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Nepali church leaders found guilty of 'witchcraft' and 'violence' for helping mentally ill woman



Christians worshipping in Nepal, May 2015

World Watch Monitor (22.12.2016) - A Nepali court has found four Christians guilty of 'violence' and 'witchcraft' against a severely mentally ill woman whom they sought to heal, even though she testified in court in their favour, saying she was now better. The four are sentenced to five years in prison. A fifth Christian, Rupa Thapa, was found not guilty and released after the hearing in the District Court of Salyan – a district in western Nepal.

The five Christians had been imprisoned since July for witchcraft, forceful imprisonment and violence towards the woman, despite her husband also saying they are innocent.

Ruplal Pariyar and his wife Ganga, Lali Pun, Bimkali Budha and Rupa Thapa were arrested by the police on July 21. Alongside the other charges, they were questioned about trying to convert their alleged victim at each of their court hearings, though this was not on the charge sheet.

The arrests followed an incident on June 6 involving Seti Pariyar who was sent by her father-in-law, who used to be a Christian, to a local church for healing prayer from apparently 'being possessed by demons'.

Witnesses report that Pariyar left the church before the prayer service was over. She was later found shouting and self-harming in a nearby forest, and taken back to her home.

Complaint

More than a month later, a local businessman gave an account of the incident to the local media and, on the basis of that media report, a Bhisma Pariyar filed a complaint against the five who were then arrested.

Rev. Mukunda Sharma, a member of the Nepal Religious Liberty Forum, heard about the case and visited Salyan in October. To help him form an appeal, he met the five imprisoned Christians as well as local lawyers and other Christian leaders. An appeal team was created to advocate for the release of the prisoners with district governing officials, which appeared at first to be successful - local bureaucrats and politicians assured them that the five would be released.

Meanwhile the alleged victim, Seti Pariyar, and her husband testified at the district court to say the five did not act forcefully or inhumanely towards her. She later testified at the church that she was completely healed because of the prayer in the church.

Local church leaders report that they think the five were 'trapped', targeted as minority Christians.

The sentences come in the context of the fact that last year, Nepal introduced a new Constitution which outlaws anything perceived to be proselytism or 'evangelizing'.

However, the first case about freedom of religion under this new Constitution was dropped earlier this month. It had been against eight Christians, in education, who distributed a pamphlet about Jesus in a Christian school after trauma counselling for the children after Nepal's massive earthquake.

The Nepal Cabinet has today (22 Dec) announced that there will be no public holiday on Christmas Day. Many believe growing Hindu nationalism in their much-bigger neighbour to the south, India, is behind decisions made in Nepal.

Nepal church sources told WWM that a home-made bomb device was left in the compound of Calvary Church, Dhangadhi on 17 Dec. Police, who disposed of it, do not know who left it.

A delegation of church leaders has asked the Nepali Home Ministry to provide security during Christmas.

Eight Christians acquitted of attempting to convert children

CSW (06.12.2016) - Eight Christians in Charikot, Nepal, who were accused of attempting to convert children to Christianity through the distribution of a comic book, were acquitted on 6 December.

Mr Prakash Pradhan, Mr Bimal Shahi, Ms Banita Dangol, Mr Balkrishna Rai, Mr Philip Tamang, Mr Kiran Dahal, Mr Bhimsen Tiwari and Mr Shakti Pakhrin were arrested in June this year.

The group was held in police custody for nine days and poorly treated in prison. Before being released on bail, local police officials charged them with attempting to convert children to Christianity through distributing a comic book which explains the story of Jesus.

The charges are thought to be the first in Nepal's history in which Article 26 (3) of the newly promulgated constitution was quoted, which states that "No person shall, in the exercise of the right conferred by this Article...convert another person from one religion to another or any act or conduct that may jeopardize other's religion and such act shall be punishable by law".

The arrests took place following two trauma counselling sessions organised by Teach Nepal, a Kathmandu-based non-governmental organisation (NGO), at two schools in Charikot. The sessions sought to address the psychological needs of children affected by the earthquakes in Nepal in April 2015 and were held on 8 and 9 June at Modern Nepal School and Mount Valley Academy in Charikot. At the end of the sessions, the organisers distributed a small gift pack to the children, which included a 23-page Christian comic book.

Mr Prakash Pradhan (principal, Mount Valley Academy), Mr Bimal Shahi (principal, Modern Nepal School), Ms Banita Dangol (Teach Nepal staff), Mr Balkrishna Rai (Teach Nepal staff), Mr Philip Tamang (Teach Nepal staff), Mr Kiran Dahal (Teach Nepal staff) and Mr Bhimsen Tiwari (Teach Nepal staff) were arrested on 9 June 2016. Mr Shakti Pakhrin (pastor, Charikot Christian Church) was arrested on 14 June 2016.

The final hearing in the case was postponed four times this year before it was held on 6 December and the court delivered an oral verdict dropping all charges and calling for the bail money to be returned to the eight Christians. The written verdict is expected within a month.

