



Talitha Kum Japan Newsletter

**Volume 1
December 2026**



The Current Situation of Talitha Kum Japan

Sr. Shizue Hirota, MMB
Catholic Talitha Kum Japan Representative

Due to the reorganization of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan, Talitha Kum Japan, which had previously operated under the Catholic Commission of Japan for Migrants, Refugees, and People on the Move, has now become an independent voluntary organization. In addition, with the approval of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan as an officially recognized Catholic organization, Bishop Goro Matsuura has agreed to serve as our advisor.

From now on, as the Japanese branch of the International Talitha Kum, headquartered in Rome, we will also cooperate with the Conference of Major Superiors of Women and Men Religious in Japan and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan. In collaboration with the "Human Rights, Peace, and Protection of Life and Dignity Section," we will continue to address the issue of human trafficking, a modern form of slavery. Furthermore, the secretariat will now be located within the office of the Men's and Women's Religious Congregations.

The reality of human trafficking in Japan became more widely known last November when it was revealed that a 12-year-old girl from Thailand had been forced into prostitution for one month, a case that received extensive media coverage. In addition, it is becoming increasingly clear that Japanese underage girls are, in effect, being coerced into prostitution in situations that occur within our immediate surroundings daily.

In response to these realities, Talitha Kum Japan will continue to promote education and awareness activities actively, support for victims including shelters, and cooperation within domestic and international networks. In particular, our Youth Ambassadors and steering committee members are conducting outreach classes nationwide at Catholic educational institutions and dioceses.

For this reason, we now need greater financial support than ever before. We have opened a bank account for Catholic Talitha Kum Japan and kindly ask for your financial support.

Mitsubishi UFJ Bank, Fukagawa Branch (086)

Ordinary Account No. 1058508

Account Name: Catholic Talitha Kum Japan

The current global situation has dealt a serious blow to Japan's economy and is affecting our daily lives as well. Yet under these circumstances, the lives of those in vulnerable positions are being threatened even more severely. We hope that, together, we may deepen our understanding of and put into practice the words of Pope Leo: "Concern for the poor is the fundamental path to encountering the Lord."

The Human Trafficking Case of a 12-Year-Old Thai Girl

Ms. Yuriko Saito

*Specially Appointed Professor, Daito Bunka University
Board Member, General Incorporated Association "Colabo"*

The human trafficking case involving a 12-year-old Thai girl, which came to light at a massage parlor in Bunkyo Ward, Tokyo, in November 2025, was profoundly shocking. While some media reports described the girl as having been "forced to work illegally," actions such as forcing a minor against her will to touch the genitals of male customers constitute child abuse, not illegal labor. Even if identifying the individual customers who bought sexual services from the child proved difficult, the case should have been prosecuted under the Act on Punishment of Activities Relating to Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, or under the Penal Code for human trafficking offenses.

However, prosecution was strictly limited. The shop owner was charged only with violations of the Labor Standards Act and the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (specifically, encouraging illegal employment). Meanwhile, the girl's mother and a Thai broker, who had left the child at the shop, were prosecuted solely for violating the Child Welfare Act. Due to low public awareness regarding child abuse and the commodification of young girls' sexuality, the victim was repatriated in January of the following year. A minor article reported the broker's arrest, and public interest has since faded.

Nevertheless, what this trafficking case confronts us with is the reality that human trafficking is by no means a problem imported solely from abroad. Rather, it challenges us to confront the trafficking issues occurring all around us within Japan, where vulnerable women and children have their sexuality commodified and traded, and where young people are increasingly targeted for forced labor exploitation through methods like specialized fraud networks.

Human Trafficking in Japan During the 1990s

During the 1990s, a succession of hardships befell women from the Philippines and Thailand who were trapped in the agonizing depths of Japan's sex trade. In 1991, the tragic case of Maricris Sioson occurred. A Filipino woman who had entered Japan on an entertainer visa, her death was confirmed at a hospital in Fukushima just five months after her arrival. Japanese authorities ruled it a "death from illness" and sent her remains back to her homeland. However, suspecting foul play due to visible external injuries, her bereaved family refused cremation. Partnering with Filipino NGOs, they pressured both the Philippine and Japanese governments to uncover the truth behind her suspected assault. The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) of the Philippines later indicated that while the direct cause of death was head trauma from a beating, severe burns, and stab wounds to her thighs and genitals strongly pointed to torture and sexual assault. Despite this, the Japanese government refused to alter its official stance of "death from illness."

