

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Toru Goto Disappointed, Not Defeated by Tokyo Court Decision

Knut Holdhus
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Toru Goto (2025)



Lower court's defamation decision overturned by judges siding with anti-cult journalist using abusive language against victim of dehumanizing faith-breaking confinement lasting more than 12 years

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Overtaken Decision in "Hikikomori" Lawsuit

Defamation Appeal Against Journalist Eito Suzuki

by the editorial desk of [Sekai Nippo](#)

See also the book, the amazing story of Toru Goto being locked up for 12 years and 5 months: [Apartment Prison: Faith-Breaking in Modern Japan](#)



Militantly campaigning against the [Family Federation](#). Activist journalist Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka

On 26th August, the Tokyo High Court delivered a ruling in the appeal trial over alleged defamation by journalist Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト), who had made remarks referring to "hikikomori" (social recluse) [See editor's note 1 below].

Toru Goto (後藤徹), representative of the [National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced De-Conversion](#), had sought 11 million yen in damages, claiming Suzuki's comments were defamatory. [See editor's note 2 below]

Presiding Judge Munehiro Sasaki (佐々木宗啓) dismissed the [lower court's decision](#), which had partially recognized defamation and ordered Suzuki to pay 110,000 yen in damages, and instead rejected the plaintiff's claims in full, ruling that Suzuki's remarks did not constitute defamation.

Following the judgment, Goto expressed strong dissatisfaction, saying:

"This is a very regrettable result. I cannot accept it."



Sign outside the building housing Tokyo District Court and Tokyo High Court

He also referred to the ongoing [appellate proceedings](#) regarding the government's request to dissolve the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), and voiced concern:

"I fear that this outcome will encourage the distorted idea that it is acceptable to [lock up believers](#) in order to make them leave the [religious organization](#)." [See editor's note 3 below]

Goto indicated his intention to appeal to the Supreme Court.

See also the book, the amazing story of Toru Goto being locked up for 12 years and 5 months: [Apartment Prison: Faith-Breaking in Modern Japan](#)

[Editor's note 1: The Japanese term "hikikomori" (引きこもり) refers to people who completely withdraw from social life, often isolating themselves at home for extended periods - sometimes years. It describes both the phenomenon and the individuals affected by it.

Hikikomori typically avoid school, work, and social interactions, often due to anxiety, social pressure, or mental health struggles such as depression. The term is sometimes used in a derogatory way but is also recognized as a serious social issue in Japan and other countries.]

[Editor's note 2: According to the complaint, Suzuki criticized Goto on the news website Yaya Nikkan Cult Shimbun, where Suzuki is the main writer, as "a male believer who stayed in his flat and became a NEET [Not in Education, Employment, or Training] after recuperation, becoming just a 'recluse'."

On Nippon TV's Information Live Miyaneya, he repeatedly criticized Goto, such as commenting that he was a "recluse" (引きこもり - hikikomori). Furthermore, Suzuki also defamed Toru Goto at a symposium held in July this year. When Suzuki was asked about the fact that he referred to Goto as a "recluse" (hikikomori), Suzuki replied, "I don't care." He also posted on X (formerly Twitter) that Goto was a puppet forced to play the "role of a victim".]

[Editor's note 3: 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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Trump Raises Alarm Over Church Raids In Korea

• August 27, 2025
• Knut Holdhus



Trump challenges President Lee on crackdown and voices concern as faith communities are caught in Korea's political crossfire

See also [Religious Liberty Under Fire in South Korea](#)

The Washington Times' recent report, "[Trump presses South Korean President Lee Jae-myung on church raids, political 'purges'](#)" (25th August, 2025), highlights a moment of international tension that reaches beyond diplomacy into questions of religious freedom, political stability, and the integrity of civil society.



The [article](#) describes how President Donald Trump, hosting newly elected South Korean President Lee Jae-myung at the White House, raised

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South Korean President Lee Jae-myung, here on 23rd August 2025. Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int. Cropped

concerns over what he characterized as “very vicious” raids against churches in South Korea. These include actions against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU), widely known as the [Unification Church](#), alongside other Christian congregations accused of having political ties to former President Yoon Suk Yeol.

