FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Toru Goto, Out After 12 Years of Being Locked Up

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October 2, 2026



Artistic illustration of Toru Goto being thrown out of Tokyo apartment on 10th February 2008 after being held captive for 12 years and 5 months. Image: ChatGPT



Toru Goto speaking during the online conference September 19, 2026

Toru Goto endured 12 years of dehumanizing confinement - only to be thrown out with nothing on a cold winter night.

Part 6 of "My Experience of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion", a testimony on 19th September 2026 by Toru Goto (後藤徹), a Japanese member of the Family Federation and victim of attempted coercive faith-breaking - locked up for over 12 years in apartment turned prison. This first-hand witness account - of high relevance for the current dissolution case against the Family Federation in Japan - was delivered at a Zoom conference organized by Peace and Reconciliation Together (PnR-T), a Dutch-registered foundation focused on reconciliation, peacebuilding, dialogue, and healing historical conflicts.

Continued from part 1: Apartment Turned Prison: 12 Years to Break Faith

Continued from part 2: Escaped from 1st Confinement, But Abducted Again

Continued from part 3: Inside the Room Where They Tried to Break Faith

Continued from part 4: Trapped: 13 Breaking Faith of 1 in Locked Room

Continued from part 5: For 12 Years They Took My Freedom, Not My Faith

Because of the strength I received from God, I was able to endure and confront the seemingly endless struggle of confinement without giving up. When the confinement dragged on, and I realized that I could not escape even by force, I went on hunger strike as an act of protest.

In 2004 and 2005, I fasted for three weeks each year. In 2006, I decided to continue an indefinite fast until I was released. Eventually, fearing for my life, I had to abandon the fast after 30 days.



Toru Goto, representing the National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion, speaking at a symposium in Tokyo on 1st March 2025. Behind him, photos of him showing his severely emaciated condition immediately after his more than 12 years long forcible detention

Even afterward, I was not given sufficient food. For days at a time, I survived on small bowls of thin rice porridge and diluted sports drinks.

In the midst of my fear and weakness, I secretly ate small amounts of mayonnaise, ketchup, vegetable leaves and stems, and even uncooked rice, whenever I could find them without being noticed.

After ten years of confinement, my struggle was no longer simply a struggle to preserve my faith. It had also become a struggle to prevent my heart from being controlled by hatred. I felt an uncontrollable hatred beginning to take hold of me.

I became afraid that if this continued, I might hurt myself or someone else. I thought,

"There is nothing I can do except rely on God."

So, in the early hours of the morning, after my family had gone to sleep, I prayed for two or three hours at a time.

"Heavenly Father, it has already been ten years since I was confined. I feel as though I am going to break. I cannot control this hatred. What am I supposed to do?"

As I continued praying, I suddenly had an intuitive awareness that I was loved by God, and I was filled with an indescribable sense of peace.

Then I began receiving messages - not as an audible voice, but as an inner voice or inspiration, almost as though the messages were coming from the wall.