That same year, another severe incident occurred in Shimodate City, Ibaraki Prefecture. Three Thai women—victims of human trafficking who could no longer endure strict confinement and physical violence—injured a Thai woman serving as a middle manager at a snack bar. Although the court openly acknowledged that "the suffering they endured (through human trafficking) defies imagination," the victims were still sentenced to eight years in prison. The defense argued that "human trafficking is forced prostitution without compensation and constitutes a cycle of continuous rape," but this argument was largely ignored by a Japanese society that broadly tolerated prostitution. This case exemplifies the systemic exploitation that Japan, as a receiving country, internalized and condoned before implementing modern anti-human trafficking protocols.

Human Trafficking in Modern Japan

In 2000, the United Nations defined human trafficking in Article 3 of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol as involving "acts" (such as the recruitment and transportation of persons) by "means" (such as deception) for the "purpose of exploitation." This protocol entered into force in 2003, legally requiring international member states to implement robust anti-trafficking measures. Has the human trafficking situation in Japan improved since

2003? The answer is no. Instead, the forms of exploitation have diversified, making modern human trafficking increasingly covert and difficult to detect.

The National Police Agency's website explicitly lists contemporary examples of human trafficking victimization, including the "coercion of sexual services," "coercion of prostitution to repay debts," "being forced into compensated dating through the exploitation of romantic feelings," and "runaway children being subjected to sexual exploitation." A clear reflection of this shift can be seen in Kabukicho, a major entertainment district in Tokyo. Many of the prominent 1990s-era signs for establishments featuring female hostesses have now been replaced by highly conspicuous advertisements for host clubs and men's "concept cafes," where young male hosts operate. These establishments specifically target young women, exploiting their romantic feelings through activities tied to "*oshi-katsu*" (the culture of passionately supporting one's favorite idol or host). While the National Police Agency reported 63 verified victims of human trafficking in 2024—58 of whom were Japanese, including 41 minors under the age of 18—this figure is widely considered to be just the tip of the iceberg. Within Japanese society, a pervasive bias remains that views individuals engaged in sex work (predominantly women) as doing so "voluntarily," "for the money," and "at their own responsibility." Consequently, systemic violence and severe exploitation are frequently dismissed as personal risks that the victims brought upon themselves, effectively obscuring and concealing the true nature of their victimization.

Furthermore, recent years have seen the emergence of international trafficking pipelines, where Japanese women are transported to Canada by criminal organizations for sexual exploitation. In response to this rising trend, the Embassy of Canada hosted a symposium in February 2026 to raise awareness among governments and NGOs, while exploring new avenues for cross-border cooperation. During this symposium, the case of a Japanese woman in her 20s who survived sex trafficking in Canada was introduced. While the specific socioeconomic background of this survivor remains undisclosed, the severe systemic difficulties young people face to simply survive in Japan can be gleaned from youth suicide rates, which are conspicuously high compared to other G7 nations. Suicide is rarely an isolated choice; rather, it is the tragic outcome of individuals being driven into a corner by a compounding chain of adverse factors. According to data from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, while suicides among young men are more heavily concentrated among those who are employed, the statistical gap between employed and unemployed young women is much narrower. Even among women classified as "employed," a disproportionate number work under unstable conditions, such as non-regular or part-time employment. Conversely, those deemed "unemployed" are frequently consumed by unpaid care work, including intensive housework, child-rearing, and elder care, which can foster profound social isolation and severe emotional strain within highly confined personal relationships. Furthermore, teenage girls who face domestic abuse or severe neglect are often left without a stable place of belonging. This acute social isolation frequently serves as a direct trigger for suicide, or conversely, leaves them highly susceptible to predatory exploitation.

In addition to domestic vulnerabilities, traditional interpersonal relationships have been severely eroded. This shift has fueled a rise in specialized cyber-fraud and scam networks, particularly across Southeast Asia. These operations use social media to lure young people with misleading information, trapping them in overseas criminal networks where they are forced to commit cybercrime. Internationally, this form of specialized fraud is recognized as a variant of human trafficking under the guise of forced labor. In countries like Thailand and the Philippines, authorities have rescued women deceived into traveling to Myanmar for these fraud operations, only to be repeatedly sexually assaulted as punishment when they failed to meet their financial quotas. Japanese women are likely also falling victim to these transnational networks.

