

An Update on Religious Freedom Issues Relating to the Unification Church in Japan  
With Special Focus on Mr. Toru Goto's Civil Lawsuit

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One of the religious freedom issues relating to the Unification Church in Japan is abduction and forced de-conversion of its members. I would like to update previous information about this issue with special focus on Mr. Toru Goto's civil lawsuit. First of all, I would like to tell you the story of Toru Goto.

Toru Goto was born in 1963. His father, Naomi Goto, was the manager of a paper factory which had thousands of employees. His mother's name was Keiko Goto. She passed away relatively recently, in September 2012. The Goto family had three children, Takashi, Toru, and Masako, all of whom joined the Unification Church. The first one who joined the UC was Takashi, the eldest son. He introduced the church to Toru and Masako.

Their parents had deep concerns about the new orientation of their children and wanted to take them out of the church. They had contacted an organization of parents of former and current UC members called "Mizukukikai," managed by Takashi Miyamura, a famous deprogrammer in Japan.

The first target of deprogramming was the elder brother, Takashi. He suddenly disappeared in spring of 1987. He was successfully deprogrammed and left the Unification Church. In autumn of 1987, Toru himself also suffered a deprogramming attempt by Miyamura, but was able to escape after a few weeks by faking apostasy. About one year later, his younger sister Masako also was deprogrammed.

In 1990, Toru began to communicate again with his family and occasionally visited his parents' home. They promised him that they would never try to abduct him again. In August 1992, Toru participated in the Marriage Blessing Ceremony held in Seoul, Korea, with his fiancée. But later she, too, was deprogrammed and left the UC.

On the evening of September 11, 1995, eight years after the first abduction, Toru was forcibly taken into a van by his family members on the occasion of a visit to his family in Tokyo. He was then transferred to a room in Niigata prefecture, on Japan's west coast, where he was confined for one year and ten months until June 1997. His parents, his sister Masako and his brother's wife Yoko were constantly present and were pressuring him to renounce his faith. Pastor Yasutomo Matsunaga, of the Niitsu Evangelical Church in Niigata Prefecture also visited him several times to persuade him to leave the UC. Toward the end of December 1995, Toru submitted a written renunciation of faith but his parents and the pastor did not trust him and continued his confinement.

Toru's father passed away from cancer on June 22, 1997. Toru was allowed to pay his final respects but he was 'accompanied' by eight people and did not see any chance to escape. He was not allowed to attend the funeral ceremony. Right after the death of his father, Toru was transferred to an apartment in Tokyo and was confined there for six months. Around the end of December 1997, he was taken to another apartment in Tokyo, which is Room 804 of Ogikubo Flower Home apartment building, where he was confined for about 10 years. Except for these excursions, he was not allowed out of doors during his entire confinement period. Miyamura visited him as many as 73 times during 1998 in order to persuade him to leave the UC.

With the passing of time, Toru became so desperate that he could not help attempting to escape even by dashing toward the entrance, only to be restrained by the family. He often screamed for help but the neighbors did not respond. Several escape attempts ended in failure and tighter surveillance. From 2004 to 2006, he made three hunger strikes, two of which were for 21 days and one for 30 days.

Around November 2007, family members started arguing about whether to go on with the confinement due to the financial burdens it imposed. Renting such an extra apartment in Tokyo easily costs at least 2,000 US Dollars per month.

On February 10, 2008, Toru's family suddenly ordered him to leave the apartment. He was then physically extremely weak. Dressed in his lounge wear, he was thrown down on the concrete corridor in front of the entrance door without any belongings or ID. Desperate for help, in the middle of winter and without adequate clothing, he began walking towards the Unification Church headquarters, which was several miles away. Suffering from cold and exhaustion, he finally came across a UC member, who offered some money, with which he could take a taxi. That evening, he was diagnosed with malnutrition and admitted to a hospital. For a while, he could barely stand on his feet.



These photos of his body were taken at the hospital, 3 days after the liberation from his confinement, by a journalist, Kazuhiro Yonemoto. He was in the state of extreme malnutrition, not as a result of his fasting but due to the prolonged intentional food deprivation for two years after the fasting ended. He was also diagnosed with severe atrophy of his leg muscles, joint problems and

other medical issues. This is how he eventually regained his freedom and returned to the Unification Church. He had been confined from the age of 31, and when he was released, he was already 44 years old.

After having regained his freedom, Toru initiated his legal fight. In 2008, he filed a criminal charge against those involved in his confinement. The police did not arrest a single person, nor did they obtain search warrants to obtain evidence. Meanwhile, the accused were able to collude in destroying evidence and concocting false stories to protect themselves. Subsequently, the Prosecutor dropped the case for “insufficient evidence” on December 9, 2009.

