

Update on Deprogramming in Japan

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Executive Summary

Note: Names of victims have been withheld in most cases in order to protect their privacy. For further information contact the author at deff@aol.com. The author is a current member of the Unification Church, a graduate of the Unification Theological Seminary and member of the UTS Board of Trustees. He serves in a voluntary capacity as the president of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom.

Abduction and confinement for the purpose of religious de-conversion remains a live issue in Japan today. Since the late 1960s, several thousand victims have been reported, mostly members of the Unification Church and Jehovah's Witnesses. Particularly troubling is the fact that the Japanese government has been unwilling to adopt a policy that would encourage police and prosecutors to protect the rights of religious minorities in cases where adult citizens are confined in order to force them to recant their faith. Despite numerous criminal complaints having been filed, no prosecution has resulted, even in cases where victims have been forcibly abducted, held against their will for prolonged periods, physically and psychologically abused, and required to renounce their faith as a condition of their release. Just as troubling, police refuse to investigate missing-persons cases where members of unpopular religions are involved, declaring to lawyers and human rights advocates representing the victims that such cases require an immediate relative's report. Police turn a blind eye to evidence that the relatives are the very ones who have criminally confined the victim. Such evidence includes rescue-request letters and appeals by lawyers specifically retained by potential victims. Police also refuse to accept reports from victims' roommates, pastors or even their fiancés.

A sign of hope in the current reporting period was the civil court ruling against the relatives and a deprogrammer of Toru Goto, a Unification Church member held for more than 12 years in a private apartment-prison with no access to the outside world. On the other hand, the compensatory and punitive damages awarded in the case were miniscule compared to the losses suffered and the seriousness of the violations. Another sign of hope has been the increased expression of concern by the international community and a small number of media reports.

During the calendar year of 2013, there were four reported forced deprogramming cases. During just the first half of 2014, three cases have been reported. Thus the hope that the ruling against the Goto deprogrammers would discourage this activity has not yet born fruit. Moreover, even the visit of a sitting US Congressman in 2012 and the active intervention of a well-known human rights group in recent months failed to produce any noticeable change in the attitude of government officials, police or prosecutors. In each case reported below, the disappearances were reported to police by UC members. In every case but one, the police refused to become involved and declined to accept missing-persons reports on the grounds that those submitting the report were not family members. The one exception involved an elderly woman whose son had a history of physical violence against her. In that case alone the police acted to rescue the victim. However, in this case too, the police declined to become involved in the religious freedom dimension of the case.

Conclusion: Japanese police have knowingly allowed the forced de-conversion of adult citizens to proceed and have routinely sided with those carrying out these crimes, often despite being clearly informed of the victims' desire to be rescued from confinement. This attitude appears to

result from a conscious and intentional policy at the national level rather than from the isolated acts of local officials. Although the numbers of cases are relatively small compared to the 1980s and 1990s when hundreds of cases were reported each year, the violations are significant and continue to deserve the attention of the international community.

Section 1: Court Cases

Toru Goto.

Although the court case brought by Toru Goto was concluded in 2014, his case goes back as far as 1995. Mr. Goto alleged that he was kidnapped and confined in apartments in Niigata and Tokyo from September 1995 to February 2008, a period of 12 years and 5 months. During this period his captors attempted to persuade him to leave the Unification Church and refused him any access to the outside world. On January 28, 2014, Tokyo District Court Judge Tetsu Aizawa presented a verdict in favor of Mr. Goto. Defendants were ordered to pay a total amount of 4.83 million yen. This includes a fine of 960,000 yen for Takashi Miyamura, a professional deprogrammer used by Mr. Goto's relatives. The case is currently on appeal, with the plaintiff arguing that the compensation and fines for his long ordeal are far too small, and the defendants arguing that they did nothing wrong or illegal.

In his legal complaint, Mr. Goto alleged that his elder brother, sister-in-law and younger sister kidnapped him in September 1995, following the advice of deprogrammer Miyamura and

another defendant, Yasutomo Matsunaga, a Christian minister also known to be involved in deprogramming UC members. Mr. Goto stated that his family kidnapped him from their home in western Tokyo and confined him in an apartment in Niigata for approximately one year and nine months. Defendant Matsunaga came regularly to this apartment to demand that Mr. Goto renounce his faith. In June of 1997, the Mr. Goto was taken to an apartment in Ogikubo, Tokyo, and for the following period of over ten years was not allowed to leave the premises. He was required to renounce the UC as a condition for his being freedom to exit the apartment. He was not allowed the consult an attorney, nor was he permitted any outside contact or even allowed to go outdoors under escort for exercise. Defendant Miyamura frequently visited the confinement site together with former members of the Unification Church and demanded that the plaintiff leave the church. He consistently insulted Mr. Goto, badgered him and threatened him with lifelong imprisonment.