Conclusion

Human trafficking in Japan exists all around us, manifesting in increasingly diverse and covert forms. For this reason, we must refuse to distance ourselves from this crisis or view it as an extraordinary, isolated event. Instead, we are called to look directly at those enduring this invisible suffering. We must actively recognize the structural difficulties and profound isolation confronting today's youth, listen closely to their voiceless cries, and cultivate safe environments where every individual can live with genuine peace of mind. Consistently dedicating ourselves to these daily, grassroots efforts is a vital and definitive step toward building a society that no longer gives rise to human trafficking.

Participation in The International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking

Ms. Rikako Nishikawa
Talitha Kum Japan Youth Ambassador

In February 2026, the *International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking* was held in Rome, Italy. I was given the valuable opportunity to participate in this special event as a representative of Asia. This event is held annually on February 8, the feast day of Saint Josephine Bakhita, the patron saint of Talitha Kum.

This year's theme was *"Peace Begins with Dignity."* Throughout the entire program, we reflected deeply on the meaning of dignity and considered what we can do to promote respect for human dignity and build peace. I would like to share a few moments that were especially memorable to me.



First, I would like to talk about the *"Walk for Humanity in Rome."* This awareness-raising activity, linked with the Talitha Kum app, was planned and carried out last year by the Youth Ambassadors of Japan. The area around the Colosseum is one of the world's most famous tourist destinations. However, many people may not realize that these magnificent structures were built through the labor of enslaved people. As we walked through these historical sites, we reflected on the lives of those whose dignity and freedom had been taken away, as well as on the societies that tolerated slavery. We shared our thoughts and insights throughout the walk.



The day before the final program was designated as *"Youth Day."* Many young people gathered, including Youth Ambassadors from different countries and members of organizations beyond Talitha Kum. We shared and discussed real cases of human trafficking from our respective countries through storytelling sessions. Listening to the experiences of survivors stirred many emotions within us — sadness, shock, anger, and compassion. At the same time, although these stories confronted us with the harsh realities of human trafficking, they also became an opportunity for us to reflect more deeply on our own mission

and responsibility. Although it was unfortunately raining during our flash mob activity, we walked around Castel Sant'Angelo while loudly proclaiming messages of peace. Raising one's voice against injustice is not always easy. However, I strongly felt that when we stand together with companions who share the same mission and vision, we gain the courage to confront these difficult issues. Meeting friends from all over the world became an irreplaceable source of encouragement and emotional support for me.

Even today, wars and conflicts continue in many parts of the world. While war visibly destroys peace, human trafficking invisibly destroys peace from within society by violating human dignity. Even in the absence of war, if there are people whose dignity is wounded and ignored, can we truly say that the world is at peace?

Through this experience, I came to realize once again that human trafficking is not merely a simple crime, but a cruel act that deeply affects human life and dignity. It is not an issue that can be solved by law enforcement alone. That is why I realized the importance of standing beside survivors, raising awareness to prevent human trafficking before it occurs, and uniting together in prayer and action. Lastly, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone I met in Rome, to Saint Bakhita who watched over us, and to God for granting me this meaningful opportunity.

Report on Shelter Activities

Sr. Michiko Miyawaki, F.M.A
Catholic Talitha Kum Japan Steering Committee Member

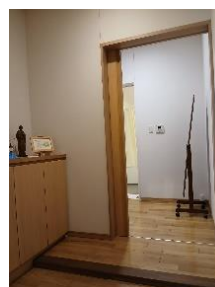
One of the activities of Catholic Talitha Kum Japan is the provision of emergency temporary shelters for people in Japan who are at risk of exploitation, including foreign technical interns and migrant workers. Based on a list of monasteries and convents throughout the country that are able to accept individuals in need, requests for cooperation are coordinated through Talitha Kum.

In fiscal year 2025, we received requests to provide shelter for two Vietnamese technical interns, one Filipino woman, and one Indonesian woman. The timing, duration, and circumstances of their protection varied. Some stayed for several months until their situations were resolved, while others required support during pregnancy.