Pastor Tanka Subedi, founding member and chair of Dharmik Chautari Nepal and Religious Liberty Forum Nepal (RLF) said: "We are very happy with the court's decision. This has raised our trust in justice and democracy in Nepal".

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said: "We welcome this acquittal of the eight Christians in Charikot. However, we join our voices with civil society in Nepal in urging the government of Nepal to amend Section 26 of the new constitution and ensure that it – along with the draft penal code – guarantees full freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression. The right to freedom of religion or belief is of particular importance in Nepal as the country recently made the transition from a Hindu monarchy to a secular democratic republic."

Nepalese Christian jailed over religious conversion

UCA News (22.07.2016) - <http://www.ucanews.com/news/nepalese-christian-jailed-over-religious-conversion/76652> - A Christian social worker who cares for orphans has been jailed in Nepal while waiting to be tried over charges related to human trafficking and controversial religious conversion laws.

Social worker Chinimaya Blown was accused by police of collecting Hindu children from remote areas of the Himalayan nation to put in her children's home and then forcing them to take part in Christian prayer services.

A conviction for evangelizing in Nepal can result in five years jail time and a 50,000-rupee (US\$470) fine.

The children's home has 14 children aged between 5-13. Blown previously ran a children's home in Dhankuta, eastern Nepal, but was unable to renew that home's permit so she brought the orphans to a new home in the country's capital.

Blown, who is currently being held in a Kathmandu jail, also faces charges related to human trafficking for placing the children in the home.

"Religion inspires us to provide refuge to the poor and orphans, but injustice has been done to these Christians by our judicial system," said B.P. Khanal, General Secretary of Janajagaran Party Nepal, a Christian political party.

"The sad thing is, the authorities have not been able to see the good deeds of Chinimaya Blown," said Khanal.

Hari Tamang, who is a pastor of the Jerusalem Antioch Church has also been charged but freed on bail after spending 25 days in police custody. Both were arrested on June 24.

Pastor Tanka Subedi, co-chairperson of the Nepal Christian Society, said that all orphanages run by Christians provide children with Bibles and teach them how to say prayers.

"This has nothing to do with conversion. Children do not become Christian or baptized until they are fully adult. By that time they will decide which religion to follow," Subedi said.

These social workers are just trying to help the needy, he added.

Meanwhile in a separate case, Bharatpur police have arrested another Christian couple for running children's home without proper documents and for distributing Bibles to the children.

The family was providing food, accommodation and education to eight poor children. During a search of the home, police found a copy of the Bible that belonged to the husband, Pratik Sunar, say sources. Sunar's wife was freed after objections from locals but he remains in police custody.

Hindu-majority Nepal released its new constitution in September. The constitution declares that Nepal is a secular state. However, lawmakers are debating a contentious bill — yet to be made law — proposing five years of imprisonment and a penalty of 50,000 rupees for anyone found guilty of converting a person from one religion to another.

Christians' trial due in Nepal's first religious freedom case under new constitution

By Vishal Arora



World Watch Monitor (20.07.2016) - Nepal's first religious freedom case since the country's new constitution was implemented in 2015 is due to come to trial later this week.

Facing charges will be eight Christian counsellors arrested for distributing a pamphlet about Jesus in a Christian school while helping children through the trauma of last year's earthquake.

Anything perceived as evangelizing is outlawed in the new constitution.

The seven men and one woman arrested June 9 were charged with trying to convert children to Christianity by distributing the pamphlet during a trauma seminar.

The counsellors were working for Teach Nepal. Barnabas Shrestha, chairman of Teach Nepal, says they were "invited by a pastor to do the counselling in the school". While it is a Christian school, not all pupils are Christians.

Shrestha denies the counsellors were trying to convert children. The police making the arrests "wanted our people to say yes, they have preached the Gospel ...which is not true".

The freedom of Nepal's Christians is increasingly under threat.

Last week, according to a missionary in Nepal, the government announced to all leaders of Christian orphanages and boarding schools in Kathmandu that it would impose huge fines, close them down and confiscate possessions should they find just one Christian booklet in their institution.

The government also announced that praying with children or letting them attend a Bible club is prohibited.

Another Christian Nepali contact, who wants to remain anonymous, told World Watch Monitor that the Social Welfare Council, which approves foreign aid used to conduct programs, has stopped granting approval for Christian activities.

When Nepal decided to remain a secular, rather than become a Hindu, state it was a disappointment to Hindu nationalist groups.

In September 2015, [hours after Nepal's Constituent Assembly rejected calls to revert to a Hindu state, two churches were bombed](#). Pamphlets promoting Hindu nationalism were found at each of the churches and nationalist group, Hindu Morcha Nepal, issued a press statement calling for Christian leaders to leave the country and for converts to Christianity to return to Hinduism.

The eight counsellors remain on bail awaiting trial, expected to be held on July 23.