During the confinement, the plaintiff attempted to escape several times; however, he was caught and forcibly constrained by the defendants. When he came down with influenza and developed a high fever, he was not allowed to visit a clinic, despite his requests. Fearing that he would not be released from his long-term confinement in his lifetime, he held three hunger strikes of 21 days, 21 days, and 30 days. His brother and sister-in-law, both of whom are ex-UC members who were themselves “deprogrammed,” became very upset by this and gave him only liquid meals, forcing him to the verge of starvation. Finally, when they did start to provide food, the family members carried out “meal sanctions” in which they would only give him only meager dishes. When the plaintiff was finally released in February of 2008, he was emaciated and was suffering from a state of severe malnutrition, according to a hospital report.

Mr. Goto submitted a criminal complaint to the Ogikubo Police Station in April of 2008, but the police did not make a single arrest or obtain a warrant to search he premises of his confinement. The case was thus turned over to the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office in February 2009 without conducting a criminal investigation. The Prosecutor then dropped the case because of “insufficient evidence.” Mr. Goto formally appealed the decision but his request that the case be reopened was turned down.

In January 2011, Mr. Goto filed his civil suit. The defendant family members denied that Mr. Goto was at any time forcibly confined against his will. They asserted that throughout the entire stay of 12 years and 5 months, during which time he saw no one at all outside the apartment, he remained voluntarily in the apartment in a determined attempt to convert his relatives to his faith. They further claimed that the internal locks on the doors and windows of the apartment were placed there to protect Mr. Goto from being removed by UC members, rather than to prevent him from leaving. Their claims were contradicted not only by Mr. Goto, but also by another victim, Kiyomi Miyama, who testified that she was required by Mr. Miyamura to participate in the attempted de-conversion of Mr. Goto as part of her own “rehabilitation” while she was confined in the same apartment complex. Defendants Miyamura and Matsunaga claimed that they did not give instructions regarding kidnapping, confinement and forcible de-conversion, and they denied conducting illegal acts. They claimed that they were only participating in voluntary family discussions.

The court ruling recognized the fact that defendants Miyamura and Matsunaga indeed instructed the families of church members and that they conducted attempts to de-convert UC members in an environment restricting their freedom to leave the quarters. The fact was also established that the plaintiff was not allowed to freely leave the apartments in Niigata and Tokyo and that the behavior of the defendants throughout this period had elements of coercion. However, the court ruled that when the plaintiff was escorted to the apartment in Niigata, he apparently went along reluctantly, and it thus discounted the illegality of the defendants' actions in the early stages of his confinement. The ruling thus denied the liability of defendant Matsunaga, who went only to the first apartment in order to persuade to Mr. Goto to renounce his faith. However, the ruling established that the behavior of the family members and defendant Miyamura were clearly illegal.

Both Mr. Goto and the defendants have the right to appeal the terms of the ruling. At last report, both parties have filed appeals. Defendants have asked that their convictions be overturned. Mr. Goto's appeal stressed that the lower court had erred in finding that he was not actually abducted prior to his confinement and that the initial period of his confinement was not against his will. He also asked the court for a larger damage award. Among the reasons cited for the appeal is the fact that Japan must abide by international treaties guarantee religious freedom, as well as its own constitution. It is not known how long the higher court will take to reach a decision on the case. The next hearing has been scheduled for August 21.

Section 2: Disappearances Reported in 2014

Ms. A.N.

Date of Disappearance: March 23, 2014

Status: Still Missing

Ms. A.N., aged 37, has been a member of the UC for more than four years. In February, 2013, she became engaged to fellow UC member Mr. Y.U. and took part in the church's Marriage Blessing Ceremony in Korea. Her parents were vehemently opposed to her faith, as well as to her engagement and her participation in the ceremony. She reported that her father's verbal abuse at the time was especially ferocious.

