

Representative Dan Burton: Religious Freedom in Japan Also Matters in America

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Tomihiko Tanaka, president of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly the Unification Church), speaks during a press conference in Tokyo on November 7, 2023. Known officially as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), the church was founded by Sun Myung Moon in Korea in 1954

Why Religious Freedom in Japan Matters in the United States **Fmr. Rep. Dan Burton - Friday, 05 April 2024 05:10 PM EDT**

Religious freedom stands as a cornerstone of any democratic society, reflecting the fundamental human right to express and practice beliefs without fear of persecution or discrimination.

We are most fortunate to live in a country where this right is respected, but it's important to consider what happens when one of our closest allies undermines this crucial cornerstone, and why it matters here in the United States.

Japan, is one of our key allies.

It's renowned for a rich cultural tapestry.

As a democracy whose constitution acknowledges its citizens' right to religious belief, one would think religious freedom would not be under attack.

Sadly, this is not a given.

Over the past couple of years, the government has viciously attacked religious minorities despite no criminal wrongdoing. For centuries, various faiths have coexisted and influenced each other, helping to shape Japan's spiritual landscape, much like here in the United States.

However, recently, the Family Federation, formerly the Unification Church, has been under constant attack by the National Diet and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida since former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's assassination in 2022.

The shooter who committed this heinous act reportedly said he felt "hate" and a "grudge" toward the church because his mother, a member, made significant donations to it more than 20 years ago.

The Japanese Communist Party has gone to great lengths to take advantage of this tragedy by mobilizing against the Family Federation.

Founded by Sun Myung Moon, the Family Federation has always championed stronger ties between Japan, Korea, and the United States.

They have also lodged devastating critiques and counterproposals regarding Marxism-Leninism. Hence, the Japanese Party's hatred.

Due to this, the church's enemies have accused the church of corruption and being a threat to society, which could not be further from the truth.

The church has adherents in nearly every country, donates to worthy causes, and operates more than 20 school and lunch programs in Africa.

The church additionally emphasizes peace-building efforts and has been involved in various interfaith dialogues to foster harmony and understanding among different religious and cultural groups in Japan and beyond.

Right now, the government's case that could dissolve the church sits in front of a judge in the Tokyo District Court.

If dissolved, the government would confiscate all the church's assets within Japan, shut down places of worship, and revoke the church's status as a religious corporation, which could result in pushing the church underground.

Because Japan is a longtime, crucial ally of the United States, the upcoming April visit of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to the United States is an important opportunity to confront this serious issue.

We must remind our dear friends in the Japanese government that the right to freedom of religion is truly a litmus test for all other human rights. If the government moves to restrict citizens' right to believe as they wish, what's to stop it from overruling other basic rights at will? Similarly, any person of faith in Japan would have reason to fear, for if the government goes after one religion, who is to say the government will stop there?

Dan Burton was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives (1983 - 2013), and chairman of the subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, of the Foreign Affairs Committee.