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New website exposes Japan's human rights violations

www.StopJapanAbductions.org Calls for U.S. Congressional Hearings

PRNewswire-USNewswire (26.08.2010) / HRWF (30.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A new website launched today at www.StopJapanAbductions.org exposes human rights violations in Japan tied to abductions and forced conversions of religious minorities in Japan.

Forced conversions and abductions in Japan are a hidden human rights crime that denies people the fundamental right to worship freely. The site, www.StopJapanAbductions.org will pursue justice on behalf of victims and hold the government of Japan accountable for their failure to prosecute these crimes against humanity.

The new website hosts news articles and videos of kidnap victims, as well as a petition, calling on the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission to hold Congressional hearings into Japan's violation of international human rights treaties.

The European Leadership Conference in a fact finding tour to Japan recently held a summit featuring world renowned human rights activists who attest to the abuses taking place in Japan.

According to human rights activist Aaron Rhodes: "This is a nightmare because public authorities [in Japan] are in collusion with criminals."

After many interviews with victims of religious abductions and forced conversions in Japan, Peter Zoehrer, a journalist in Europe, concluded:

- Police in Japan often refuse to help victims of abduction and forced conversion
- In some cases, police in Japan cooperate with the perpetrators
- In several decades, not a single case has been prosecuted in Japan
- Japanese civil courts treat the problem as a "family matter"

The website petition, from the International Coalition for Religious Freedom, calls on Congress to hold hearings before the end of the year about religious and human rights abuses taking place in Japan – one of America's great trading partners. These hearings should be held by the Tom Lantos Commission on Human Rights, co-chaired by Rep. James McGovern (D-MA) and Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA).

SOURCE International Coalition for Religious Freedom

Kidnapping, confinement and forced conversion

Appeal to the international community

Foref (19.02.2010) / HRWF (19.02.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - On behalf of The Japanese Victims' Association Against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion we appeal to the international community to influence the government of Japan to take action urgently to halt the impunity related to the long-term and persistent use of kidnapping, forced confinement and even torture of its citizens. These cases involve denial of multiple rights, including and especially freedom of religion during which time members of religious communities are being coerced to change their beliefs while confined against their will.

It has been reported that in the Unification Church alone, more than 4,300 members have been victimized to date. During the past four decades, over 1,300 adherents have managed to escape their captors, sometimes at great personal risk, and return to their religious communities. They report human rights violations such as long-term confinement, mental and physical abuse, and psychological manipulation designed to force them to recant their faith.

Despite numerous complaints to police, not one indictment has been brought against the perpetrators of these crimes. Currently at least five Unification Church members remain missing in Japan, suspected to have been confined and held against their will because of their faith: Momoyo Yamada (30), Fusako Tomoda (22), Yuko Majima (60), Masako Kudo (25), and Yoshiko Majima (30).

The case of Toru Goto

One recent shocking example of Japan's religious intolerance is the case of Mr. Toru Goto, who was confined for over 12 years and 5 months against his will in an apartment in Tokyo. Already in his 30s at the beginning of this confinement (his second one), Mr. Goto was imprisoned in a small apartment, guarded day and night, just blocks away from the municipal authorities. He was not allowed to leave the apartment even to exercise and was not permitted communication with the outside world during these 12 years. He was at times constrained by force and required to listen to his captors' indoctrination and ridiculing day after day, in an attempt to make him convert from Unificationism to mainline Protestant Christianity. The ringleaders in this case were the Christian minister Toridechi Matsunaga and professional "deprogrammer" Shun Miyamura in collusion with members of Mr. Goto's family.

When, after 12 years of imprisonment, the captors were forced to admit that Mr. Goto was not going to succumb to their brainwashing techniques, they cruelly threw him out into the street in February 2008, a tall man but weighing only 39 kilo and barely able to walk. He went directly to the police station to report the crime but was refused help. He finally reached the church headquarters in Tokyo and was then taken to the hospital for a prolonged rehabilitation. He filed charges against the perpetrators of this crime in 2008, and yet on December 9, 2009, Tokyo prosecutors refused to indict them. Their claim of "insufficient evidence" is a travesty of justice and the government's action of turning a blind eye allows those responsible to continue their activities with impunity.

Here are just a few of many documented testimonies showing how severely human lives have been affected through these crimes:

Mrs. Hiroko Tomizawa.

In June 1997, a group of about twenty thugs, including an ex-policeman and private detectives, armed with an electric stun gun, iron chains and an iron pipe, attacked a UC local church in the Tottori district. They injured four church members and forcibly abducted Mrs. Tomizawa. The following day, when a church officer tried to file a criminal complaint at Tottori police station, the officer on duty refused to receive it, telling him: "We are busy. You should not bring such a case." Mrs. Tomizawa was confined in three apartments over the next fifteen months. She eventually escaped and brought criminal charges against her relatives and the "deprogrammer," a Protestant minister named Mamoru Takazawa. However, in 2000, the Tottori prosecutor's office refused to indict the perpetrators.

Mrs. Takako Fujita.

Mrs. Fujita, married to a Korean church member, was kidnapped during a visit home to Japan. In profound despair brought on by protracted psychological and physical abuse, she committed suicide in the bathroom of the apartment where she was forcibly detained with no hope of escape. Her husband came to Japan in an attempt to attend her funeral ceremony, but the family refused to admit him. The police were made aware of the situation but did not treat it as a criminal case. In the end, despite substantial evidence that she had been illegally confined, no one was arrested or indicted.