She participated in a church workshop for two weeks at Cheju, Korea during March 2014. After returning to Japan on the morning of March 23, she got off a bus on her way to Touon City, Ehime Prefecture. Since then she has been out of contact with her fiancé and other church members.

Ms. N. had been working for about 15 years as a nurse at the Shikoku Cancer Center in Matsuyama City, Ehime Prefecture. She resigned from her job in March 2014 and moved to her maternal grandparents' home, located in Touon City in the same prefecture. After contact with her was lost, a church member visited this house on March 26, but no one was there. On March 27, a member visited her parents' home in Kagawa Prefecture. Although one car was seen, no one was found to be home there as well.

Mr. S.S., a church staff person dealing with the abduction problem in Ehime Prefecture, visited the police in the first week of April and explained the situation. He reports that the police listened to him carefully, but finally decided not to accept his missing persons' report on her case.

Mr. M.I.

Date of Disappearance: December 29, 2013

Status: Still Missing

Mr. M.I. was last seen by his friends on December 29, 2013. Born on January 5, 1987 to a middle-class family Mr. I was introduced to the Unification Church in 2005 while a student at the Aoyama Gakuin University. A year later, he joined the church and moved into the local center while continuing his university career. When his parents learned of his conversion two years later, they required him to drop out of school so he could come back home to live with them in Chiba Prefecture. (He was still a minor at the time.) He obtained a job in Tokyo but continued attending UC services without his parents' knowledge.

In 2009, Mr. I moved into the dormitory of the factory where he was working. He obtained additional training and later that year he took a job as an electrician. Now a legal adult (the age of majority in Japan is 20) he decided to live in the communal church center again, while continuing his work as an electrician. In 2010, he moved out of the center but continued his religious life in his spare time. Because his parents had by this time discovered his re-affiliation with the UC, Mr. I feared that he might be deprived of his freedom by them. He therefore wrote a

formal statement stating that if he were to go missing, he believed it would be due to his family's confining him against his will, and that he desired that the police should try to rescue him.

Mr. I reported that over the New Year's holiday in 2011, his parents attempted to restrain him for a "discussion about his faith" but he was able to get away. In May 2011, he moved to Yamagata Prefecture for job training. A year later Mr. I came across a childhood friend whose parents had joined the Unification Church together with him. They informed Mr. I that his parents were in contact with an evangelical pastor named Yoshida who advises parents on how "rescue" young UC members from the church. However, in October 2012, Mr. I's parents conducted an apparently friendly visit to the church to observe its worship service. After that, they stopped criticizing the UC when he met with them.

Nevertheless while preparing for his visit to his parents for New Year's 2014, Mr. I again became fearful of being abducted. He told a close friend that he had purchased a GPS device to locate him in case he would be abducted. On January 2, the day he was scheduled to return, he activated an emergency signal. The police were immediately informed of the disappearance, including being shown his statement requesting rescue. However, they declined to open an investigation into his situation.

On February 18, 2014 delegation from the Brussels-based NGO *Human Rights Without Frontiers* met with Chiba police officials and urged them to visit the location where he was believed to be confined or to at least summon Mr. I's parents for questioning. On February 20, HRWF "was informed that members of I's family had prevented him from contacting anyone.

Even still, the police refused to take action to assist him in any way while the delegation was still in Tokyo.” The delegation also raised the issue with three members of the Diet, and with representatives of the Justice Ministry. HRWF stated that “The delegation invoked the implementation of clearly-defined police procedures in the case of suspected abduction.” However, at last report, no effective action was taken by the police.

Ms. M.S.

Date of disappearance: December 28, 2013

Status: Still missing, probably renounced the UC

Age 35 at the time of her disappearance, Ms. M.S. joined the UC when she was 24. She became engaged to fellow church member, Mr. H.Y., in February 2013. They participated the UC’s Blessing Ceremony that month.

On December 28, 2013, Ms. S visited her parents’ home in Niigata. She had hoped to have a good talk with her parents on this visit and asked them to meet her fiancé on January 2. However her parents declined, saying they would be out to make a round of New Year’s greetings on that day. She sent an e-mail to a church friend at 1:36 pm December 28, indicating that she had arrived safely at her parents’ home. Her fiancé became concerned since there was no communication from her after that. On the evening of December 31, he went to the family’s home, but no one was there and the house lights were off. A member of the Suginami Church visited the house on January 1 and 2, but again no one was there. On January 6, after consulting a representative of the prefectural council, church staff called the local police to request

cooperation. However, the police refused to cooperate, saying it was a “matter between parents and child.”