On February 12, 2010, Toru and his attorney visited the Prosecutor, who verbally explained to them why no charges would be brought. They said, the accused admitted that the entrance door was locked with security chain and padlock, but the purpose of the locks was not to confine Toru Goto: “The entrance door was made unopenable in order to block UC people from taking Toru back.”



This photo is a reconstruction of the chain and padlock. The entrance door was locked with security chains and padlock opened from inside, not from outside. How could a rational person conclude that their purpose is anything other than to prevent someone inside the apartment from leaving without a key?

On January 31, 2011, having failed to secure a criminal prosecution, Toru filed a civil lawsuit against his family members and the deprogrammers. The amount of the damages claimed is approximately two million US Dollars. This lawsuit is currently pending; so I would like to explain what's been going on so far.

Until December 2012, almost two years were spent on 12 oral proceedings in which lawyers of both sides made allegations and produced evidence. Examinations of the plaintiff, the defendant, and witnesses started from this year, 2013. The plaintiff, Toru Goto, claims that he was abducted and confined for 12 years and five months in an attempt at forced religious de-conversion.

The defendant of this lawsuit consists of three groups. One is Takashi Miyamura. Officially, he is the director of a public relations agency called TAP Co., Ltd. He also manages an organization of parents of current and former UC members called “Mizukukikai.” His career as a deprogrammer started in early 1980's.

Unlike many other Japanese deprogrammers, Miyamura is not religiously motivated. His group “Mizukukikai” has membership fees and is a financial foundation for his activity as a deprogrammer. Miyamura admitted in his recent court testimony that he has been paid by parents for his activities.

Miyamura's lawyer is Hiroshi Yamaguchi, who is the secretary-general of the anti-UC group

known as the National Network of Lawyers against Spiritual Sales. As such, he is the *de facto* leader of anti-UC movement in Japan.

The second group of defendants is Yasutomo Matsunaga, pastor of the Niitsu Evangelical Church in Niigata Prefecture. He has deprogrammed many UC members, and many of them filed civil lawsuit against the UC, which is called “Niigata Lost Youth Compensation Case.” Total numbers of the plaintiffs in these lawsuits are 58; one of them is Yoko Goto, who is sister-in-law of Toru and one of the perpetrators of his confinement. Pastor Matsunaga’s lawyer is Shuji Nakamura, who also belongs to the National Network of Lawyers against Spiritual Sales.

The third group of the defendants is Toru’s family members. Takashi is a former employee of Miyamura’s company. He worked under Miyamura and has been engaged in various deprogramming activities. He was also one of the plaintiffs of “Lost Youth Compensation Case in Tokyo.”

Yoko Goto is Takashi’s current wife and a former UC member. After she was abducted and deprogrammed by Matsunaga and Miyamura she divorced her first husband and left the Unification Church. Later she got acquainted with Takashi through anti-UC activities and married him. She is a quick-tempered person and slapped Toru's face many times during his detention.

Masako Aoyagi is Toru’s younger sister, who is also a former UC member who left the church by deprogramming. The lawyer of these three defendants is Takashi Yamaguchi, who is also a member of the National Network of Lawyers against Spiritual Sales.

Here are the main counter-arguments of the defendants;

1. There was no abduction and confinement. Toru stayed in the apartments by his own will for 12 years and 5 months from the beginning to the end.
2. The reason why the Toru stayed in the apartments was that he wanted to convert his family to the UC.
3. The reason why the entrance door was locked with security chains and padlock was to prevent the UC members from breaking into the room and seize Toru back against his will.

Examinations of the plaintiff, the defendant, and witnesses started from this year. On March 11 Toru himself testified at the Tokyo district court. Examination lasted about two hours. At the end of examination, Toru said, “I really suffered anguish from abduction, confinement, and gang mental abuse. I was stripped of my human dignity and robbed of a precious period of my life. I can never forgive the perpetrators.”

Cross examination lasted about two and half hours. Toru refuted the defendant's claim that he stayed in the apartments to convert his family to the UC. He said, “That is far from the truth. The defendants’ claim is a far-fetched and twisted argument as a desperate measure to justify their abduction and confinement.”

