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Pastor must begin prison term for praying and evangelizing

- **Nepali Pastor Keshab Acharya faces a year of jail time for prayer and evangelism after a court refused to hear his appeal challenging his conviction from late November 2021.**
- **ADF continues to support Pastor Keshab and advocating for Nepal to uphold its international commitments to religious freedom**

ADF (25.01.2024) – In a detrimental development for religious freedom in Nepal, the Nepali Supreme Court has released an order on January 23rd for Pastor Keshab Raj Acharya to serve one year in prison for peaceful religious activity. Pastor Keshab must now face his prison sentence unless the court accepts his appeal to have the prison sentence converted into a fine.

“While facing more jailtime is distressing, I find solace in God, believing that anything is possible through Him I urge the international community to engage with the Nepali government to safeguard religious freedom in order to pave the way for true religious freedom for everyone in Nepal. I thank everyone for their continued support and prayers for me and my family,” said Pastor Keshab.

Timeline of the case

It all began in March 2020: Pastor Keshab received a call from a man requesting prayer for his sick wife. In response, the pastor invited the man to come to his house for a prayer. Later four police officers arrested him. He was released on 8 April 2020, only to be re-arrested a day later on charges of “outraging religious feelings” and “proselytizing” for distributing religious leaflets.

The Dolpa District Attorney’s office filed charges on 21 May 2020 under Nepal’s criminal code which penalizes religious propagation. Nepal criminalizes conversions and even the attempt to convert any person. The punishment for conversion is up to five years’ imprisonment and a fine of up to 50,000 Nepali rupees (\$375).

One and a half years later, in November 2021, Pastor Keshab was sentenced to two years in prison and a fine of 20,000 Nepali rupees (approx. 170 USD) for the alleged “outraging religious feelings” and “proselytizing”. Just before Christmas 2021 he was released on bail. On 13 July 2022 the next instance, the Jumla High Court reviewed the case. Though the court confirmed the conviction, it reduced the punishment to one year of prison.

Supreme Court confirms prison sentence for prayer and leaflets

With the help of ADF International, he again appealed the decision and was free on bail until the Supreme Court of Nepal would hear the case. The Supreme Court now declined to do so and thus upheld the Jumla High Court’s sentence. Pastor Keshab’s only chance

to forego imprisonment is that the Supreme Court would accept his appeal to convert the sentence into a fine.

“No one should live in fear of being arrested or criminally charged for peacefully sharing their religious beliefs. And no one should be sent to prison for praying and sharing their faith. In upholding Pastor Keshab’s prison sentence, the Supreme Court of Nepal has not only violated his basic human rights to religious freedom, but also missed out on a crucial opportunity to set a positive precedent allowing others to engage in prayer and evangelism without fear of punishment. We urge the Nepali government to ensure that all are able to freely practice and profess their faith by safeguarding fundamental freedoms in line with its international commitments,” said Tehmina Arora, Director of Advocacy, Asia for ADF International.

Reflecting on almost three months of imprisonment before his sentencing, Pastor Keshab said: “It was very difficult for me. I would think of my little children and my wife, and I would cry out to the Lord in prayer. I would look up at Him in hope that if it is in His will that I should be put through this, He would get me out of this.”

For more information on Pastor Keshab’s case [see here](#).

Appeal filed to protect religious freedom in Nepal

In partnership with local allies, ADF International is supporting Pastor Keshab’s legal defense.

“The decision of the Supreme Court to decline to hear the appeal and therefore confirm the sentencing of Pastor Keshab to one year in prison is distressing. Pastor Keshab was merely helping sick people by praying to God for their well-being. The District Court’s decision went beyond the scope of the law and needs to be corrected. Together with Pastor Keshab’s local lawyer, Indra Prasad Aryal, we are exploring the possibility of having his prison sentence reduced and converted into a fine,” said Tehmina Arora.