

INDIA: Orissa, five Christians accused of guru Laxamananda murder released on bail

By Nirmala Carvalho

AsiaNews.it (27.11.2019) – <http://bit.ly/2QYPE5D> – Previously, the Supreme Court had established the release of two other Christians accused without evidence of the murder of the Hindu guru. The accusations against the Christians had triggered the 2008 pogrom. Bishop Barwa: “Happy and sad at the same time, because Christians have suffered through faults not theirs”. In 2021 the Plenary of Indian Bishops will be held in Bhubaneswar.

Mumbai (AsiaNews) – The Supreme Court of India has decided to release on bail **the last five of the seven Christians sentenced to life imprisonment** charged with the murder of the Hindu swami Laxamananda Saraswati in 2008.

That murder, **claimed by the Maoists** but attributed to Christians by Hindu fundamentalists, triggered the sectarian violence in Orissa.

Reacting to *AsiaNews* Fr. Dibakar Parichha, Christian defense lawyer on behalf of the archdiocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar, rejoices: “Finally justice is done to the innocent persons. I am happy that they will be united with their own family and make new life after 11 years”.

The court’s ruling was issued yesterday. The five men are Bhaskar Sunamajhi, Buddhadev Nayak, Durjo Sunamajhi, Sanatan Badamajhi and Munda Badamajhi (with mental disabilities). **They had been in jail since 2008**, with a life sentence handed down

in 2013. Before them, in May of this year **the same court freed Gornath Chalanseth**, the first of the seven who was able to embrace his family again; then, last July, bail was also granted to **Bijaya Sanaseth**.

Archbishop John Barwa declares: "I I am happy and also sad, I am overjoyed that finally my people have received bail, on the other hand, I feel saddened that innocent Christians were incarcerated for eleven long years". The prisoners' families, he continues, "have suffered tremendously. They suffered immense suffering because of their faults, but only because they were Christians. However, we are very happy now. This is a success story because God is faithful. "

Yesterday, says Msgr. Barwa, "I was in Kandhamal and the wives wanted to meet me to thank me. In fact, the diocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar has supported the legal fees of the Christians, except for one of them defended by Adf [Alliance Defending Freedom, ed.]. Fr. Dibya Singh, legal advisor of the archdiocese, took care of their trials. We have scheduled a thanksgiving prayer for when they return. Also in February 2021 there will be the Plenary Assembly of the Bishops' Conference in Bhubaneswar. We have already started the preparations. Our goal is to bring the bishops of India to Kandhamal "

The lawyer thanks "all our supporters. When we appealed for bail, the matter was referred to various courts. At that point we turned to the Supreme Court against the High Court of Orissa which continued to deny their release. It is a victory for the innocent "

In 2008 the religious violence unleashed by the Hindu radicals devastated the Christian community with a very heavy toll: 120 deaths; almost 56 thousand faithful forced to flee; 8 thousand homes burned or looted in 415 villages; 300 churches demolished; 40 raped women.

Sajan K George, president of the *Global Council of Indian Christians* (GCIC), says: "5 innocent walked free on bail after 10 years, 11 months and 11 days in prison, GCIC thanks God for the freedom ". "The arrest of the seven Christians – he complains – has upset the Christians of India who already had difficulty recovering from fatal attacks. Christian lawyers immediately started fighting for their release. The court sentenced them to life imprisonment on the basis of false accusations of a fabricated "conspiracy theory", although there was no clear evidence. "