On April 8, 2013, two witnesses testified at the court; one for the plaintiff and another for the defendant. The witness for plaintiff was Ms. Kiyomi Miyama. Her life history includes the experience of deprogramming, losing her faith, and even a lawsuit to nullify her marriage in the UC

to a Korean man, as a condition of her release. She happened to be confined in the same apartment building as Toru Goto. Although her renunciation of faith was not faked, she later regained her faith and came back to the UC. She testified as follows:

I was kidnapped in mid-February of 1996 and submitted to forced de-conversion for 2 years and 7 months. Miyamura visited my room and persuaded me to leave the church. When Miyamura confirmed that I had lost faith, he forced me to accompany him to persuade other UC members who were also confined at that time, including Mr. Toru Goto who was locked up in a room on the upper level of the same apartment building. I visited Mr. Goto's room in 1998. When a former member of UC tapped on the front door, Mr. Goto's family member opened the heavy lock and let us in. His family member locked the door again from inside with chains and a padlock behind us. When I was taken to that room, Miyamura and others were already there, speaking to Mr. Goto. His head was drooped the whole time Miyamura was showering him with words of criticism. I felt terrible stress in the anguished, tense atmosphere of the persuasion. I felt very, very sorry for Mr. Goto, who cast his eyes down. Therefore, I could not say anything to him. When we left the room, Mr. Goto's family member unlocked the front door for us and relocked it after we stepped out.

Ms. Miyama also testified that her family's decision and actions were controlled by Miyamura and the confinement place was prepared by members of "Mizukukikai," which is managed by Miyamura.

The witness for defendant was Mr. Fumiaki Ohkura, who is a former employee of Miyamura's company. He was a plaintiff in "Lost Youth Compensation Case in Tokyo," and has been active in supporting Miyamura's deprogramming activity.

In his testimony, he said, "I agreed to have a discussion with my family members according to my own free will. Mr. Miyamura is a wonderful person who saved me. He didn't force me to leave the church." However, in the book titled "What Parents Should Know," edited by The Mind-Control Institute and published in 1997, Mr. Ohkura's younger sister contributed an article, in which she quotes him—at the time of his deprogramming—as follows: "You betrayed my trust in you... You brought me here without my permission... It's obvious that this apartment was prepared for conversion. You're gonna pay for this! I'll sue you... Everybody lied to me and brought me here! I can't trust you," etc. In his cross examination, Toru's lawyer pointed out inconsistency between description of this book and his testimony. He got upset and began to cry. Finally even slipped up and admitted, "My parents didn't let me out."

On May 14, Defendant Takashi, Toru's brother testified at court. He claimed that:

1. There were no such things as abduction and confinement.
2. Toru had stayed in the apartments by his own will.
3. He was able to leave the apartment anytime if he wanted.

In his cross examination, Toru's lawyer asked Takashi, "If there is any such example where parents released their child by their own decision without permission of Miyamura, tell me concretely! Is there such a case?" Then Takashi replied, "As far as I know, there is no such a case."

On June 3, Pastor Yasutomo Matsunaga and Yoko Goto, Toru's sister-in-law, testified. Pastor Matsunaga claimed, "I was just asked by family members to participate in their discussion. Of course I always participated in the discussion with the consent of UC believers. Since it was a family discussion, family members took full responsibility and I am in no way responsible for it."

However, his testimony contradicts evidence produced in court by the plaintiff. One of them is Pastor Matsunaga's video clip to educate parents of UC members. (photo) This is one scene of the video clip, in which Pastor Matsunaga gives specific guidance on kidnapping and confinement.

Another piece of evidence is a "kidnapping and confinement manual" hand-written by Pastor Matsunaga. In this manual, concrete methods of abduction and confinement are described for example:

- "Child rescue" [abduction] may require the engagement of six or so individuals.
- In the persuasion sessions, the parents should not leave the site without the persuader's consent, and the child must be convinced that there is absolutely no way out.

The manual also lists "the criteria of judgment" to release the captive person

Yoko Goto repeated basically the same claim as her husband. However, she learned from Takashi's examination that he failed because he was too honest and tried to answer every question of the lawyer. At the time of her cross-examination, she said nothing concrete. She said "I don't know" 21 times during her cross-examination.

On June 17, Miyamura and Masako Aoyagi, Toru's younger sister, testified. Miyamura claimed that he was just a counselor and asked by family members to participate in their family discussion, with Toru's consent. However, Miyamura himself contributed an article to the previously-mentioned book "What Parents Should Know," and the article indicates that his testimony is false. His advice to parents in the book is as follows:

The more important thing is that it is extremely dangerous for you to be the judge of this....there is no other way than to depend on an experienced counselor for this judgment....it is better to say that he/she is already beyond your level of treatment.

As for specific actions from here on, the point is to seek out an expert to request the actual "rescue counseling"... Once you have found a counselor who is reliable, you should entrust things in his hands, without any doubt.

With this, all examination finished. From now on, the both sides will submit final documents and the court will hand down a ruling on the case as early as the end of this year.

I personally feel that the defendants' argument is totally ridiculous and nonsense. But I am not sure which side will win the case. In the past similar cases in Japan, victims of deprogramming won three cases, but lost two cases.

If Toru Goto wins the case, the judgment will work as a deterrent against further abduction, confinement and forced de-conversion of the UC members in Japan.

But if Toru Goto loses the case, I would say that there is no justice in Japanese legal system.