The *Washington Post*, the larger competitor of *The Washington Times*, [wrote on the same day](#) that before President Lee’s visit, Trump signaled unease with how Lee came

to office earlier this year – securing victory in the June election that followed the impeachment and removal of his predecessor, conservative leader Yoon Suk Yeol, after Yoon’s short-lived declaration of martial law.

The Washington Post

The large DC paper wrote,

“‘WHAT IS GOING ON IN SOUTH KOREA? Seems like a Purge or Revolution,’ Trump wrote on Truth Social on Monday morning. ‘We can’t have that and do business there. I am seeing the new President today at the White House.’”

The [article by Jeff Mordock](#) and Andrew Salmon in *The Washington Times* underscores a disturbing pattern: religious organizations in South Korea are being targeted under the guise of political investigations. What should concern international observers is not only the fairness of these prosecutions, but also the chilling precedent they set for freedom of belief, association, and expression in one of Asia’s most important democracies.



Former South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and First Lady Kim Keon-hee, here in Tokyo 16th March 2023. Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int. Cropped

The [article](#) points to investigations into churches allegedly tied to political figures, particularly ex-President Yoon and his wife. For the [Family Federation](#), the central concern is that a spiritual movement, whose global mission is to promote peace and [family values](#), is being swept into political turmoil through accusations of bribery and undue influence. Allegations – such as gifts offered to the former First Lady – have not been substantiated in court, and the [Federation](#) has already expressed willingness to cooperate with authorities. However, the fact that raids and media sensationalism precede any judicial ruling suggests that these measures are more about [political theater](#) than due process.

President Trump’s comments are significant because they echo what many within the [Family Federation](#) and allied faith communities have felt for decades: South Korea’s governments, often under pressure from political rivals or activist groups, have sometimes treated religious minorities with suspicion or hostility. The raids described in the article are not mere administrative checks but aggressive interventions that risk intimidating congregations and stigmatizing entire communities. When churches like Sarang Jeil and the [Family Federation](#) are portrayed primarily as political actors rather than spiritual communities, the broader principle of religious freedom comes under attack.

The fact that this issue was raised in a White House meeting speaks to its gravity. The [Family Federation](#) is not only a Korean faith movement but also a global one, with extensive networks in the United States, Japan, Africa, and beyond. Its affiliated media, business, and

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humanitarian projects have long championed U.S.-Korea relations and peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula. By undermining such a movement at home, South Korea risks sending a dangerous signal abroad – that religious freedom can be curtailed for political expediency. President Trump's warning that such instability could jeopardize trade relations only underscores how these raids may damage trust between allies.

The [Family Federation](#) has experienced cycles of misunderstanding and persecution in South Korea since the movement was [founded in 1954](#). Yet the [religious organization](#) has consistently emphasized reconciliation, family unity, and interfaith cooperation. In this light, the current accusations appear less as isolated charges and more as a continuation of a historical tendency to scapegoat the [Federation](#) during political crises. Linking the movement to corruption without due process revives old prejudices rather than addressing real issues of governance.



Met misunderstanding and persecution even before he [founded the movement in 1954](#): [Sun Myung Moon](#), here in the early 1950s. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

While President Lee insists the raids are part of investigations into past abuses of power, his government would do well to ensure that faith communities are not indiscriminately targeted or publicly defamed. The [Family Federation](#) has affirmed its readiness to cooperate with legal authorities; what it seeks is fairness, transparency, and recognition of its religious mission. Genuine dialogue with religious organizations would strengthen South Korea's democracy, while heavy-handed raids risk fracturing it further.

The [Washington Times article](#) captures a pivotal moment in U.S.-Korea relations, where concerns about trade and security overlap with deeper questions of liberty and human rights. For the [Family Federation](#), the stakes are clear: the right to practice faith without political persecution must be defended, not only for its own members but for all religious communities in South Korea. President Trump's public acknowledgment of the issue provides a measure of hope that international attention will encourage restraint and fairness. Ultimately, South Korea's standing as a democratic ally depends not only on its economic strength or military partnership, but also on its commitment to protecting the fundamental freedoms of conscience and belief.

See also [Religious Liberty Under Fire in South Korea](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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