



March 23, 2010

Keiko Chiba
Ministry of Justice
1-1-1 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku
Tokyo, Japan 100-8977

Dear Mr. Chiba,

I write on behalf of the Center for International Human Rights Law and Advocacy at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law to express concern over reported religious kidnappings of Unification Church members and the failure of the Japanese government to address the issue. The Unification Church reports that since 1966, over 4,000 church members have been abducted and confined against their will in attempts to “deprogram” them of their religious beliefs.¹ Since August 2009, five members of the church have gone missing and are suspected to be in confinement.² These kidnappings are typically undertaken by the victim’s family members in conjunction with leaders of other religious organizations.³ In each known case, the victim was taken by force, confined, deprived of the right to communicate with others, and subjected to intense pressure to change his or her religious beliefs.⁴ In one recent long confinement, church member Toru Goto was held by his family for 12 years and 5 months while Christian church leaders undertook intense efforts to change his faith.⁵

The Unification Church further asserts that despite victims’ numerous reports to the police, not a single case has been prosecuted.⁶ Victims routinely report that their cases were dismissed because the confinement is viewed as a “family matter.”⁷ Japan, as a signatory to the International Covenant on

¹ Gentaro, Kajikuri, *Stop Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion in Japan* (November 21, 2009), found at http://www.religiousfreedom.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=53&Itemid=30 (last accessed March 10, 2010).

² Burton, Douglas, *Tokyo Resident Believed to be the Latest Kidnap Victim in Japan*, found at <http://www.familyfed.org/news/index.php?id=111&page=1&apage=1> (last accessed March 15, 2010).

³ *Supra*, Note 1.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Goto, Toru, *Toru Goto’s Testimony At the founding assembly of Association to Eliminate Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion* (November 21, 2009), found at http://www.religiousfreedom.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=55&Itemid=30 (last accessed March 10, 2010).

⁶ *Supra*, note 1.

⁷ Colvin, Alex, *Deprogramming in Japan* (February 22, 2010), found at http://www.religiousfreedom.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=470 (last accessed March 17, 2010).

Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), has an international duty to protect the religious rights of its citizens.⁸ Most relevantly, Article 18 of the ICCPR provides in subsection 2 that “No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.”⁹ We respectfully submit that Japan not only has a duty to abstain from religious coercion but to also actively protect its citizens from such coercion by others, even family members. The use of forcible confinement to encourage religious conversion crosses the line between persuasion and impermissible coercion under the ICCPR. Thus, we contend that Japan has a duty to investigate the issue and to take measures to protect the religious rights of its citizens.

To meet this duty, we encourage the Japanese government to guarantee that the police search for all reported missing church members and investigate all past cases of kidnapping and confinement, bringing charges against perpetrators when appropriate. Such actions will not only allow closure for past victims and freedom for current victims, but will also prevent religious kidnappings and confinements from happening in Japan in the future.

Sincerely,

Nicole Blake Lyells
Center for International Human Rights Law and Advocacy
University of Denver
Sturm College of Law

Cc: Mr. Takihoro Yokomichi, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Japan
Mr. Satsuki Eda, Chairman of the House of Councilors of Japan
Mr. Ichiro Fujisaki, Ambassador of Japan to the United States

⁸ List of signatories found at http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&lang=en (last accessed March 15, 2010).

⁹ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Article 18 (2), found at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm> (last accessed March 12, 2010)