Dr. Hirohisa Koide.

On June 13, 1992, Hirohisa Koide, a medical doctor, was kidnapped while he was busy taking care of patients at a hospital. He was confined for almost two years. During his confinement an anti-UC lawyer, Hiroshi Hirata, visited the confinement place and told Koide's parents and relatives that the confinement was legal. Consequently, Koide's period of confinement was prolonged. His deprogrammer was a Christian minister named Yasutomo Matsunaga. Dr. Koide was forced to make public statements against the Unification Church before his captors would relax security measures enough that he could safely escape and return to the church. Koide describes his experience in his book "Hitosarai Karano Dasshutsu" (Tokyo: Kogensha, 1996).

Violation of international and national human rights standards

The above cases represent only a few of literally thousands of cases. These practices are clearly in violation of international human rights instruments guaranteeing the right to freedom of religion and belief (UDHR, Art. 18) and freedom of movement (UDHR, Art.13) as well as UDHR Article 9, which states that: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Human rights begin at home

Japan is bound to uphold these standards as a member of the international community and is indeed usually seen as exemplary.

However, it appears to lack transparency and consistency in the area of freedom of religion, creating a reaction in blatant denial of the indivisibility of all human rights. Much of this results from the fact that these cases of attempted forced conversion, usually instigated by relatives of the victim at the behest of a network of professional "deprogrammers," are viewed by authorities as "family matters." These cases invariably involve adult victims and

therefore they can never serve as a justification for violating a believer's right to practice their religion.

Moreover, false imprisonment is a crime in Japan under Article 220 of the Japanese Penal Code (arrests and confinement) stating, "Anyone who would arrest or confine other individuals unlawfully shall be subject to imprisonment for the period of more than three months and not exceeding seven years."

Furthermore in Article 11 of the Japanese Constitution it says:

The people shall not be prevented from enjoying any of the fundamental human rights. These fundamental human rights guaranteed to the people by this Constitution shall be conferred upon the people of this and future generations as eternal and inviolate rights. See also Article 20, Japanese Constitution:

Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all.

Or Article 223, Japanese Penal Code (extortion):

A person who, by intimidating another through a threat to another's life, body, freedom, reputation or property or by use of assault, causes the other to perform an act which the other person has no obligation to perform, or hinders the other from exercising his or her rights, shall be punished by imprisonment with work for not more than 3 years.

It is incomprehensible that all of the above-mentioned rights written in the Japanese Constitution and the Penal Code have been repeatedly violated throughout more than 40 years without legal consequences to the perpetrators of these crimes. Hundreds of young adult lives have been ruined and families destroyed. The stain on the integrity of Japan and its reputation as a stalwart defender of human rights will remain, unless the perpetrators will be brought to justice and the victims are vindicated.

After exhausting multiple legal and other channels to secure a more rigorous and coordinated commitment from the government to put an end to kidnapping and forced religious conversion in Japan, the victims of these crimes have now decided to appeal to the international community. We urge you to investigate and recognize these crimes laid before you as a dangerous precedent that threatens the very essence and foundation of human dignity.

On behalf of the victims we seek the following:

1. That if any member of the Unification Church or other minority religion becomes a victim of kidnapping and confinement, the Japanese government must immediately intervene and rescue the victim.
2. That the Japanese police must promptly search for anyone who has been kidnapped or confined and bring the victim to a safe place where the person may freely decide whom he or she chooses to associate with.
3. That in order to eliminate such incidents from this country once and for all, the Japanese police investigate all those who have been involved in past cases of kidnapping and confinement and, where appropriate, bring charges against them. The case of Toru Goto in particular should be immediately re-opened and the perpetrators of the crimes against him should be brought to justice.

FOREF Europe, Forum f. Religious Freedom-Europe
Office: Seidengasse 28/4, 1070 Vienna, AUSTRIA
President: Prof. Dr. Christian Bruenner
Secretary General: Peter Zoehrer
Phone: +43 6645238794
E-mail: manager@foref.info
Website: <http://foref.info>
Blog: <http://religiousfreedom-europe.blogspot.com/>
ZVR: 429267353
Footnote: See also
http://religionandpolicy.org/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5949&Itemid=238 (Washington-based rights group condemns kidnappings in Japan)

Doomsday cult member faces execution

AFP (19.01.2010) / HRWF (20.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Japan's supreme court has rejected an appeal against the death sentence for a senior member of the doomsday cult behind the 1995 deadly sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway.

The ruling means Tomomitsu Niimi, 45, will be the 10th member of the Aum Supreme Truth cult to face execution after exhausting all legal appeals.

Three other cult members are awaiting verdicts on appeals against their death sentences.

The supreme court upheld the death sentence handed down by two lower courts against Niimi, who was convicted on 11 charges, including the subway attack that killed 12 people and the murders of a lawyer, his wife and their baby.

Niimi, who was involved in the deaths of a total of 26 people, and his lawyers had contended that he simply followed the orders of Aum leader Shoko Asahara in the series of crimes.

Fifteen years after the attack, Niimi still worships Asahara, 54, whose real name is Chizuo Matsumoto, making prayers in his cell.

Asahara too is on death row for the gas attack and other crimes.

The bearded guru was revered as a god by his sect, which preached a blend of Buddhist and Hindu dogma mixed with apocalyptic visions.

He was obsessed with Nazi-invented sarin gas and paranoid his enemies would attack him with it.

Japan usually carries out the death penalty only in cases of multiple homicide.