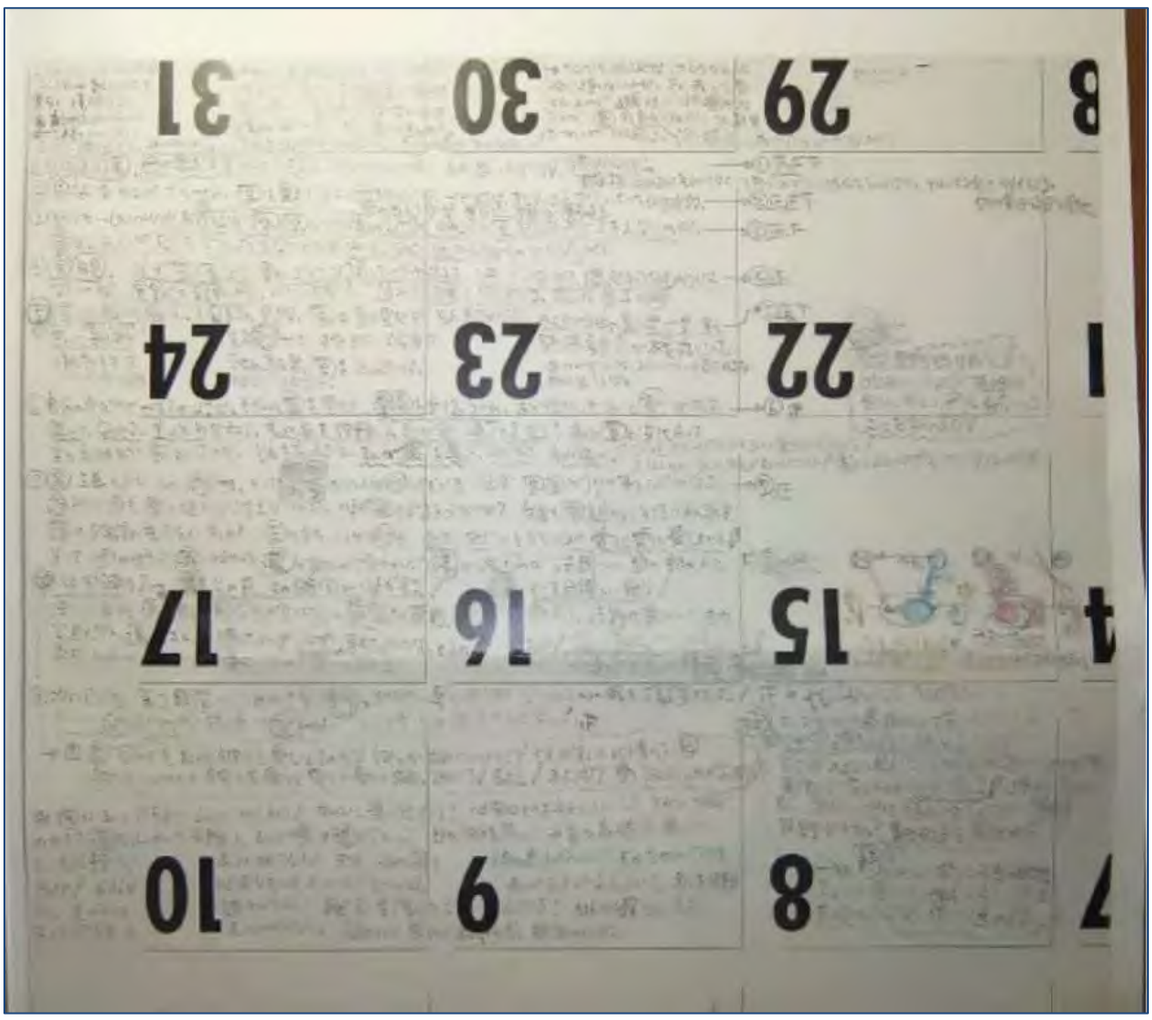
This is something I actually drew while I was confined in the apartment. (Showing image)

"Trust me. I will guide you. Entrust yourself to me. Watch carefully. See my power. See what I can do."

I wrote down these messages I repeatedly received on scrap paper from an old calendar. Since I had no writing instrument, I used a piece of left-behind graphite lead for a mechanical pencil.

In the midst of that struggle with resentment, I received the following message from God:

"Even so, I love them. Somehow, I want to save them. That is the feeling in my heart. As their Savior, love them, love them, love them and save them. Save them. Do not hesitate. Love them and save them."



During more than 12 years of confinement, Toru Goto wrote down messages he received, on scrap paper from an old calendar

This message is actually written around the very middle of the paper. I was touched by God's overwhelmingly deep love, and the tears would not stop flowing.

In essence, the message also said,

"When the conditions are fulfilled, even what appears impossible will surely fall into place."

I understood this to mean that if I fulfilled the necessary conditions, the day would surely come when I could leave the apartment.

At the point of deepest despair, I gradually began to find the light of hope again through prayer.

On Sunday evening, 10th February 2008, my family sat down in front of me. My brother asked,

"What on earth do you want to do?"

I answered,

"I have no intention of sitting here in this confinement room and continuing to examine whether the Unification Church teachings are right or wrong."

My brother then said,

"In that case, get out!"

I asked them to give me at least a little money because otherwise I would not even be able to take a train. They said,

"No. You don't need any money."

I said,

"After confining me for twelve years, isn't it terrible to throw me out with nothing?"

Then my family physically lifted me up and threw me out through the entrance and into the hallway.

To be continued. Part 7 coming soon.

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States Weaponizing The Law In War On Faiths

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conference hosted by the ***HJ International Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership*** in New York on 24th September 2026, distinguished experts gathered to discuss contemporary threats to religious freedom. Under the theme *"Honoring Constitution Day – Contemporary Threats to Religious Freedom: The Significance of the 1st Amendment"*, presenters highlighted how democratic nations are increasingly failing to protect religious minorities. Although the presentations ranged widely, several observations were particularly relevant to the systematic, state-backed persecution currently faced by the ***Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*** (formerly the Unification Church) and its leader, **Dr.** Hak Ja Han, in both **Japan** and **South Korea**.