Eight Christians in Nepal released from prison but conversion charges remain

Barnabasfund.org (22.06.2016) - <http://bit.ly/28XI0no> - Eight Christians in Nepal's Dolakha district, including one woman, were released from prison last Friday (17 June), nine days after being arrested on charges of distributing Christian literature to children at two schools with the intention to convert them. News of their release was greeted with thanksgiving across the Nepalese Christian community. However, the charges have not been dropped and there remain calls for the group to be punished.

"Three of them are out on bail, whereas five of them are out on 'general release'," revealed Tanka Subedi, church pastor and Co-Chair of the Nepal Christian Society, to Barnabas Fund. "The charges against those on 'general release' have not been dropped; they have to appear in court as and when summoned," he continued.

A thanksgiving service was held in Kathmandu, Nepal's capital, on the day the eight believers were released.

Last Wednesday (15 June), the Federation of National Christian, Nepal (FNCN), wrote to the Home Minister of Nepal, Bahadur Basnet, appealing to him to release the imprisoned Christians. The FNCN also urged the government and other relevant bodies to maintain social and religious harmony, and to stop persecuting innocent people without any proof.

Following news of the believers' release, Subedi added a note of caution, saying, "A Member of Parliament for the Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal (RPP) yesterday [Monday 20 June] demanded maximum punishment for these eight Christians." Our contact in the region has asked Christians across the world to "continue to pray that the trial may be positive to the believers and a similar incident may not happen again".

The pastor also said that on 21 June the Welfare Ministry circulated a letter to all District Development Committees instructing them not to approve any religious projects. This, he said, would mean a complete ban on bringing foreign funds into Nepal for such projects.

Faith on the Rise in Nepal: Love for the Least of These: A BreakPoint report

Pakistan Christian Post (05.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2bFv0n3> - If I asked you to name the places where Christianity is growing the fastest, you, being a well-informed BreakPoint listener, would probably respond "Africa" and/or "China."

And you'd be correct. The explosion of Christianity south of the Sahara is so great that a colleague of mine is surprised whenever he meets a West African immigrant who's not a believer. And as we previously told you on BreakPoint, Christianity in China is growing so rapidly that, by one scholar's estimate, there will be more Christians in China than in any other country by 2035.

But there are other, less-known places where the Good News is being heard and received.

One of these is Nepal. When Americans think of Nepal—if they ever do—what comes to mind is an exotic blend of the Himalayas, "wind-swept prayer flags," and temples, lots and lots of Hindu temples, with a few Buddhist stupas thrown in for good measure.

Until recently, that would have accurately summed up Nepal's religious scene. In 1951, Nepal's census showed no—that would be zero—Christians in the country. Ten years later, it showed just 458.

Forty years later, the number had risen to 102,000 and ten years later, i.e., in 2011, it had risen to 375,000. What's more, according to a report by the International Institute for Religious Freedom, Nepalese Christian leaders believe that this last figure underestimates the number of Christian by a factor of six: instead of 375,000 Christians there are closer to 2.3 million.

That would put the percentage of Christians at nearly 10 percent and rising, as opposed to the government's claimed 1.5 percent. While Nepal is officially a secular country, it has an overwhelming Hindu majority that, historically, has tolerated a small Buddhist minority that poses no threat to the country's Hindu identity.

By way of protecting this Hindu identity, Nepal's interim constitution states that "no person shall be entitled to convert another person from one religion to another and shall not take actions or behave in a way that would create disturbance in another's religion."

This of course effectively outlaws evangelism. Yet Nepalese are converting to Christianity in large numbers.

Part of the reason is that the law is difficult to enforce. A larger part is that Christians have stepped into areas of need that neither the government nor the Hindu majority can or even will serve.

As is the case in India, many of the converts to Christianity come from the lower castes. Even though, as in India, discrimination on the basis of caste is illegal, centuries, if not millennia, of custom and practice aren't reversed by the action of a parliament sitting in the capital.

What makes a difference in the lives of these people is other people whose own faith not only rejects the idea of caste but also insists that in ministering to the "least of these," they are ministering to God himself.

In yet another parallel to India, Nepalese Hindu activists aren't pleased by the results. So much so that they may be willing to manipulate census figures.

What's happening in Nepal is good news, indeed. It's also a reminder than Islam does not have a monopoly restricting religious freedom, especially when it comes to Christians. Recently, a Lutheran pastor was found murdered in the Indian state of Jharkhand. His death is believed to be a part of a larger pattern of anti-Christian violence by Hindu nationalists.

So, in addition to thanking God for the spread of the good news to unlikely places, please keep these vulnerable brethren of ours in prayer.

(BreakPoint is a Christian worldview ministry that seeks to build and resource a movement of Christians committed to living and defending Christian worldview in all areas of life. Begun by Chuck Colson in 1991 as a daily radio broadcast, BreakPoint provides a Christian perspective on today's news and trends via radio, interactive media, and print. Today BreakPoint commentaries, co-hosted by Eric Metaxas and John Stonestreet, air daily on more than 1,200 outlets with an estimated weekly listening audience of eight million people. Feel free to contact us at BreakPoint.org where you can read and search answers to common questions).
