

## IAPD Japan and UPF Taiwan: History of Religious Persecution and Conflict

Tomihiko Tanaka  
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Taicheng, Taiwan - In observance of UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2023, UPF-Taiwan and the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD)-Japan held an international symposium, "History of Religious Persecution and Conflict, and Opportunities for Reconciliation and Development," on February 8 at a venue in Taichung City, Taiwan with speakers and participants in Japan taking part in it virtually at a venue there. Around 160 religious leaders and Ambassadors for Peace attended the event, whose theme was "Decline of Religions Endangers Nations."



The program opened with the organizer's remarks, which was given by Dr. Yen-Po Tang, president of UPF-Taiwan. Dr. Tang noted that religion is the fruit of human wisdom and that the role of religion is to have a positive impact not only on individuals, but also on families, communities, nations and the world. He expressed his hope that the symposium, which brought together representatives from the Buddhist, the Christian and emerging faiths, would stimulate a lively discussion.

Four sessions followed, with the representatives giving presentations in each one.

The first session, "History and Lessons from Religious Persecution Experienced by Buddhism," was presented by Dr. An-Wu Lin, professor at the Institute of Religion and Humanities of Tzu Chi University. Dr. Lin explained the history of conflict and overcoming conflict in Buddhism as well as basic teachings of the faith tradition.



The second session, "History of Persecution Taoism Experienced and the Way to Overcome It," was presented by Dr. Feng-Mao Li, professor emeritus of the Department of Religious Studies at National Chengchi University. Dr. Li explained the teachings of the "Tao Te Ching," which was purportedly written by Lao-Tse, focusing in particular on Ji, which means affectionate heart for others in English, which Lao-Tse considered to be of great importance.



In the third session, Mr. Shinobu Ishimaru, coordinator of the IAPD-Japan and president of the Interreligious Federation for World Peace, spoke on "A History of Persecution Against Christianity in Japan and Consideration of the Unification Movement Today."

Mr. Ishimaru gave an overview of the history of Christianity in Japan, explaining that after its arrival in 1549, missionaries were sent to various regions. Christianity spread mainly in western Japan, but the Edo

shogunate's prohibition of it led to a long period of oppression that resulted in severe martyrdom and forced apostasy. Although there was a brief revival of Christianity during the wave of modernization in the early Meiji period, the momentum stalled afterwards.



He also spoke about religious persecution in current day Japan. In particular, he clarified that the Japanese Communist Party has taken the lead in attacking the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly the Unification Church). It is inciting confrontation rather than engaging in dialogue and cooperation with religions, and the spiritual degeneracy due to religion's decline might endanger the basic principles of the nation to the point that the nation is confronted with a crisis of survival. Therefore, now is the time for unwavering faith in God and unity among believers, not only in Japan, but also abroad, he said.

At the end of session, Mr. Ishimaru introduced several activities of the IAPD-Japan and talked about the work of the Religious Ambassadors for Peace, who have been praying together for peace in places where there is hatred.



In the fourth session, "New Religions Contribute to Modern Society," leaders from different religions spoke about their own faiths. Rev. Fumiya Sakou, chief priest of Koujuin Buddhist Temple, Jodo Shinshu Sect, who participated online from Japan, referred to the shooting of the late former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe last year and criticized the Japanese media for constantly bashing the Unification Church and presenting biased news without addressing the truth of the incident. He expressed that he feels forces based on materialistic ideology are working behind the scenes in Japan and abroad. He appealed to the participants to unite and deepen their solidarity as human beings with souls, rise beyond national borders, and acknowledge oppression of spirituality as a holy ordeal to help breakthrough this situation.