This was the first time our community had directly cooperated as an emergency shelter. In addition to language barriers and differences in lifestyle and customs, we initially experienced anxiety and uncertainty about whether we could truly provide an environment where individuals carrying physical and emotional pain and exhaustion could rest peacefully. However, this experience also became a grace-filled opportunity for learning and growth. The facility that accepted them is a convent primarily dedicated to caring for elderly sisters, and therefore does not have specialized shelter staff or facilities. For this reason, we prepared a room near the community dining hall as their living space, and we shared meals as one community. The residents naturally began offering their help, saying things such as, “Please let me do something.” As they assisted with serving meals, washing dishes, and cleaning, a sense of warmth and closeness gradually developed, and they came to feel like members of our community.

All consultations, support services, and legal procedures for the shelter residents were handled by the referring organizations. Aside from appointing one person to communicate with the referring organization and another to communicate directly with the shelter residents, we focused mainly on creating an environment where they could spend their days with peace of mind. We intentionally refrained from asking about the personal circumstances or painful experiences that led them to seek protection. Instead, we centered our hearts on the fact that they were facing difficulties and placed great importance on offering compassionate and thoughtful support throughout the community, including simple words such as, “We are praying for you.”

Through this experience of shelter cooperation, we witnessed firsthand the dedication of people who sincerely confront these problems and tirelessly work to protect and provide relief to victims. This filled us with deep respect and admiration. Furthermore, for the Indonesian woman, support was made possible through cooperation with Talitha Kum Indonesia. Learning about this collaboration deeply impressed us and reminded us of the strength and beauty of solidarity that transcends national borders. We sincerely hope that people who come to Japan from countries with different languages, cultures, and ways of thinking may, even in small ways, experience their lives, work, and encounters in Japan positively and continue forward with hope on their individual journeys. We wish to continue cooperating in whatever ways we can.



Learning Together, Walking Together — Outreach Classes by Talitha Kum Japan

Ms. Motoko Yamagishi
Talitha Kum Japan Steering Committee Member

In fiscal year 2025, Talitha Kum Japan has also been actively conducting outreach classes.

In the course on “Human Trafficking,” participatory classes were primarily led by Youth Ambassador members in response to requests from Seisen University, Kagoshima Junshin Junior College, Sophia University Catholic Center, and Salesian International School.

In the “Migrants and Refugees” course I coordinate, we were given opportunities to lecture at Seisen University, Shizuoka Futaba High School, and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit in Nagoya, among other institutions.

In January, at Seisen University’s Ueno Campus, I taught more than 200 students on the themes “Philosophy of Life / Life and Society” and “Women and Society / Gender and Society.” One particularly memorable moment was a discussion sparked by questions about why Japan does not readily accept refugees, which led to a wide range of opinions and exchanges. In the afternoon session, I spoke about the current situation of migrant women living in Japan and the support available to them. It was a valuable opportunity to reflect together on what it means to build a society in which every person’s life and dignity are respected.



At Shizuoka Futaba High School, I spoke to about 140 second-year students on the theme “Toward a Society Where We Live Together.” While addressing the social conditions that allow misinformation about foreign residents to spread easily, we considered how to build a society based on mutual understanding and support. It was also impressive that many students approached me afterward to ask questions.

At the end of February, I was invited to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit in Nagoya, where I spoke with sisters gathered from across Japan about the current situation of refugees and migrants in Japan and the Church’s efforts to support them. Lively discussions began even during lunch, and the gathering became a meaningful occasion to recognize again the importance of cooperation across dioceses and religious congregations, as well as the hope such collaboration brings.

Through these encounters, I have felt the growing connections that emerge when we learn and walk together. I hope to continue these opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding across many different settings.



Thoughts on Visiting Schools (Outreach Classes)

Mr. Naoki Nakanishi

Talitha Kum Japan Youth Ambassador



I calm my nerves by telling myself that all I have to do is follow the script and the plan we prepared. The computer is working fine, and the PowerPoint presentation I carefully prepared has no problems. Both the script and the slides were refined through repeated Zoom meetings and discussions. We have done everything possible. The HDMI cable is already faithfully serving as the bridge between the computer and the projector. But this time, I myself must become another kind of bridge together with my teammates. We are entrusted with the important responsibility of making the invisible world visible and becoming a bridge that invites the awareness of the students listening to us into that world. That weight rests upon our

young shoulders.