The logo of HJ International Graduate School

The Ideological Roots and Weaponization of "Brainwashing"

Dr. Massimo Introvigne a leading scholar on new religious movements and prominent activist for religious freedom, traced the modern targeting of religious minorities back to pseudo-scientific theories of "brainwashing" [See editor's note 1 below] and "coercive persuasion". Originally pushed by Marxist and secularist groups to attack all religions, these concepts were eventually narrowed down to target unpopular minority groups labeled as "cults".

Totalitarian states like China historically weaponized these ideas, exporting them into democratic Asian neighbors through left-wing legal networks and communist parties.



***Sam Brownback with his book "China's War on Faith"**, co-authored by Michael Arkush and Joel Rosenberg. Published May 2026 by Republic Book Publishers. Screenshot from live transmission by HJ International*

While Western courts – such as the U.S. federal courts in the landmark 1990 *Fishman* decision – historically rejected brainwashing [See editor's note 1 below] as unscientific nonsense akin to a "flat earth" theory, the concept is now being reintroduced into democratic legal systems through legal "Trojan horses". These modern variations include the concepts of "coercive control" and "spiritual abuse", which are being aggressively utilized by state actors to dismantle the Family Federation.



Opened can of worms that allowed the introduction of a series of legal "Trojan horses" targeting the Family Federation and welcomed by Beijing: Former Japanese prime minister Fumio Kishida, here on 14th July 2022. Photo: 首相官邸 / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int. Cropped

State Persecution and "Spiritual Abuse" Legislation in Japan

The crisis for the Family Federation escalated drastically in Japan following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2022. The assassin's grievances regarding his mother's financial donations to the Family Federation were seized upon by the *Japanese Communist Party* and anti-religious hostile actors. Backed by ideological pressure from China, this culminated in a severe state-backed crackdown.

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A central mechanism of this persecution is Japan's newly passed legislation criminalizing the "spiritual abuse" of children (defined broadly to include minors up to age 18). Under the guise of child protection, the law relies on highly ambiguous definitions of psychological coercion. It penalizes standard religious practices, such as counseling family members against abortion, advising against certain holiday celebrations, or engaging in traditional confessions.

As Dr. Michael Jenkins, current president of the *Universal Peace Federation* of North America, noted, the legal hostility against the Japanese Family Federation has reached unprecedented heights. Japanese authorities have pushed to dissolve the religious corporation entirely. Shockingly, the legal rationale used by Japanese bodies states that even if no ongoing wrongdoing is found, the religious organization's foundational theological teachings imply they *might* commit violations in the future. This directly criminalizes religious doctrines under the assumption that faith equals automatic mind control [See editor's note 2 below].

The "Church Dissolution Bill" in South Korea

The state-sponsored hostility in Japan has directly spilled over into South Korea, creating a dangerous regional precedent. Dr. Jenkins revealed that the Chinese Communist Party's "anti-heresy" committee (Jin Zhao) has actively hosted meetings in Seoul with Korean and Japanese representatives to demonstrate how states can weaponize public distrust to eliminate persecuted religious organizations.

This transnational pressure has heavily influenced South Korean politics. South Korean President Lee Jae-myung instructed his *Minister of Legislative and Judicial Affairs* to study Japan's legal tactics specifically to replicate them against domestic churches. This has resulted in a highly controversial piece of legislation currently sitting before the National Assembly's *Judiciary and Legislative Committee*, officially designated as Civil Code 221-5932, but widely dubbed the **"Church Dissolution Bill"**.



Advocating for Japanese dissolution order as a model for disbanding the Family Federation in South Korea: Minister of Justice Jeong Seong-ho (정성호 – also anglicized as Chung Sung-ho). Photo: 대한민국 국회 / Wikimedia Commons. Korea Open Government License Type 1. Cropped

This bill utilizes vague legal terminology to mandate the complete dissolution and asset seizure of any church or nonprofit organization that becomes vaguely "involved in politics". Crucially, it dictates that if a church leader is convicted of *any* crime, the entire religious body can be permanently shut down and its properties confiscated by the state. Under this highly politicized climate, prominent leaders like Dr. Hak Ja Han face intense judicial jeopardy, with other elderly religious figures already being detained long-term and sentenced for non-violent electoral infractions.

The Global Stakes and the Need for Vigilance

The presenters emphasized that the suppression of the Family Federation is not an isolated incident, but a blueprint for global authoritarian encroachment. Former *U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom*, Sam Brownback, explained that authoritarian regimes systematically target religious groups because people of faith answer to a higher moral authority than the state – a reality that totalitarian regimes find intolerable.

