

THE INSTITUTE Condemns Kidnapping and Forced Religious Conversion in Japan

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Alexandria, VA, January 12, 2010 THE INSTITUTE on Religion and Public Policy calls upon the government of Japan to bring to a halt the long-term and persistent use of kidnapping and forced confinement of its citizens to deny and change their religious beliefs.

It has been reported that just in the Unification Church alone, more than 4,000 members have been victimized to date. Those who have managed to escape often did so at great personal risk.

The approximate 1,300 who returned to their religious communities reported horrific accounts of long-term incarceration, mental and physical abuse and psychological manipulation designed to force them to recant their faith. Currently at least four Unification Church members remain missing and are suspected to be held against their will.

One example of Japan's religious persecution is the case of Mr. Toru Goto, who was confined for over 12 years against his will in Tokyo and finally gained his freedom in 2008. Mr. Goto was not allowed to leave the illegal private prison, even to exercise, and was deprived of food by his captors, necessitating a prolonged hospital stay when he was finally released.

The perpetrators of this crime are known to the police, and yet on December 9 prosecutors refused to hear the case against them. Their claim of "insufficient evidence" is a travesty of justice and allows those responsible to continue their activities with impunity. Such inaction by the government will almost certainly result in more such kidnappings.

These practices are clearly in violation of international human rights instruments guaranteeing the right to freedom of religion and belief and freedom of movement. Japan is bound to uphold these standards as a member of the international community. Moreover, false imprisonment is a crime in Japan under Article 220 of the Japanese Penal Code. These gross human rights violations threaten to stain Japan's otherwise exemplary role in promoting and defending fundamental rights around the world.

THE INSTITUTE strongly urges the immediate and forceful intervention of Japan's Government, Diet, prosecutors, police, human rights organizations, and religious leaders to put an end to kidnapping and forced religious conversion in Japan. A conscious lack of action on the part of the Government of Japan to end these kidnappings and forced conversions makes the government complicit in such acts.