

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Deprogrammed Apostates Sent to Infiltrate FFWPU Japan

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June 16, 2025



Passageway near the site where young [Family Federation](#) believers were abducted and confined - Adachi Ward, Tokyo. Japan



[Sekai Nippo](#)

**The silent war on faith: Infiltration, coercion, and the erosion of religious freedom - How faith-breakers abducted thousands by using deprogrammed believers**

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[Series] Deprogramming That Never Ends (Part 1)

**Chain Abductions of Believers Triggered by a Stolen List**

**Family Federation Targeted**

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai](#)

[Nippo](#)



Protesting the organized persecution ignored by the authorities. Protesters gathering in East Ikebukuro Central Park, Tokyo on June 8, 2025 to call for the revocation of the dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#)

"Deprogramming" [See editor's note below], where believers are forcibly restrained and coerced into renouncing their religion, is internationally recognized as a violation of human rights. In Japan, some Christian pastors and others hostile to the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) have carried out deprogramming [See editor's note below] by using believers' families. As former believers who had been deprogrammed [See editor's note below] renounced their faith, a "chain reaction" of [abductions and confinements](#) of other members occurred. Testimonies from believers who were present at the time reveal how the damage from deprogramming [See editor's note below] rapidly escalated.

"I was constantly filled with anger of having my faith stripped from me, and with anxiety because I didn't know whom I could turn to."



*Protesting the organized persecution ignored by the authorities. Here, from a demonstration in the large southern city of Fukuoka, Japan March 30, 2025*

So says 61 year old Shinichi Ishimura (石村信一), the head of a [Family Federation](#) church in Kita Ward, Tokyo. Around 30 years ago, he led youth believers at a church in Adachi Ward. At its peak, over 200 young believers were active there - not only in missionary work but also in events designed to build fellowship. He recalls,

"We have so many good memories - gathering around dinner while someone played guitar, holding monthly birthday parties where teams put on performances."

But between 1992 and 2001, he laments, "Just from our church alone, close to 100 members may have been forcibly detained."



*A reenactment of Yukie Kanamori (pseudonym) having been forced into a sleeping bag and abducted in a van by several men. Image provided by the person involved, partially edited. Published in Sekai Nippo April 25, 2025*

Starting in 1998, new believers - those who had only just joined - began being abducted and confined in rapid succession. Over a period of less than two years, at least 18 individuals were victimized. Some were even [abducted](#) just steps away from church facilities.

Upon investigating, a shocking possibility emerged: "A member list may have been stolen." Testimony from believers who escaped from confinement revealed that a former male member, Mr. A, appeared at the site and said:

"I got my hands on the list of believers. More [abductions](#) are being planned."

"They'll fall away like dominoes," he added, using the phrase "imozuru-shiki" (芋づる式 - dragged down in a chain reaction).

Mr. A had himself been [abducted and deprogrammed](#) [See editor's note below] in July 1998. Then, one

day in September, he seemingly entered the church while no one was around. Ishimura explains,

"We found a note from Mr. A in the staff room along with books he had borrowed."

If he had indeed obtained a list of believers, "He could have easily copied down addresses from that room, either by hand or with a copier," Ishimura sighs.

Friends who had shared dreams and ideals were [abducted and confined](#) one after another - and then renounced their faith without saying a word.

Ishimura's expression became somber as he said,

"I was truly devastated - I couldn't bear it."

He says the pain of those events still lingers deep within him.



*Professional faith-breaker and victim. Illustration*

Similar chain abductions occurred in Osaka as well. Around 1992, Yoshio Shibata (pseudonym, 50s) served as a church leader in Osaka City. At that time, a female believer, Ms. B, returned after having been abducted.

While her safe return was initially a relief, strange incidents soon followed: Believers walking alone were abducted in broad daylight on the street. It seemed as though the routes and timings of their movements were fully known to the deprogrammers, and 7 - 8 members were eventually [abducted and forcibly confined](#).

The truth came to light when another abducted believer managed to escape. That person later

attended an anti-[Family Federation](#) meeting held by deprogrammers and saw Ms. B there. She was introduced as someone who had "helped in the rescue".

"In other words, Ms. B was a spy," Shibata says.

After this story spread among the congregation, Ms. B quickly disappeared. Shibata says the incident left lasting scars. In 1994, another female believer returned from where she'd been confined. But overcome with suspicion - wondering if she might be a spy - I even confronted her in front of the other members.

"I still wonder," Shibata murmurs.

"Was she doing it willingly? Did she volunteer to help them? Or was she coerced into it as a kind of test of loyalty? Now, no one can really know."

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**[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.

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.



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

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



Location of the cities mentioned, located on the southern island of Okinawa. Illustration: Maximilian Dörrbecker (Chumhwa) / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#)

On 7<sup>th</sup> June, the Okinawa Citizens' Association for the Protection of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedom of Religion, composed of members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), held a lecture in Urasoe City, Okinawa Prefecture.

Toru Goto (後藤徹), who was confined for **12 years and 5 months** by pastors and

professional deprogrammers and pressured to renounce his faith, gave a talk emphasizing the importance of religious freedom.

Goto, who serves as the representative of the [National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Religious De-Conversion](#), reflected on his ordeal, saying,

"It was a despicable act that deprived me of all freedoms, including even the freedom of the mind. [...] Even so, I could not abandon a faith more important to me than life itself."

As a guest speaker, Pastor Ryuichi Sunagawa (砂川竜一) of [Tsukishiro Christian Church](#) (in Nanjo City) expressed remorse, saying,

"I am deeply sorry that Christian pastors were involved in the persecution of the [Family Federation](#)."

He then offered words of encouragement to the believers gathered at the venue:

"Never give up – no matter what happens, protect your freedom of faith."



Ryuichi Sunagawa, 13th May 2025. Photo: Yuya Kawase (川瀬裕也)

**Featured image** above: Toru Goto giving a lecture on the afternoon of 7<sup>th</sup> June 2025, in Urasoe City, Okinawa Prefecture. Photo: Yuya Kawase (川瀬裕也)

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