

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's History of Coercive Faith-Breaking

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Professional faith-breaker and victim. Illustration Grok xAI



Inside Japan's dark history of deprogramming: How families were urged by professional faith-breakers to lock up their own sons and daughters

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Reporter's View

Woman Tearfully Recounts How an Acquaintance, a Family Federation Follower, Was Confined and Had Her Faith Coercively Broken

by Takahide Ishii (石井 孝秀), Deputy Managing Editor, News Department of [Sekai Nippo](#)



A reenactment of Yukie Kanamori (pseudonym) having been forced into a sleeping bag and abducted into a van by several men. Image provided by the person involved, partially edited.

See also [Abduction Called Rescue - It Was Confinement](#)

Numerous cases have been reported in which relatives of believers of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) carried out [abductions and confinements](#) under the guidance of professional "deprogrammers" (commonly known in Japan as dakkai-ya, or "exit counselors") for the purpose of forcing the believers to renounce their faith [See editor's note below]. It is not uncommon for such victims to be left with deep [psychological scars](#), and even a single day of confinement can result in [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD). This is a serious [human rights issue](#).

As this paper reported in "[In District Court Hearings, 'Confinement' Rephrased as 'Surveillance'](#)" (6th March) and "[Statements Details Criminal Technique of Coercive Faith-Breaking](#)" (23rd April), affidavits submitted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to the Tokyo District Court contained accounts of such [abduction and confinement](#) experiences. These included being locked in a storehouse or forced into a hotel room to make them abandon their faith [See editor's note below] - yet the ministry apparently did not view these as human rights violations.

Current believers have submitted rebuttals to these affidavits. I once spoke to one of them, a woman referred to here as Ms. A.

In the early Heisei era (1989-2019), a female university student came to embrace the [Family Federation's](#) teachings after Ms. A first spoke to her. But after about six months, the student suddenly disappeared. Ms. A only learned what had happened when she read an affidavit written by the student's father.



Parents listening to faith-breaker (deprogrammer).
Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator

According to the affidavit, the parents had been contacted by a pastor working as a deprogrammer (faith-breaker) [See editor's note below], who told them, "Your daughter attends the [church](#)." The parents then "protected" her by confining her in a hotel room.

Upon reading the affidavit, Ms. A was moved to tears, saying she felt "deeply sorry for her". She was angry at the entire process of forcing someone to leave her faith without respecting her feelings, yet she also felt personally responsible.

Ms. A recalls,

"When we were talking about her and her father, I felt uneasy that she might be abducted and confined."

But she did nothing in particular to prevent it, and the tragedy unfolded of parents confining their own daughter.



Protesting the coercive faith-breaking business in Japan. Toru Goto (second from the right, front row) and others from the [National Association of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion Victims](#) participating in a protest march, 10th February 2025, Suginami Ward, Tokyo, Japan

The affidavit states that the student's parents had been criticized by the deprogrammer-pastor for having "failed in their parenting". However, Ms. A says,

"She was such a gentle and honest girl. If they had simply talked with her normally, without confinement, she probably would have understood her parents' feelings and left the [religious organization](#). I wonder if being told they had raised her wrong drove them into confining her unnecessarily."

Ms. A's anguish remains.

It is certainly natural for parents to want to protect their son or daughter from suspicious organizations. It's unlikely this was just one or two isolated families. But if there were misunderstandings or anxieties on the family's side, to what extent had the [religious organization](#) arranged opportunities for discussion? For example, if students wanted to join, perhaps the [organization](#) could have suggested they wait until after graduation before making a final decision. Flexible, case-by-case responses might have been possible. Now, voices of reflection and calls for improvement are beginning to emerge from individual current believers like Ms. A.

On the other hand, deprogrammers [See editor's note below] insist that "the believers' free will had been taken away" and that "it was necessary to prevent new victims," stubbornly justifying confinement as "protective persuasion". Yet when held accountable, they shift the blame, saying the believers' families acted on their own.

Depriving someone of their freedom for the sake of faith-breaking [See editor's note below] should never be permissible. It is time not only for deprogrammers themselves but also for those who have cooperated with or supported them to reconsider their stance.

See also [Abduction Called Rescue - It Was Confinement](#)

[Editor's note: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

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washington

Times carried a compelling report titled “Faith leaders demand freedom of religion guarantees at Korea conference”. The piece by Andrew Salmon spotlights a five-day [Conference for World Religious Leaders](#) held in Seoul, South Korea. Drawing over 300 faith leaders from across the globe, the gathering was more than symbolic – it was, according to the paper, a united appeal for the protection of religious freedom amidst rising authoritarian and democratic pressures throughout Asia.

Setting and Purpose

The Washington Times piece is written in a fairly straightforward, factual journalistic voice. Salmon manages to convey well the [conference's](#) sense of urgency and moral seriousness.



