

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Toru Goto - 12 Years in Captivity - Fighting Back

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Toru Goto giving a lecture on the afternoon of June 7, 2025, in Urasoe City, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Victim of faith-based abduction speaks out after 12 years in captivity for his belief - Toru Goto demands end to religious persecution in Japan

Tokyo, 9th June 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Abduction and Confinement "Also Rob You of Your Freedom of the Mind"

Lecture by Toru Goto in Okinawa

On 7th 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.



Ryuichi Sunagawa, May 13, 2025

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."

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June 8, 2025

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community, and the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#).

The [Family Federation](#) is active in most democratic countries, including Japan, where we have approximately 600,000 members. Our presence in Japan spans over 65 years, during which we have experienced significant growth. However, powerful forces have consistently worked against us, and this opposition intensified following the tragic incident on 8th July 2022, when former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated while delivering a speech.

The perpetrator was a young man who believed that Abe supported the [Family Federation](#). He harbored deep resentment toward [our organization](#), rooted in personal grievances – his mother became a member nearly 30 years ago and made substantial financial contributions.

The specifics of his family background raise several questions, and his deeper motives remain unclear. Reports suggest he held communist sympathies and spoke of initiating a revolution. Incredibly, a member of the Japanese Red Army even produced a film about him, portraying him as a hero; the film was shown in Japanese cinemas.



Tetsuya Yamagami, the man who killed Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan. Photo: Andrew2592009 / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int.](#) Cropped

On 19th January 2024, renowned sociologist of religion Massimo Introvigne stated that key facts about the assassin had been largely ignored by the media, resulting in a distorted public understanding of the event.

What followed was a wave of harassment, spearheaded by a legal network known as NNLASS, composed of left-leaning lawyers who frequently file lawsuits against religious organizations. Just days after the assassination, they held a press conference in which they labeled the [Family Federation](#) as an antisocial group and called for its dissolution.

This was highly unethical. Instead of leaving it up to the police to carry out a thorough investigation, the lawyers – just days after the assassination – designated a scapegoat – the very organization they'd been trying to get dissolved since 40 years.

This marked the beginning of an orchestrated campaign of defamation and pressure. On 10th May 2023, Professor Kevin M. Doak of Georgetown University, an expert in East Asian studies, stated in an [interview with Sekai Nippo](#) that Japanese communists were exploiting Abe's assassination to "smear the former [Unification Church](#) and the LDP", Japan's ruling party.



Dr. Kevin M. Doak, author and professor of East Asian languages and cultures at Georgetown University, Washington DC. Published with permission.

The [Family Federation](#), formerly known as the [Unification Church](#), thus became entangled in a political struggle. The response to the assassination was startlingly unorthodox: instead of focusing scrutiny on the assassin, the media redirected public attention toward the [Family Federation](#).



Thierry Valle. Photo: [Bitter winter](#)

On 4th November 2022, Thierry Valle, head of the French religious freedom organization CAP-LC, [addressed the UN Human Rights Committee](#) in Geneva. He noted that Japan's left-leaning media had distorted the narrative by adopting the assassin's justification and portraying him as the victim – while casting the [Family](#)

[Federation](#) as the perpetrator, thereby disregarding numerous relevant factors.

The media played a central role in fueling this narrative. Coverage of

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the NNLASS press conference was uncritical, amplifying the lawyers claims and shaping public opinion accordingly. It is well known that the political left in Japan has long opposed the [Family Federation](#).

In an [interview](#) published on 22nd November 2022, in the communist newspaper *Shimbun Akahata*, Kazuo Shii, former chairman of the Japanese Communist Party, was asked: "From the Communist Party's point of view, is this the final war against the [Family Federation](#)?" He responded affirmatively, stating that the struggle had been ongoing since at least a gubernatorial election in 1978.



*In Nov. 2022 interview, **Kazuo Shii**, chairman of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) said the party is fighting the "final war" against the [Family Federation / Unification Church](#). Here Shii on 30th March 2023. Photo: Attribution: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#). Cropped*

Indeed, as far back as the 1960s, our movement was not only involved in religious activities but also actively opposed communism. During a time of radicalization across Japanese universities, the *International Federation for Victory over Communism* was founded by [Sun Myung Moon](#) and members of the [Family Federation](#). It was a separate organization but gained widespread support, amassing three million members. Through public information campaigns, the movement contributed to communist defeats in several local elections.

This longstanding opposition has made the Communist Party and other left-wing groups our persistent adversaries. After the Abe assassination, pressure intensified. At the initial press conference, the NNLASS lawyers demanded the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) and eventually brought this demand to the Prime Minister. However, he initially responded that an organization cannot be dissolved without a criminal conviction. While there have been civil lawsuits – mostly related to donations and initiated by activist lawyers – such cases do not warrant the dissolution of a religious body.

Importantly, dissolution in Japan is not merely the removal of status as a religious corporation. It would involve the confiscation of assets and properties and could severely restrict our ability to pass on our faith to future generations.



Fumio Kishida and Taro Kono in June 2024. Kono, Minister for Digital Transformation and Minister for Consumer Affairs and Food Safety, is known to have lobbied Kishida to get the [Family Federation](#) investigated. In August 2022 Kono appointed Masaki Kito as expert advisor in a [study group](#) Kono established in the Consumer Affairs Agency for the issue of the [Family Federation](#). Kito is an activist radical leftwing lawyer who has been campaigning against the [Family Federation / Unification Church](#) for decades. Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#)

On 18th October 2023, then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida stated that the [Family Federation](#) could not be dissolved, as neither the organization nor its legal representatives had committed any criminal acts.

However, the very next day, following intense media and political pressure, he [reversed his position](#). He announced that civil disputes could also be grounds for dissolution. What he did was essentially changing the law – and not only that – he also gave it retroactive effect. This was something he did not have the authority to do alone, but he managed to push it through. This marked a significant governmental overreach. [...]

One key figure in this campaign was Minister Taro Kono, who had

long been critical of the [Family Federation](#). He initiated the formation of an "investigative committee" to examine the organization. This committee lacked impartiality, as it included four outspoken opponents of the [Family Federation](#), among them Masaki Kito, a leading figure in the NNLASS network. No one with a balanced or supportive view of the [Family Federation](#) was included.

Predictably, the committee's findings were negative and contributed to further political pressure. The report deeply influenced the Prime Minister and other policymakers, reinforcing an already skewed narrative.

To be continued. Part 2 coming soon.

Featured image above: Steinar Murud delivering his message at the House of Literature in Oslo on 12th June 2025. Photo: David Toresen

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