UC sources state that anti-UC lawyers representing Ms. S have contacted the church demanding that the church return donations she made. However, she has not met personally with church members or her fiancé, nor has she officially renounced the church as far as can be determined. While it is probable that she has indeed left the church, she will still be listed as missing until this can be confirmed.

Section 3: Disappearances in 2013

Mr. T.I.

Date of Disappearance: April 27, 2013

Status: Renounced his faith under apparent duress

Born on July 30, 1991, Mr. T.I. was a senior in the College of Science and Engineering at Kanazawa University at the time of his disappearance: He joined the Unification movement in the summer of 2010 after participating in a workshop of CARP, the UC’s youth movement. He officially affiliated with CARP on April 1, 2011 and moved into the CARP center at Kanazawa on April 1 of that year while continuing his studies.

Mr. T.I. revealed his affiliation with the CARP movement to his parents in June 2012. His mother was noticeably upset at the news and openly opposed his faith. She urged him leave the

CARP center as soon as possible, while his father, though also disapproving of his new faith, made no such demand. Mr. T.I. visited his parents' house in September 2012 and again on the 2013 New Year's holiday. He maintained regular contact with his family via e-mails and phone calls. He informed his parents that he had obtained a job after his graduation. He also invited his mother to a meeting of CARP members' parents scheduled in April, and she said she would participate in it.

Mr. T.I. visited home again from April 27 to 29 to celebrate his younger brother's entering the university. Knowing that his parents' opposition to his CARP membership could spell trouble, he took several precautions. Previously, he wrote a "request for rescue" letter and filed it with his attorney. Mr. T.I. also arranged for a UC member who lived in his parents' neighborhood to help him in case something happened. He brought three cell phones with him on his journey. The first was the phone he normally used. The second was a backup phone that his parents did not know about, and the third was a specially prepared phone with a GPS locator in case of emergency.

Around 2:00 p.m. on April 27, the GPS locator-equipped cell-phone sent a text message to a friend saying, "The buzzer was pushed! Please contact." (This was the prearranged signal requesting urgent assistance.) The GPS indicated the current location as the precise address of the parents' home. A CARP staff member immediately called the house, but there was no reply. Mr. T.I.'s friend visited the house in the evening of April 27, but the house had been vacated.

On May 1, two local CARP leaders visited the Shibata Police Station near the T.I. family's home and also went to the Civil liberty Bureau of Niigata Prefecture to report the incident and seek

assistance. Their names were Mr. Murata, the director of the Kanazawa CARP house where Mr. T.I. lived, and Mr. Karube, regional coordinator of CARP in central Japan. They visited the Community Safety Division of the Shibata Police Station and spoke with Assistant Police Inspector Satoshi Kotake, from 10:50 am to 12:20 pm. A summary of conversation is as follows:

Mr. Murata explained that he was living with Mr. T.I. and thus fell under the category of “people who live with the missing person” according to Article 6 of Rule No. 13 of the *Rules of The National Public Safety Commission* governing persons qualified to file missing-persons reports. However, Inspector Kotake replied “We must give priority to family members and relatives. First we should contact his parents. We will do this.” Mr. Murata replied, “His parents are suspected of confining him for religious reasons so we want you to directly talk to him and establish whether he is voluntarily discussing with his parents or he is under detention.” Despite the fact that Mr. T.I. was well above the age of legal adulthood, Inspector Kotake replied: “If we contact his parents and find he is there with the parents, it means that he is not a missing person. We can do nothing more. That is the scope of our services by the Community Safety Division. If you expect more, please consult with the Police Affairs Department.” The inspector promised that he would contact either Mr. T.I. or his parents. Mr. Murata provided the phone numbers of Mr. T.I.’s three cell phones as well as that of his parents’ house. Inspector Kotake quickly called these numbers but no one answered.

That afternoon, as suggested by Inspector Kotake, Mr. Murata and Mr. Karube visited the Police Affairs Department and talked with an official named Mr. Aoki. They showed him the written request from Mr. T.I. formally requesting that the police search for him in case he was out of

contact because he might be kidnapped and confined by his parents for religious reasons. The letter stated that police should allow him to return to the Unification Church. Mr. Aoki, however, replied: “This letter has no effect. He is not a member of the Unification Church. Why does he ask for rescue to the Unification Church?” (Technically Mr. T.I. joined only CARP, and was not registered as a member of the Unification Church.)