When democratic nations like Japan and South Korea adopt these repressive legal frameworks, they provide a dangerous validation for authoritarianism worldwide. For instance, countries like Rwanda have already cited Japan's restrictive religious policies as a justification for

shutting down thousands of local churches. The conference concluded with a stark reminder: the protection of the soul's right to freedom requires eternal vigilance, and the weaponization of the law against the Family Federation threatens the foundational liberties of all spiritual communities globally.

***Text**: Knut Holdhus, editor*

***Featured image** above: The speakers at the HJI online conference on 24th September 2026 on threats to religious freedom: From left to right, Dr. Michael Jenkins, former US ambassador Sam Brownback, Dr. Massimo Introvigne. Screenshots.*

[***Editor's note 1***: "**Brainwashing**" was a popular term that emerged during the early Cold War to explain why some prisoners of war and political detainees appeared to adopt beliefs favored by their captors. The idea suggested that powerful psychological techniques could erase a person's existing beliefs and replace them with new ones against their will, almost like reprogramming a machine.

Over time, however, the concept was largely discarded by mainstream psychology and cognitive science as a scientific explanation of persuasion or belief change. Researchers found little evidence for such a process, that any special, unique process existed that could fundamentally override human autonomy and completely remake a person's personality or convictions.

Studies in psychology, sociology, and psychiatry showed that belief change is usually gradual, variable, and dependent on many factors: social pressure, isolation, coercion, rewards, threats, conformity, identity, and existing motivations. People can certainly be influenced, manipulated, indoctrinated, or coerced, but there is no scientifically demonstrated mechanism that allows a person's mind to be completely overwritten in the dramatic way implied by "brainwashing".

The concept came under especially heavy criticism in the 1970s–1990s during debates about new religious movements – by anti-religious activists and others often called "cults". Some experts testified that members had been brainwashed, while other scholars argued that the theory lacked clear definitions, reliable measurements, falsifiable predictions, and strong empirical support. Courts increasingly viewed brainwashing testimony skeptically because it often could not meet scientific standards of evidence.

A major problem was that "brainwashing" lacked a clear, measurable definition. Different writers used it to describe very different phenomena, from prisoner interrogation to religious conversion to participation in controversial groups. Because it could not be reliably operationalized or tested, it failed to meet basic scientific standards. Studies of prisoners of war and members of new religious movements showed that apparent ideological conversions were often temporary, strategic, situational, or reversible rather than evidence of a mysterious mind-control process.

By the 1970s and 1980s, many psychologists, sociologists, and legal scholars concluded that brainwashing functioned more as a cultural and political metaphor than as a validated scientific theory. Courts also became increasingly skeptical of expert testimony claiming that members of new religious movements had been "brainwashed". Today, scholars generally prefer more specific concepts – such as persuasion, coercive control, social influence, indoctrination, obedience, and group dynamics – rather than assuming the existence of a mysterious power that can completely rewrite a person's beliefs.]

[***Editor's note 2***: In Japan, the **"mind-control" myth** has been a powerful tool used to stigmatize and suppress new religious movements (NRMs), particularly since the 1980s. The concept suggests that NRMs manipulate or "brainwash" their followers, depriving them of free will and rational thought. This narrative gained traction after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, when public fear of dangerous cults intensified. Although Aum was an extreme and violent exception, the incident cast suspicion on all

NRMs, allowing critics, media, and the government to label diverse groups as manipulative or psychologically coercive.

The "mind-control" myth serves multiple social and political functions. It simplifies complex questions of belief, making it easier to portray converts as victims rather than as individuals exercising spiritual agency. This framing justifies legal and social intervention, including the coercive "deprogramming" of believers – sometimes involving confinement or psychological pressure to force renunciation of faith. Lawyers, ex-member groups, and certain media outlets have used the idea of mind control to construct NRMs as threats to family stability and national order, reinforcing social conformity and Japan's preference for established, non-controversial religions such as Buddhism and Shinto.

In recent years, the myth resurfaced following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose attacker cited resentment toward the Unification Church. Public outrage reignited scrutiny of NRMs, and politicians and journalists revived "mind-control" rhetoric to explain the Church's fundraising and recruitment practices. Critics argue that this framing discourages genuine religious tolerance and critical examination of Japan's restrictive religious climate. Overall, the "mind-control" myth functions less as a scientific or psychological concept and more as a moral panic – a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority faiths and to reaffirm mainstream social norms about religion, obedience, and the boundaries of acceptable belief.]

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