the abductions and free the victims. We must protest religious freedom and human rights."



Rev. Michael Jenkins (left) presents letter to the Japanese Ambassador. Rev. Luonne Rouse looks on.

Dr. Rouse was supported by Luke Higuchi, president of the Survivors Against Forced Exit (SAFE) organization, Rev. Michael Jenkins, chairman of ACLC, and Bishop Jesse Edwards. Several victims of Japanese abduction and attempted deprogramming attended the event to share their stories and answer questions. Numerous members of the Korean and Japanese media also attended.

The documentary, titled "Kidnapping and Confinement in the Unification Church – Kiyomi Returns Home After 13 Years," inspired the protest, according to the organizers, and detailed the abduction and confinement of several members of the Unification Church, which is a matter of persecution that occurs daily in Japan at the hands of religious deprogrammers. The documentary drew the largest share of TV audiences in Korea when it aired (12 percent), and has claimed a substantial amount of attention within the Korean-American community.

Japanese Authorities Not Enforcing the Law

Dr. Rouse said at the briefing: “We as clergy have been working on the continued human rights and religious freedom abuses that are going on in Japan. We are shocked that a good friend and ally of America, that is a modern democratic society, would continue to allow the abduction and forced confinement of adult men and women against the fundamental principles of freedom of religion that Japan is supposed to uphold.”

“I’m reminded of the acts that were done in America when the higher law on the books forbade kidnapping, abduction and the destruction of life. And yet local authorities, who were driven by bigotry and hatred, allowed the lynching of black brothers and sisters to occur. Even though it was clearly against the law, local police, prosecutors and judges took no action,” Dr. Rouse continued.

“We are encouraged, however, that God is real and that when people of faith and conscience come together from all faiths, we will overcome. We shall overcome. We saw this with Dr. Martin Luther King. We saw this with the great reformers in history. We once again will see this in Japan. We’re calling upon the righteous people of Japan in government and in civil society to come forward and stop the forced and violent abduction of adults in Japan, and the release of the captives immediately. God is saying, once again,: ‘Let my people go!’ ” Dr. Rouse told the gathering.

Meeting Requested with Japanese Ambassador



Mitsuko Antal, a spouse of a U.S. Army chaplain, said she was abducted and held for 52 days in 1996, then abducted again in 1998 and held for 72 days. She was wounded when she jumped from a second story window to escape in 1998.

The protest concluded with Dr. Rouse and supporters walking into the Japanese Consulate and hand-delivering a [letter](#) directly to an aide of the Honorable Sunichi Nishimiya, the Consulate General. The [letter](#) requests a meeting between the Ambassador, human rights leaders, and several of the Japanese victims currently living in the United States to share stories of persecution and discuss steps to remedy the current situation.

Rev. Michael Jenkins, chairman of the ACLC later announced: “We are going to the Consul General today, Ambassador Sunichi Nishimiya, and we’re seeking to discuss with him the facts of these cases as we are building a broad-based international interfaith movement of people of conscience to call upon the good people of Japan and government and civil society to stop the abductions and release these prisoners of faith immediately. The laws are already in the books. All that is needed is for Japan to enforce them. We are working with the American Congress and with the Japanese Diet, and we find there is deep concern for this abuse of human rights and religious liberty.” Rev. Jenkins said that unless the group obtained the requested meeting with the ambassador, there would be a follow-up demonstration of several hundred concerned citizens.

Congressional Action Urged by Bishop Edwards



Mr. Luke Higuchi, chairman of Survivors Against Forced Exit was illegally confined in a mental hospital for three months.

Also speaking at the event was Bishop Jesse Edwards, a Pentecostal minister, who said:

“As a Pentecostal pastor and the president of the American Clergy Leadership Conference, we come to send a message to the Japanese ambassador and consul general, and to the ambassador in Washington, as well as to the authorities in Japan. We are working closely with our Congressmen and Senators because we believe that a violation of religious freedom, whether it be in Japan or in any nation of the world, must be addressed. If it is not, it will spread.”

Bishop Edwards continued: “We as Christian clergy are very, very concerned about the persecution of people of faith. My fellow Pentecostals in America have been persecuted and even beaten and killed over their beliefs. And in relationship to this faith-breaking operation that’s continuing in Japan, we see that one of our own Pentecostal believers in the United States was abducted, taken through the faith-breaking process simply because some of his family didn’t believe in the Christian denomination that he chose with his own faith. Only through convictions of the criminals involved did the kidnapping and human rights violations stop and religious freedom secured.”

During the past 40 years, an estimated 4,300 members of the Unification Church have been subjected to human rights violations of this nature. Between ten to twenty Unification Church members are currently abducted each year in Japan to undergo forced de-conversions.

In the United States, American citizens are being encouraged to [sign a petition](#) encouraging Congress to hold hearings on human rights violations in Japan. Specifically, the hearing would be held by the Tom Lantos Commission on Human Rights, co-chaired by Rep. James McGovern (D-MA) and Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA). The briefing was covered by the Korea Times, MKTV, Segye Times, and Radio Korea. See following links for Korean language reports:

newskann.com/bbs/board.php?bo_table=photo&wr_id=18

www.knntv.us

www.krbusa.com

newsroh.com/technote7/board.php?board=main&command=skin_insert&exe=insert_iboard1_home

For more information on the *Japan* abduction issue visit: stopjapanabductions.org/