

Religions for Peace Japan Appeal for the Prohibition of Human Trafficking 2025

On 6 November, an incident came to light that starkly revealed the gravity of human trafficking in Japan. A 12-year-old Thai girl, coerced into providing sexual services at an illegal massage parlour in Tokyo, was rescued as a victim of trafficking. In the span of just one month, she was forced to serve more than sixty customers. The perpetrators were arrested only after she bravely escaped alone and sought help from the Tokyo Regional Immigration Services Bureau.

This case exposes not only the seriousness of human trafficking in Japan, but also the inadequacy of existing countermeasures. It reminds us that the pathways into trafficking are alarmingly close to our everyday lives; that public awareness remains insufficient; and that each of us—especially religious leaders—must confront this issue with moral clarity and self-reflection. Human trafficking is not a distant or exceptional problem. The courage of this Thai girl helped bring the issue of sexual exploitation into public view, yet her case represents only the visible surface of a much deeper problem.

In recent years, euphemistic expressions such as “JK businesses” (commercial services involving high-school-age girls) and *papa-katsu* (compensated dating) have become widespread, masking structures of sexual exploitation as something casual or normal. Such terms trivialize exploitation, obscure criminal accountability, and often shift blame onto victims through notions of “personal responsibility.” As a result, both victimization and perpetration are minimized and overlooked.

Despite the efforts of government and civil society to raise awareness, the methods by which traffickers control victims and conceal abuses have grown increasingly sophisticated. In February 2025, a Japanese male high-school student—lured by the promise of “a lucrative job” by someone he met in an online game—was taken first to Thailand and then to Myanmar, where he was forced to take part in large-scale fraud operations.

These cases demonstrate that transnational criminal networks are rapidly expanding and that Japan has become vulnerable to such operations. In the 2025 United States Department of State *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Japan was, for the sixth consecutive year, assessed as “not fully meeting the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.” Root causes such as poverty, abuse, bullying, and the absence of safety within the home create fertile ground for traffickers to prey upon vulnerable individuals—many of whom experience repeated victimization.

Religions for Peace Japan, an alliance of religious communities committed to the equal and inviolable dignity of every human life, views the current situation with deep concern and a renewed sense of responsibility. Human trafficking is a heinous crime that robs people of the dignity and freedom inherent to all. It traps the vulnerable in cycles of exploitation and despair. Religious leaders directly engaged in anti-trafficking efforts remind us that, across traditions, we share both moral convictions and concrete responsibilities.

In Buddhism, the belief that all beings possess Buddha-nature calls clergy to listen to the cries of those who suffer and to act from compassion to lead them toward liberation. In Christianity, the commandment to love one’s neighbour affirms the equal worth of all people; thus, human trafficking—an assault on the inherent value of the person—must be rejected, and efforts to restore human dignity become part of the mission of salvation. In Islam, the conviction that Allah has bestowed dignity upon every human being grounds the imperative to act with justice and to undertake *jihad*—the exertion of one’s utmost efforts—to secure peace and safety for all.

Although differing in doctrine and tradition, religious communities share the unwavering belief in the inherent and inalienable dignity of every human being. From this shared conviction, we cannot—and will not—turn away from the reality of human trafficking, which treats people as objects and violates their fundamental human dignity.

Since its founding, Religions for Peace Japan has consistently prayed and worked for the peace and well-being of all. At today's "Roundtable on Human Dignity 2025," we reaffirmed the necessity of strengthening a "network of trust" that links politicians, the media, the labour sector, religious communities, and ordinary citizens in the collective effort to eradicate human trafficking.

In particular, the following actions are of decisive importance in addressing human trafficking:

1. **Promoting awareness-raising activities** among the member religious bodies of Religions for Peace Japan and through its international networks.
2. **Strengthening collaboration** between Religions for Peace Japan and governmental bodies, international organizations, NGOs, human-rights organizations, the labour sector, and civil society.
3. **Advocating for greater public recognition** of the realities of human trafficking and the urgency of addressing them.
4. **Providing spiritual and material support to victims**, utilizing the full range of WCRP's social resources.
5. **Creating spaces for dialogue and learning** that nurture personal responsibility, moral reflection, and shared ownership of the struggle against human trafficking.

We hereby pledge to listen attentively to the voices of those who cannot speak and to offer our prayers, our dialogue, and our concrete actions toward building a society where no one is left behind. In doing so, we commit ourselves to contributing to the eradication of human trafficking and to realizing a world in which the equal dignity of all life is fully respected.

19 November 2025