

Young Unificationists Rally at University of Hawaii to Decry Faith-breaking in Japan

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The "Japan's Hidden Shame" event, which raised awareness about faith-breaking, was organized by the CARP chapter at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Young Unificationists of the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP) chapter at the University of Hawaii at Manoa held an event titled "Japan's Hidden Shame" that addressed the abductions and illegal confinements of Unification Church members in Japan on March 7, 2012. The purpose of the event was to raise awareness about faith-breaking, as over 4,000 adults in Japan have been victims of kidnapping and torture in the name of religious de-conversion since 1970. Organizers of the event also aimed to put political pressure on Japan's government to act upon these human rights violations.

Second-generation Unificationist Takaaki Ito, a member of CARP Hawaii, opened the event by talking about the abductions still going on in Japan today. According to Ito, Japan's traditional religious beliefs are rooted deeply in Buddhism and Shinto, and during the past 40 years, families have taken extreme measures to de-convert or "de-program" members of minority groups such as the Unification Church and Jehovah's Witnesses. Many families are often assisted by hired de-programmers, who include so-called exit counselors, Protestant pastors and former members of marginalized religions. There are even businesses that offer de-programming services for a price.

"The media has painted a bad image of these churches, and they are marginalized religions. Therefore, the police are afraid to do anything," said Ito. "If it's a family thing, [the police and media] step out. ... That's not a bad system, but it is being abused. Family is very important but in Japan, individual rights are not very respected, and it's a problem."

In order to regain their freedom, some victims fake de-conversion. Some are successfully de-converted, and some escape, as Toru Goto and Luke Higuchi were able to do. Victims have reported being beaten, starved and raped while in confinement. These crimes have been reported by victims after they regained their freedom, but very few cases have been won.

"The police, the courts, the media – say they don't have enough proof to address these cases. But we have all the proof," said Ito.

At the event, members from the Oahu Lovin' Life Ministries sang a Japanese song in the spirit of supporting their brothers and sisters in Japan. Hawaii State Unification Church Pastor Rev. Ernie Ho welcomed those in attendance, and a video presentation followed, showing several testimonies of Japanese Unificationists who were victims of kidnappings at the hands of faith-breakers.

Three Japanese Unificationists took the stage to offer their testimonies as victims of forced de-conversion: Mrs. Kumiko Saito, a resident of Hawaii, who was abducted by her relatives but who eventually escaped, Mr. Toru Goto, who was confined and tortured by faith-breakers and family members for 12 years and Mr. Luke Higuchi, the founder and president of Survivors Against Forced Exit (SAFE).