

UPF Japan's IRF Summit Rallies Activists for Religious Freedom in Japan

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Tokyo, Japan – The International Religious Freedom Summit held its second annual regional conference in Asia on July 22 at the New Otani Hotel in Tokyo. Approximately 180 participants from Japan and abroad attended this event, including **Dr. Chang Shik Yang**, chairman of UPF-International; **Mr. Jacques Marion**, chairman of UPF-Europe and the Middle East; and **Mr. Shunsuke Uotani**, secretary general of UPF-Japan.



The theme of the conference was "Religious Freedom in Asia." A wide range of topics was discussed, covering the state of religious freedom in authoritarian countries such as China – where the treatment of Uyghur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists was of special concern – and also conditions in Asian democracies such as India and Japan.

Of the many sessions, the one that attracted the most attention was the keynote speech by former US Secretary of State **Mr. Mike Pompeo**. Mr. Pompeo emphasized the geopolitical importance of protecting religious freedom in Asia, and expressed his expectation that Japan would play a constructive role in this area.



Other major speakers included **Mr. David Curry**, president and CEO of Global Christian Relief; **Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett**, president of the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice; **Mr. Sam Brownback**, who formerly served as a US senator, governor of Kansas, and ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom; and **Mr. Eric Ueland**, vice chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom.



During the question and answer session, **Mr. Ogasawara Yutaka**, a member of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), explained: "Currently in Japan, the government has filed a request for a dissolution order against the Family Federation in court. The government has proceeded with the procedure without listening to our opinions, and we are now waiting for the court's decision." He

asked Mr. Pompeo's opinion on this situation.

Mr. Pompeo said, "It would be both a mistake and detrimental to the county of Japan, in my view, to dissolve any church, any practicing faith. This is not the methodology... this would be, in my judgment, improper. I pray that the Japanese leadership will review this and make a better decision than the one that you fear they're headed down that path."



On the same day, the International Coalition for Religious Freedom (ICRF) Japan Committee held its General Assembly at the Kaiun Club in Tokyo. An audience of about 320 people attended. In addition to domestic professionals and religious leaders, they also included overseas professionals who had participated in the IRF Summit Asia and media commentators.



ICRF began its activities to promote religious freedom in 1998, but had been inactive in recent years. UPF-Japan Chairman **Mr. Katsumi Otsuka** has reactivated the ICRF Japan Committee in response to the current situation, with religious freedom increasingly under attack since the 2022 assassination of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe by a gunman with a grudge against FFWPU. Mr. Otsuka is reactivating the

committee to unite religious leaders and intellectuals who hope to rectify this situation and protect religious freedom in Japan.



Prof. Shoichi Ito of Kyushu University, who was elected as the new chairman of the ICRF Japan Committee, opened the meeting with his welcoming remarks. **Mr. Marco Respinti**, director of the religious freedom and human rights magazine Bitter Winter, said that freedom of religion is the first human right, and that no power, state, church, or organization can suppress or deny that right.



Next, former Musashino University **Prof. Seishiro Sugihara** explained the meaning of religious freedom as guaranteed in the Japanese Constitution.

Mr. Pema Gyalpo, visiting professor at Takushoku University in Tokyo, is originally from Tibet, and served as the first representative of the Dalai Lama to the Asia-Pacific region. He spoke of religious persecution in communist countries, especially China, and sounded the alarm that Japan could become like those countries if things continued as they were.

Mr. Shunsuke Uotani, secretary general of UPF-Japan, reported on the CESNUR International Conference held in Bordeaux, France in June. He showed a video message from **Mr. Tanaka Tomihiro**, chairman of the FFWPU-Japan, which was shown at the conference.



Following words of encouragement from **Rev. Higashi Wakow**, a Tendai Buddhist monk, a "Proposal for Religious Freedom" was read out by a young leader, which was unanimously adopted, and the organizers of the ICRF Japan Committee signed the proposal on a board.



The ICRF General Assembly was streamed nationwide on YouTube.