The police official also stated that Article 6 of Rule No. 13 authorizes “people who live with the missing person,” to file reports “only in case parents and relatives are out of contact. Here, ‘people who live with the missing person’ does not mean a simple roommate” but refers to an intimate life partner such as a common-law spouse. After they had talked for 30 minutes, Mr. Karube received a phone call from Inspector Kotake saying that he had contacted the parents and they told him, “We are just having a family discussion; so please set your mind at rest.” Mr. Karube asked whether he talked with T.I. himself. But the policeman reiterated that once he was told that Mr. T.I. was together with his parents, the police would not deal with it as a missing person case. He claimed that the job of Community Safety Division finishes at that point and anything above that is off limits.

Mr. Karube showed Mr. Aoki the e-mail from the GPS locator. He explained that this signified an emergency situation and was an evidence that he had been abducted. But Mr. Aoki denied this constituted evidence because there was no proof that Mr. T.I. himself pushed the buzzer; someone else might have pushed or it was pushed by chance. Mr. Aoki concluded that: “We will decide whether we will confirm the will of T.I. or not. Even if we talked with him, we are not obliged to report to you since you are not family members.”

Later that day Mr. Karube and Mr. Murata visited the Civil Liberty Bureau of Niigata Prefecture. They talked to Mr. Futoshi Ishikawa, deputy secretary for legal affairs. Mr. Ishikawa said he never heard of such case and was interested in their report. However, he said that the Civil Liberty Bureau only gives advice about human rights violations and cares for victims. It has no power to execute legally binding action. He advised them to consult with a lawyer to discover his whereabouts. He copied materials provided by the CARP staff and promised to report this case to his supervisor.

On May 30, Mr. Karube and Mr. Murata made a second visit to the Shibata Police Station and spoke with Mr. Aoki and one other officer. Mr. Aoki stated: “We were able to reach Mr. T.I. himself. He said that they were having a discussion at a safe place, so there is no problem.” The CARP staff requested specific details about when the contact was made and by whom. Mr. Aoki replied: “There is no need to tell you how and who made contact, and we are not obligated to tell you.”

The CARP staff reported: “We then conveyed that when we visited the Civil Liberties Bureau, and the counselor there recommended that we consult the lawyer, Mr. Fukumoto, whose name was given on the Request for Protection. They requested that Mr. Aoki speak directly to Mr. Fukumoto. Mr. Aoki replied, “I have no obligation to speak with him, so I will not.” They contacted Mr. Fukumoto and handed the phone to Mr. Aoki, but he refused to take the phone. He also refused to respond to anything said by Mr. Fukumoto over the speaker phone.

About two months later, on July 24, Mr. Murata received a letter from Mr. T.I., declaring his resignation from the CARP. The letter was dated July 22. The following are excerpts of its contents:

“I have been discussing with my family members about my life in the CARP movement and my faith in the Unification Church. Through that discussion I realized that the range of my thinking was narrow due to one-sided information and education by the CARP members. Since I and my parents did not have enough knowledge about Christianity, a Christian minister helped our discussion. Through that I realized that the Unification Church is a criminal organization, its doctrine is not the Truth, and Rev. Moon cannot be the Messiah. So I cannot continue with CARP activities anymore and I announce my resignation from CARP by this document. I suggest that my former colleagues in Kanazawa CARP open their eyes and learn about doctrine of the orthodox Christian Church. Please send my personal belongings to my parents' house.”

Ms. M.M.

Date of Disappearance: March 28, 2013

Status: Renounced her faith under apparent duress

Born on May 10, 1986 Ms. M.M. graduated from high school in 2005 and soon began working as a caregiver in a hospital. In 2007 she met the Unification Church and began studying the Divine Principle. Her parents disapproved of her new religious affiliation, and in 2012 they confined her to their home to convince her to renounce the church. She maintained her faith and

was allowed to leave after one week (January 1 to 7). After this incident, her parents visited the UC both in Hiroshima itself and near her workplace at Harada Hospital. Since that time, she visited her parents' home once a month and seemed to be on good terms with them.

