

George Washington University's chapter of Amnesty International features survivors of religious kidnappings in Japan

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For the first time, a campus chapter of Amnesty International featured the survivors of religious kidnappings in Japan at a meeting at George Washington University's Marvin Center on March 19, 2013.

Ms. Shani Shih, the student board member of Amnesty International at George Washington University said the turnout of 50 people was far greater than she expected. "It was spectacular. I was very happy," she told Unification News.

"Usually Amnesty International (AI) has its own agenda, complete with letter writing campaigns. This time the topic was a cause from outside of AI," said Yuri Higuchi, a student member of AI who helped organize the meeting.

The meeting included briefings by Mr. Luke Higuchi, the president of Survivors Against Forced Exit (SAFE). Higuchi told of his harrowing story of torture and forced confinement in Japan in the late 1980s. Other survivor testimonies were heard from Ms. Yumi Hoshino and Ms. Mituko Antal. Ms. Ichiko Sudo, a radio talk show host reported that 80 percent of the victims of kidnapping and forced confinement are Japanese women whose own parents have paid huge sums to faith-breaking (FB) specialists and that torture sometimes includes beatings and rape. Ms. Hoshino reported that professional deprogrammers charged her parents more than \$80,000 in Japanese currency. Ms. Sudo presented slides of apartment buildings outfitted as confinement centers complete with barred windows and fortified door locks.



"The worst thing about faith-breaking is that it violates adult children's belief that they can trust their parents," Ms. Sudo told the group. Several of the women who testified shed tears as they recalled their traumatic experiences paid for by their misguided parents.

Mr. Dan Fefferman, president of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom, reported on efforts to raise awareness of the issue at the United Nations Human Rights Council, with the U.S. State Department and with the Justice Ministry of the Japanese government.



“There is no problem with Japanese law,” said Fefferman, as he went on to explain that the Japanese Constitution guarantees religious freedom but that local authorities do not intervene with parents who have decided to violate the human and civil rights of their adult children.

Yury Higuchi, who is majoring in International Affairs and double-majoring in Chinese at George Washington University, told the group she first became aware of the severe persecution of Japanese members of the Unification Church when she read reports about the 12 year confinement of Mr. Toru Goto whose story was published in 2009. One day while having dinner with her family at a restaurant, her father told her that he, too, was a victim of kidnapping and suffered solitary confinement in a Japanese asylum for the insane time of 30 days. “I was like: ‘You’re kidding, aren’t you?’ It was like a bomb was dropped,” Ms. Higuchi told the group.



All of the survivors who attended the meeting are married and raising children in the United States, where they are free from the worry of being kidnapped and confined repeatedly as some were in Japan. Also attending the meeting were American citizens who had survived faith-breaking attempts in the United States or other countries during the 1970’s. Mrs. Diane Abendroth of Bowie, Maryland, attended with her son, Robert. Abendroth returned to the Unification Church after she was kidnapped from her Delaware home in 1978. She later married a Unification Church member and raised five sons, all of whom reached the rank of Eagle Scout in the Boy Scouts of America. Doug Burton shared his story about being kidnapped and forced into captivity for several weeks in France.

“This meeting was a model case of our second-generation Unificationists standing up on this issue and sponsoring an event on a college campus. I am very proud of my daughter, Yury,” said Higuchi. He added: “I want every second-generation member to realize that they can create changes. Such grassroots events can make a difference. Also, we can tell people why we joined the Unification Church and why we kept our faith despite the faith breaking, and especially because our True Mother, (Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon) has told us to do a witnessing campaign.”