All members of the Talitha Kum Japan Youth Ambassadors understand this, whether consciously or not. Our audience today is a group of carefree third-year elementary school children. Yet in the future, if we are to save many high school students from suffering, we may have to show an even harsher reality to children who know little of evil, or to students of the same age who are struggling through what feels like a living hell. Seen from that perspective, perhaps it is not such a cruel thing to do.

As the lecture begins, the room fills with a tense atmosphere. Naturally so. We are speaking continuously about serious and complex issues that are far from being someone else's problem. The students listen attentively without fidgeting. Some gaze at us with cold eyes, as if interviewing us and testing the skills that brought us here. Others look at us with curiosity, their interest awakened and wanting to know more.

I do not feel this as strongly when speaking to children, but when the audience is high school students, I cannot help feeling that way. Perhaps, somewhere in my subconscious, I feel self-conscious about young people lecturing other young people, as though it might be somewhat presumptuous. More than once, I find myself wondering: *What difference will this really make?*

It has already been three years since I first learned of the group called the Talitha Kum Youth Ambassadors. The name itself is written entirely in katakana and carries a somewhat mysterious atmosphere. Yet the word *Talitha Kum* possesses a power beyond human understanding. Two thousand years ago, in *The King of Kings*, these words were spoken: "Little girl, arise!" and a child returned from the realm of death. We want to deliver these words of life to children and women suffering in living hells, awakening in them the joy of being alive. With that hope in our hearts, we energetically plan events, laugh boldly as young people should, and continue increasing our number of companions through the spirit of Talitha Kum. "There is value in taking up the cause of peace on earth with human hands," as Ultra Series taught. I believe that means proclaiming the good news and building God's kingdom on earth. Visiting schools and giving guest lectures is one of the means to that end.

After the lecture, we receive comments from the students. Then one astonishing sentence catches my eye:

"We want to join Talitha Kum too!" So it was not in vain...! We really are helping to save the world!

Announcement and Request

Catholic Talitha Kum Japan held its inaugural general meeting on January 22, 2026, and made a fresh start with a new name and constitution as an independent voluntary organization (officially recognized by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan). We are pleased to welcome Bishop Goro Matsuura as our Episcopal Advisor.

Talitha Kum was established in 2009 as one of the programs of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG). Today, it has grown into a global network connecting religious sisters and collaborators working to eliminate human trafficking and modern slavery. We welcome organizations and individuals who wish to become members of Catholic Talitha Kum Japan, think together about human trafficking issues, and support our activities.

There are two types of membership: Regular Members and Supporting Members.

- Regular Members are organizations or individuals who agree with the purpose of Catholic Talitha Kum Japan, participate in activities as much as possible, and provide financial support. They hold voting rights at the general meeting and can participate in our operation and activities.
- Supporting Members are organizations or individuals who agree with our purpose and provide financial support as much as possible, but they do not hold voting rights at the general meeting.

If you wish to join, please notify the secretariat of our organization by email.

Our activities are supported by your donations. We kindly ask for your understanding of our organization's activities and request that you send your contributions to the new account below.

Bank Name: MUFG Bank, Fukagawa Branch (086)

Account Type & Number: Ordinary Deposit 1058508

Account Name: カトリック タリタクムジヤパン (Catholic Talitha Kum Japan)

Please note that due to the change in our handling bank, we can no longer send transfer forms in advance. Additionally, the sender's information is now limited to a maximum of 30 Katakana characters. Therefore, we sincerely apologize for the inconvenience, but after making your transfer, please notify our secretariat of the following information via the email address below or the QR code on the right:



- 1.Full Name/
- 2.Address/
- 3.Date of Transfer/
- 4.Donation Amount/
- 5.Whether a receipt is required/
6. Permission to publish your name (Yes/No)/
- 7.E-mail address or phone number (Optional)

E-mail: japantalithakum@gmail.com

Catholic Talitha Kum JAPAN

End Human Trafficking



Catholic Talitha Kum Japan

Office for Religious Institutes and Missionary Societies

2-10-10 Shiomi, Koto-Ku, Tokyo, Japan 135-8585

E-mail japantalithakum@gmail.com

FAX : 03-5632-4466