In early 2013 Ms. M.M. became engaged to a Japanese man and participated in the UC's Marriage Blessing Ceremony. On March 28, 2013 she visited her parents' home and was in contact with church friends by phone. After that she lost contact. She was scheduled to work at the hospital on March 30, but when a local church staff member called the hospital, he was informed that the hospital had received a phone call from Ms. M.'s mother saying: "My daughter needs some time off from work."

Church members visited her parents' house (in Iwakuni City, near Hiroshima) at 8:00 pm, March 30, but the house was empty and the lights had been turned off. Ms. M carried a GPS device to help locate her in case of trouble. The locator indicated that she was in her parents' house, but apparently she was no longer in possession of the device. Since there was some early indication that her elder brother had been in contact with an anti-UC Christian minister, church staff members visited him on the evening of March 30 and asked about her. He denied his involvement with this case.

On April 1, four church members visited the police and the Civil Liberties Bureau in Yamaguchi Prefecture. At the Iwakuni City Police Station, Mr. Honda (in charge of legal affairs for the UC in the Hiroshima area), Ms. Tamura, Mr. Ide and Ms. Mio spoke with an officer identified as Mr. Imai of the Community Safety Division of the police. They explained the situation and showed

him a copy of a letter Ms. M. had written after she had been confined in 2012. During the discussion, Officer Imai's supervisor intervened several times and called him to another room. Eventually Officer Imai stated: "If we can contact her parents, we will confirm her will and get back to you. However, an application to search for a missing person can be submitted only by family members or someone authorized by the family members. If this is not the case, we cannot really investigate it."

On the same day, the church members visited the government office complex of Yamaguchi Prefecture and met Mr. Shinichiro Yanagi, section head of the local Civil Liberties Bureau. His initial approach was more appreciative of the Ms. M's rights as an adult. He said, "Even parents should not confine their child. According to the situation we can inform the police." After the church members explained to him that they had already done so, "he just listened to us." They then asked him to report on this matter to his superior.

On May 17, 2013 the Hiroshima UC received a letter from Ms. M, announcing her resignation from the Unification Church. It states:

"I, M.M., recently noticed the problems in the teachings of the Unification Church and made my own decision to submit this notice of withdrawal from the Unification Church. I would like to declare my engagement fixed at the Blessing Ceremony in February 2013 null and void."

On May 24, 2013 Ms. M came to the church center with her family, informed staff members that she had left the church, and picked up her belongings.

Name: Ms. M.H.

Date of Disappearance: May 7, 2013

Status: Renounced her faith under apparent duress

Ms. M.H. worked as a nurse and shared a room with other two church members in Tokyo. She had revealed her UC affiliation to her mother in 2011. During the winter of 2011 she participated in a UC-sponsored 40-day workshop despite her parents' disapproval. In July 2012, during a visit to her parents' home in Sapporo City, a discussion about her faith resulted in a bitter quarrel. Her elder sister confiscated her cell phone and her passport. She was forcibly confined to her parents' home at this time but was able to return to Tokyo on September 30. She visited again over the New Year's holiday of 2013, apparently without incident. In January and February of 2013, she participated in another UC training session.

On May 4, 2013, Ms. H. again visited her parents' home. She sent an e-mail to a church staff member on that date, with no mention of trouble. She was supposed to return to Tokyo on May 7. After her roommates became concerned, church staff called her parents' home but nobody answered the phone. Before visiting her parents' home on this occasion, Ms. H had been suffering from minor depression and received counseling from a clinical psychologist. Because of this, the UC headquarters considered that she may have been simply taking some time off to be with her family. As the days turned into weeks with no contact, they concluded that she was probably under restraint against her will.

On May 28 UC staff members visited Sapporo and met Ms. H's brother at the entrance of her parents' home. The staff also visited the police to explain the situation but received no assistance. On June 29 Ms. H's parents visited her apartment in order to terminate her lease and to pick up her belongings. On July 2 attorney Masaki Goro sent a letter to the UC representing Maki H as his client and announcing her resignation from the UC.

Mrs. H. F.