Tageldin (Taj) Hamad, president of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF). Screenshot from video by [FFWPU](#).

Tageldin (Taj) Hamad, president of the [Universal Peace Federation](#) (UPF), the conference's organizer, framed the meeting as a vital response to mounting threats against worshippers. From the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar to restrictive policies in China and the criminalization of Bible distribution in North Korea – religious freedoms are under siege across the region. Hamad's words – “something sacred is under threat: That is our shared spiritual heritage” – anchor the gathering in a deeply empathetic and spiritual rationale for action.

Broadening the Scope: Modern

Threats to Spirituality

Conference speakers didn't limit their concerns to overt religious persecution. Patriarch George Stallings Jr. offered a broader critique: the very structure of modern civilization – driven by science, technology, and institutional efficiency – is gradually constricting the space for spiritual life. He invited attendees to reaffirm religion's indispensable role as the moral compass and the soul of societies, counterbalancing laws with values and conscience.



George Augustus Stallings Jr. in Seoul 6th Aug. 2025. Screenshot from video by [FFWPU](#).

A Three-Point Declaration

The religious leaders crafted a focused, three-part declaration:

- 1. **Prayer for religious freedom** – asserting it as “universal and inalienable”, to be upheld by both national constitutions and international norms.
- 2. **Interfaith solidarity** – rooted in shared values of truth, conscience, and spirituality.
- 3. **Commitment to universal values** – truth, love, justice, and peace, seen as the ethical foundation derived from religious traditions.

This declaration emphasizes unity without diluting the particular strengths of different faith traditions, a clear strength of the approach.

Complexities: Family Federation in Legal and Political Crosshairs



Kim Keon-hee, here in Washington DC 10th July 2024. Photo: Jim Bourg/U.S. Department of State. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

A nuanced tension runs through the article, as the UPF is closely linked with the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) – formerly the [Unification Church](#) – which has ownership ties to *The Washington Times*. The [Federation](#) is under scrutiny: In Japan, it faces dissolution proceedings over alleged “spiritual sales”; in South Korea, it's embroiled in investigations tied to former first lady Kim Keon-hee. Kim is accused of [accepting luxury gifts](#) from a former [Federation](#) official through a shaman intermediary.

In response, [Federation](#) leaders claim political victimization, asserting that their anti-communism stance has made them a target, particularly by left-wing groups. Such allegations make it of course harder to get the

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ving groups. Such allegations make it of course harder to get the message across and underscore at the same time that any religious organization today must be able to navigate legal and reputational minefields.

Impact and Call to Action

Strong criticism was voiced when South Korean authorities **raided** the **Family Federation** and other worship sites – **raids** decried by speakers as violations of religious freedom.

U.S. Bishop Nancy Rosario called the conference “a clarion call [...] to expand the movement for continued global peace without fear of persecution,” reinforcing the message that this moment demands courageous and collective responses.

Yet, as Patriarch Stallings insisted, declarations alone are insufficient:

“Talk is not going to cut it [...].
You have to put your feet to your faith.”

He urged religious leaders to go beyond rhetoric,

“The religious leadership of our churches is spiritually impotent [if] they cannot bring any kind of challenge to situations where we see religious persecution rearing its ugly head.”

Stallings suggested that “any movement to promote the declaration’s three points” should ground itself in grassroots action and spiritual reawakening.

Analysis and Reflections

The article by Andrew Salmon offers a compelling blend of vision and vulnerability. On one hand, the conference stands as a beacon of interfaith solidarity, moral clarity, and spiritual hope. The three-point declaration offers a polished framework that could galvanize global religious communities. The urgency is palpable, and the ethical appeal strongly resonates.

On the other hand, the UPF’s affiliation with a religious movement facing serious allegations shows how vulnerable and exposed today’s champions of religious liberty are. We live in a world where totalitarian regimes constantly work to export their anti-religious narrative to democratic societies like Japan and South Korea. And those regimes do not lack supporters in the free world. Unless one’s faith is firmly rooted in strong conviction and a clear understanding of being in the middle of a battle between good and evil forces – and a veritable information war – the sense of urgency of the freedom-of-religion message is easily lost.

The Washington Times piece conveys well how serious the situation is for the cause of religious liberty. On one hand, the article celebrates a powerful, collective spiritual awakening among global faith leaders. At the same time, Salmon points out how advocates of freedom of religion or faith are up against powerful forces scheming to take hard-won freedoms away.

See also [Religious Freedom: 330 Faith Leaders Speak Up](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus

Featured image above: From the press conference in Seoul on 7th August 2025, that was part of the World Religious Leaders Conference 2025. Screenshot from video by [FFWPU](#).

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Bishop Nancy Rosario from Church of God's Children, New York speaking in Seoul 7th Aug. 2025. Screenshot from video by [FFWPU](#)

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