

Secular Nepal Bows to Hindu Extremist Pressure - Arresting and Charging Nepali Christian Pastor under Its Blasphemy and Anti-Conversion Laws



Pictured: Pastor Keshav while free

Wednesday, December 13, 2021 | Dolpa District Court in Nepal sentences Christian pastor to two years imprisonment and a fine of 20 000 Nepali Rupees under Section 158 (1) and (2) of its Penal Code on 30 November 2021 for sharing his faith.

Authorities first arrested Pastor Acharya Keshav in March 2020 from his home without an arrest warrant and did not file charges officially against Pastor Keshav until a week later in April when another District Administration Office in Kaski accused Pastor Acharya for disseminating false information for saying “Jesus can cure Corona” and praying for the stop of the Coronavirus in Jesus’ name. The authorities then filed two additional charges targeting the pastor for his religious faith, including accusing him of proselytizing and “outraging religious feeling” under Section 158 and 156 of the National Penal (Code) Act, 2017. Jubilee Campaign submitted a letter together with members of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable addressed to the Attorney General calling for the dropping of all charges against Pastor Keshav and drawing attention to the arbitrary nature of his arrest.

Leading up to Nepal’s recent Universal Periodic Review in January 2021

Jubilee Campaign joined several civil society members in raising the case of Pastor Keshav at the United Nations and called on Nepal to repeal its anti-conversion laws.

Nepal's blasphemy and anti-conversion laws have been criticised by both the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom and the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief due to their vague wording, discriminatory application and clear restrictive measures on fundamental human rights. Already in 2017, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, submitted a communication to the Government of Nepal expressing concern with its then newly introduced anti-conversion and blasphemy laws. Dr. Shaheed reiterated his concerns in his 2019 Annual Report, saying that **these laws could be "invoked against legitimate manifestations of religion or belief, including the charitable activities of religious groups or teaching others about one's faith, and that this law could be used to target religious minorities for sharing their beliefs with others."**

Unfortunately the Special Rapporteur's predictions could not have been more accurate with the Government of Nepal sentencing Pastor Keshav in November 2021 to prison for sharing his beliefs and arresting two South Korean Catholic nuns in September 2021 for their charitable work, while justifying these violations under Nepal's anti-conversion and blasphemy laws.



Pictured - Nepali police arresting Pastor Keshav in Dolpa, following the court sentencing him to two years in prison.

Last week, President Biden hosted a virtual Democracy Summit where Nepal had a seat at the table. Leading up to the Summit the US Ambassador to Nepal held a side-event in conjunction with the Summit where he

hailed Nepal's "democratic governance" and Constitution that defined Nepal as a "secular, democratic, and federal government." The Prime Minister of Nepal Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba released a statement at the Summit also affirming Nepal's "democratic and inclusive" Constitution. **The recent actions, however, by the Nepali authorities - documented in US State Department's own International Religious Freedom report - are cause for extreme concern for this young democracy.**

Jubilee Campaign strongly condemns the arrest of Pastor Keshav and expresses disappointment that the Attorney General chose to interpret Nepal's laws contrary to its international human rights commitments and its own Constitution. Pastor Keshav has exercised his right to freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression but the government has chosen to frame Pastor Keshav's actions as causing public indignation – bowing to extremist voices who are intolerant of other religions and beliefs.

Jubilee Campaign also calls for the immediate release of Pastor Keshav so that he can be reunited with his two sons and wife.

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#HRC46 GD item 2 on the impacts of Covid-19 restrictions ...

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Additional Reports Raising Pastor Keshav's Case



Nepal UPR

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Jubilee Campaign is a non-profit organization which promotes the human rights and religious liberty of ethnic and religious minorities in the most oppressive countries. We assist individuals seeking asylum from religious persecution as well as promote the care and well-being of larger groups of refugees fleeing religious and ethnic persecution.

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