Date of Disappearance: Dec. 29, 2012

Status: Liberated by Police

H. F. is a mature woman in her 60's living in Kato City in Hyogo Prefecture. Her faith in the Unification Church faced serious opposition from her family, especially her eldest son K, who has a history of physically abusing his mother. On December 29, 2012, her son confined her to their home by locking all external doors from the inside and taking charge of the keys. She reports that he unleashed violence against her by punching and kicking in her face, chest and abdomen. He also handcuffed his mother's wrists and cuffed her to a heavy television with a chain. On the same day, he called Pastor Rikio Matsuzawa, a minister of Osaka Eiko Church, (affiliated with the Japan Holiness Church) and asked him to come to the room where her mother was confined. Mrs. F alleges that this pastor knew full well that she was illegally confined against her will. Her son admitted to her that he visited Pastor Rikio Matsuzawa's church more than 50 times in order to receive his guidance before he executed this act of house arrest and attempted de-conversion.

Mrs. F reported that not only did Pastor Matsuzawa refuse to help her to freedom, he used her captivity to attempt to convince her to leave her chosen religion. He came to the house nearly every day every day until January 9, 2013, pressuring her to recant her faith in the Unification Church.

Suspecting that she was confined against her will, UC members reported Mrs. F's disappearance to the police. Since there had been previous reports of his assaulting his mother, they visited the house on January 10, 2013 and placed Mrs. F in protective custody. After interviewing her, they agreed to deal with her charge of domestic violence but refused to deal with the allegation that she was a victim of forced de-conversion. On the same day, she went to a doctor under police escort and was diagnosed with contusions consistent with domestic violence. Her son was admonished by the police and he gave up confining his mother in order to de-convert her. At last report, Mrs. F was freely practicing her faith.

APPENDIX: The Background of Deprogramming in Japan

While the term "deprogramming" first came into use in the United States in the 1970s, the phenomenon of parents and relatives using force to influence a convert to renounce a new faith dates back to ancient times. The history of western religion contains many examples of people being forced to renounce a new-found faith. Parents of early Christian martyrs such as Saint

Thecla and Saint Pepetua were among the first to attempt to break the faith of their adult children because of the social unacceptability of their faith. In medieval times, the parents of Saint Francis of Assisi went to the civil authorities to force him to recant his decision to give away his possessions and devote himself to "Lady Poverty." Saint Thomas Aquinas was held captive in a family castle for nearly two years as his relatives tried to dissuade him from his commitment to the still new Dominican order. The Spanish Inquisition resorted to torture and death threats in order to influence converts of other faiths to return to the Catholic Church. The Protestant Reformation witnessed numerous families bitterly divided as members opted for opposing versions of Christianity.

Islamic scripture and law forbids compulsion in matters of religion. Nonetheless, in practice, forced conversions have been known throughout Islamic history and families whose sons or daughters adopt another religion or sect sometimes took extreme measures in reaction.

According to sharia law, Muslim women are banned from marrying non-Muslim men; and this rule is still enforced in some Muslim states. In Buddhism, forced conversions are likewise forbidden, but there have been instances in history where they have occurred. For example, during the Edo period of Japan, when the first Christian missionaries had arrived, Tokugawa Shogunate forced many newly converted Japanese Christians to renounce their new faith.

Only in the modern era did the principle of religious freedom gradually gain wide acceptance. In Europe, the end of the wars of religion between Protestants and Catholics gave rise at first to mere toleration of competing major faiths, but smaller and newer sects often continued to face persecution. Even in the United States, where believers fled in hope of finding greater freedom, minorities such as Catholics, Jews, Quakers, and even Baptists won the right to practice their faith only gradually.

In the U.S., Supreme Court decisions eventually upheld the constitutional right of adults to choose a new religion even over their parents' objections, and the right to choose one's own religion also gained greater acceptance in the other Western democracies. After the end of World War II, this right was guaranteed in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief... (Article 18).

With religious freedom firmly established in most democratic countries, parents wishing to force their adult children back into traditional faiths and lifestyles sometimes resorted to illegal means. The success of new religious movements in the late 1960s and early 70s witnessed the emergence of the phenomenon of "deprogramming," complete with a theory of "mind control" or "brainwashing" that sought, ultimately unsuccessfully, to bypass religious freedom issues. The theory held that adherents of new religions did not join these groups by their own free will but had been manipulated by "coercive persuasion." Families were thus justified to hire professional deprogrammers to kidnap believers, confine them against their will, and "rescue" them from the "cults" that they had joined.

