

## **Table of Contents**

- ***Deprogramming in Japan: Damages awarded in Unification Church case***

---

## **Deprogramming in Japan: Damages awarded in Unification Church case**

***Japanese judges confirm that kidnapping and detaining believers for the purpose of coercively "de-converting" them is a crime.***



**Victorious in court: Mr. and Mrs. Seo**

HRWF (29.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/34RcOkH> - On 27 November, the Hiroshima High Court in Japan found guilty five persons involved in the kidnapping and confinement of a married couple for the purpose of forcibly de-converting them. The accused will have to pay damages to the victims: 610,000 yen (about 6,100 EUR) to the husband and 1,110,000 yen (11,100 EUR) to the wife.

In July 2014, Koji Seo and Yuko Seo were kidnapped by their own families for forcing them to leave the Unification Church founded by Reverend Sun Myung Moon (UC). The whole operation was then masterminded by Pastor Mamoru Takazawa, a well-known recidivist in these matters.

As a rule, in Japan, the few cases that managed to reach a court were never recognized as criminal cases. Seo's case did not escape "the rule." They finally managed to file a civil lawsuit in May 2016.

### ***The accused***

Originally, eight persons were in the dock:

- Masako Seo, the mother of plaintiff Koji Seo
- Etsuji Seo, the father of plaintiff Koji Seo
- Yasuhiko Yamane, the father of plaintiff Yuko Seo
- Yumi Yamane, the mother of plaintiff Yuko Seo
- Miyuki Kubo and her husband Masahiro Kubo
- Pastor Mamoru Takazawa and his assistant in the deprogramming, Atsuyoshi Ojima.

However, two of them died during the proceedings. Pastor Takazawa passed away in 2015 before the civil lawsuit was filed in May 2016, and Etsuji Seo died before the first judgment by the Hiroshima District Court was issued on 18 February 2020.

Miyuki Kubo was instrumental in convincing the parents to kidnap and confine their (adult) children. She also played the role of guardian in the confinement apartment under the direction of Pastor Mamoru Takazawa, for the purpose of forcing Koji and Yuko Seo to leave the UC.

Masahiro Kubo, her husband, was an accomplice in the kidnapping and transporting of the couple.

### **Who was Pastor Takazawa?**

Pastor Takazawa recognized his involvement in several court cases of abduction and deprivation of freedom for the purpose of de-conversion.

In the final decision of the case brought by Kozue Terada against her kidnappers —her parents, Pastor Takazawa and Atsuyoshi Ojima (a lay assistant at a Lutheran Church) —, the Osaka High Court (9th Civil Section) ruled on July 22, 2004 that Kozue Terada's parents and Takazawa had jointly perpetrated an illegal act by imposing "persuasion sessions" against her will, in a situation where she was under physical restraint, and condemned them to jointly pay 200,000 yen (about 2,000 EUR) for depriving Kozue Terada of her freedom of movement (joint tort). Ojima was declared innocent on the grounds that his persuasion activity had been limited to a "conversation," which was not illegal.

### **Final judgment**

In a previous ruling issued by the Hiroshima District Court on February 18, 2020, the defendants were ordered to pay the following damages: 1,160,000 yen (about 11,600 EUR) to the husband and 1,650,000 yen (about 16,500 EUR) to the wife. "It can be said that the deeds of the plaintiffs' parents are vicious crimes and are not justified," the court said.

The defendants decided not to appeal the judgment of the High Court, which is therefore final.

The Hiroshima High Court (source: Supreme Court of Japan).

The first case when the Japanese courts sentenced kidnappers and deprogrammers was the well-known case of Toru Goto, who was abducted and confined during 12 years and five months, from September 1995 to February 2008. On November 13, 2014, the Tokyo High Court issued a ruling ordering five people (three close relatives of the victim, an Evangelical pastor, and another person) to pay damages to Toru Goto. His brother, sister-in-law, and younger sister were ordered to pay together the total amount of 22 million yen (about 220,000 EUR). The professional deprogrammer, Mr. Takashi Miyamura, was ordered to pay 11 million yen (110,000 EUR).

As the confinement period of Mr. and Mrs. Seo was less than a week, the damage estimation can be considered much better in comparison with Toru Goto's case.

"The Report of the UN Human Rights Committee on Japan in 2014 had a very influential role in the decision of the Japanese court. It was the result of your efforts and we appreciate it very much," said Norishige Kondo from the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification-Japan (FFWPU-J) to Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF).

In December 2011, HRWF published a report titled "Japan: Abduction and Deprivation of Freedom for the Purpose of Religious De-conversion" based on interviews of UC victims conducted in Tokyo, Seoul and Barcelona in 2010-2011. And in July 2013, HRWF contributed to the 111th session of the UN Human Rights Committee with a report titled "Abductions and confinement for the purpose of religious de-conversion".

After the case of Mr. and Mrs. Seo, the Unification Church, which claimed over 4,000 cases of kidnapping and deprogramming attempts from 1966 to 2011 with a peak for the years 1987-1995, did not have any more incidents to report.

---