



### Japan's Human Rights Failures Draw Attention as Activists Rally in 10 Major U.S. Cities



Mitsuko Antal shares her story in tears.

Clergy, civil-rights leaders, and victims of religious-freedom violations joined with concerned citizens throughout the United States on November 16, 2010 to protest the Japanese government's failure to protect the human rights of minority religious believers.

Demonstrations included a 200-person protest outside the Japanese consulate in New York City and smaller demonstrations in nine other cities to draw attention to activists' request to meet with Japanese officials in an atmosphere of good faith.

In four of the ten cities in which these demonstrations were held, senior consular officials respectfully received delegations and promised to communicate their concerns to their superiors in Japan. Most consulates, however, refused to allow the delegations entry, even though Japanese citizens were involved.



Former victim Miyano speaks at rally in Boston.

The demonstrations we called in reaction to the outright refusal of the Consul General in New York City to meet with a delegation of civil rights and religious leaders to discuss the issue of faith-breaking in Japan on October 20. The leaders hoped to discuss with Ambassador Shinichi Nishimiya their concerns that "thousands of Unification Church members have been abducted and held against their will in Japan in an attempt to break their faith. However, the Japanese government continues to turn a blind eye to this crime, treating it as a mere 'family matter.'"

Media interest ranged from "11-Alive" TV in Atlanta, to the *Seattle Times*, Radio KEX in Portland, Korean TV in New York City, the *Korea Herald* newspaper, campus TV in Los Angeles, and the Japanese journal

An article written by Segye Times, titled "[“Condemning of Human Rights Violations of Japanese Unification Church Members': Protests Held Simultaneously in 11 Cities of the United States”](#)", was posted on Yahoo in Korea on November 18, 2010.

The article's main photo was captioned: "Religious leaders, human rights organization representatives, Japanese Unification Church kidnapping victims and their families, a total of over 200 people, held a protest in front of the Japanese Consulate General in Manhattan, NY on the 16th, urging the eradication of human rights violation crimes toward Japanese Unification Church kidnapping and confinement victims. (Photo provided by the Kidnapping and Confinement Victims Association)"

Dozens of pictures of the events can be seen here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/stopjapanabductions/sets/>

- **New York City.** An estimated 200 participants rallied. Speakers included: Rev. Luonne Rouse, United Methodist Church of Long Island; Bishop Jesse Edwards, ACLC; Rev. Michael Jenkins, ACLC; Rev. Joshua Cotter, Unification Church; Luke Higuchi, SAFE President; Angelika Selle, WFWP President; Archbishop George A. Stallings, ACLC; victims Mitsuko Antal and Michiko Presky, and others. The rally featured passionate speeches by civil rights leaders, compelling testimonies of victims, and a rousing commitment as the crowd joined in singing "We Shall Overcome."
- **Atlanta.** Led by Unification Church District Director Tom Cutts, this demonstration featured speeches by Georgia State Senator Donzella James, Pastor Mark Abernathy of the Connect Point Christian Center and Dr. Gloria W. Wright, Day Spring International Ministries. The local NBC-affiliate television station WXIA—"11 Alive" interviewed speakers and took video footage of the event. Although the delegation was not allowed inside, the consulate's attorney respectfully received our letter and information.
- **Boston.** District director Richard Buessing led the event, which featured speeches by former State Senator Bill Owens, Rev. Cecil Cozier, and former abduction victim Miyano Takahashi. Deputy Consul Hisashi Takatomi received the delegation respectfully inside the consulate. He took their information and listened carefully to our speakers, including the testimony of Ms. Takahashi.



Rev. Bruce Sutchar in Chicago

Chicago. The delegation gathered in front of the consulate on Chicago's famous Michigan Avenue. Speakers included Pastor T.L. Barrett of the Life Center Church of God In Christ, Rev. Fannie Smith, who has worked closely with Rev. Jesse Jackson for many years, and Rev. Bruce Sutchar of the Unification Church. Ms. Etsuko Ito and Rev. Kinihiro Sagisaka spoke as former victims of abduction in Japan, and Mrs. Akemi Matsuda represented the Japanese community, speaking with deep emotion and tears. The consulate had tight security, and the delegation was prevented from hand-delivering the letter, being told to mail it instead.

- **Houston.** Speakers included: Dr. Karen Holly, President and Founder of Grace International Seminary, Pastor Mark Soto, and former abduction victim Yumi Kang. Although security was tight, Deputy Consul General Takahiko Watabe received Ms. Kang and another Japanese sisters courteously. He listened to her testimony and received the delegation's letter and materials. He stated that he would report on their visit to the Japanese Ambassador to the United States, as well as to the incoming Consul General.
- **Los Angeles.** This event yielded some promising media results. A TV media team came from the University of Southern California to tape the event. KABC Radio and the *Korea Herald* both interviewed UPF-USA president Jim Gavin. Although the Consul General normally has a cooperative relationship with the Unification Church community in Los Angeles, the delegation was barred entry and had to send their appeal by registered mail. However, they are hopeful of getting through to him through other channels.
- **Miami.** Speakers included Pastor Fernande Gelin of the Return of Christ Church, Reverend Tom Cutts, Rev. Gary Chidester, and Mr. Tom Byrne. Delegates were not allowed entry into the consulate but delivered their letter and materials to the consulate's security person.



Victims and supporters demonstrate in Portland.

**Portland, Oregon.** Pastor Stewart Minnieweather of the American Clergy Leadership Conference Chaplain Claudia Al-Amin, Muslim chaplain to Oregon's correctional services (prisons). A reporter from News Radio station KEX covered the event. Security was tight. The delegation was barred entry but hopes to deliver their materials to the Consul General later.

- **San Francisco.** After speeches and readings outside the consulate, Bishop Jackson of the Carriage Hills Community Church, Attorney Masako Ando, and Unification Church Youth Pastor Kenritsu Yamamoto, led the delegation into the consulate. There, they eventually met directly with Consul General Tetsuya Iwata. He listened carefully to their plea and the reading of the delegation's official letter. He stated that he had already been made aware of this situation and promised to do what he can.



Victims and supporters demonstrate in Seattle.

**Seattle.** Rev. Larry Krishnek of the Unification Church gave opening remarks and introduced the first speaker, Mrs. Ellen Abellera, former executive director of the Governor's Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs. She was followed by ACLC Pastor Richard Rivers. The final speaker, Japanese Unification Church member, Noriko Fisher, who delivered a moving message representing the Japanese victims. Three Seattle police officers and two building security escorted the delegation into the consulate, where they were surprised to learn that Consul General Ota was waiting for them. He respectfully received their materials, and said that he would read the letter and forward it to Tokyo. Interest in the issue was expressed by a reporter from *Hokubei-hochi* ("North American Journal"). Also, a *Seattle Times* reporter, Janet Tu, called Rev. Krishnek and Mr. Abellera to interview them on the phone.

***Contributed by Dan Fefferman, International Coalition for Religious Freedom***