In the US and Europe, deprogramming was brought to an end as courts ruled against the "brainwashing theory" as applied to religious converts, and mainline churches firmly rejected and opposed the practice of "deprogramming" as unethical. The National Council of Churches declared that "kidnapping for ransom is heinous indeed, but kidnapping to compel religious deconversion is equally criminal."¹ Moreover, the courts recognized the issue as clear-cut: an

¹ "Resolution on deprogramming: Religious Liberty for Young People Too." Adopted by the Governing Board of the National Council of Churches of Christ on Feb 26 1974. <http://www.religiousfreedom.com/PDF/Japan/Goto/13.%20NCC%20Statement.pdf>

adult has a right to choose his or her own religion, and not even family members can legally hold an adult against their will in order to change their religious beliefs. As a result, the police began to arrest the deprogrammers, and both civil and criminal cases resulted in serious penalties against the perpetrators of these crimes.

In Japan however, for over 40 years, members of the Unification Church (UC) and other groups have suffered gross physical and psychological abuse at the hands of deprogrammers. As the most successful of the imported new religious movements in Japan, the UC has been the prime target of these faith-breakers. Literally thousands have been kidnapped, forcibly confined for weeks, months, and sometimes years, with the intent to break their faith. Preying on the vulnerability of worried relatives, deprogrammers enlist their active participation in these kidnappings, while charging them exorbitant fees, sometimes running into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, and thereby victimizing the families themselves.

The trauma of kidnapping and forced confinement has devastating effects on all family members. It results in an often complete breakdown of trust between parents and kidnap victims. It has broken apart families. Wives have been separated from husbands, and even from their own children. One victim was raped on numerous occasions by her “deprogrammer.” Others have sustained serious injuries such as broken bones and even brain damage during escape attempts. Beatings, continual verbal abuse, and violent constraint are commonplace. One case even resulted in suicide when the victim despaired of ever regaining her freedom. Unlike in the United States, Christian ministers have often been the principal perpetrators of these crimes, counseling families not to release kidnapped victims until they renounce their faith and agree to adopt the ministers’ particular brand of Christianity.

Of the estimated 4,300 kidnapping victims in Japan, approximately two-thirds eventually succumb to the deprogrammers' faith-breaking techniques. Yet, even among these now ex-members, an independent study found that many continue to suffer long-term psychological problems that exhibit the classic symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).²

Attempts to bring the perpetrators of these human rights crimes to justice have been largely ineffective, due to the refusal of Japanese police to pursue those responsible and of higher legal authorities to prosecute them. In fact there is significant evidence of the implicit, and in some instances explicit, support of the deprogrammers by authorities. Cases are routinely dismissed as mere "family matters." In some instances, victims who have escaped are returned to their captors by the very police from whom they had sought help. Not one deprogramming case has even been prosecuted in a Japanese criminal court, despite numerous complaints and constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and laws against false imprisonment.

This willful neglect is no better illustrated than by the decision of the Tokyo prosecutor's office on December 9, 2009 to drop charges against those responsible for the kidnapping and torture of Mr. Toru Goto. Already in his 30's when he was kidnapped, Mr. Goto was held captive for over 12 years and starved virtually to the point of death.³ The recent victory of Mr. Goto in civil court does not ameliorate the willful negligence of police and prosecutors in this and similar cases.

It is clear that Japanese legal authorities have betrayed the victims of these gross miscarriages of justice and violations of human dignity. Japan's constitution states that "Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all." Moreover, under Article 220 of the Japanese Penal Code, false imprisonment

² *Our Displeasing Neighbors: Tragedies of Women "Saved" from the Unification Church* by Kazuhiro Yonemoto (407 pages), Tokyo, Joho Center Publishing, 2008.

³ Toru Goto's Testimony At the founding assembly of Association to Eliminate Religious Kidnapping & Forced Conversion, February 15, 2009
http://www.religiousfreedom.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=55&Itemid=30

is a crime and, “Anyone who would arrest or confine other individuals unlawfully shall be subject to imprisonment for a period of more than three months and no more than seven years.”

In light of the refusal of Japan’s legal authorities to address these abuses, it is critical that this be brought to the attention of the international community, thereby compelling the government of Japan to abide by the very international human rights laws it claims to uphold. Just as in the earlier cases in Europe and the America, Japan’s deprogrammers will only stop their illegal activities when the penalties they face no longer make it profitable for them to continue. This will occur when the courts and legal authorities aggressively prosecute them and make it clear that kidnapping, deprogramming and forced conversion, have no place in a democratic Japan.