

Prisoners of Conscience Updates and Prayer Requests: Iran, Nepal, Algeria, & Pakistan

Jubilee Campaign and our partners in religious freedom advocacy achieved some tremendous successes in 2021 within the realm of prisoners of conscience - such as the acquittal and release from prison of Pakistani Christian couple Shagufa Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel after they spent seven years on death row for alleged blasphemy. In our [year-end newsletter](#) (below), we focused on the stories of Hamid Soudad and Suleiman Bouhafs in Algeria as well as Nadeem Samson and Stephan Masih in Pakistan. Now, however, we have some new updates to share with you about other cases in Iran, Algeria, Nepal, and Pakistan.



Click on the above graphic to view and download Jubilee Campaign's 2021 Year-End Newsletter

IRAN

Mahrokh Rokhsareh Ghanbari was originally arrested in December 2018 when Iranian authorities ambushed her home and confiscated her bibles and other Christian materials. After paying a bail of 30 million Toman she was released, though in January 2019 she was summoned to court and charged with "acting against national security" for her Christian faith. She began serving her sentence in October 2019, though she was temporarily released in March 2020 due to the



COVID-19 pandemic as a measure to limit the spread of the virus throughout Iranian detention centers. Though she was told in 2020 that she would not be required to return to prison, Jubilee Campaign was disappointed to hear that she was summoned to Karaj Revolutionary Court in January 2022 to face new charges of propaganda against the regime.

Between January and February 2019, nine Iranian Christian converts and colleagues - (from left to right; top to bottom) **Hossein Kadivar, Khalil Dehghanpour, Kamal Naamanian, Mohammed Vafadar, Abdolreza Haghnejad, Shahrooz Eslamdoust, Mehdi Khatibi, Babak Hosseinzadeh, and Behnam Akhlagi** - were detained in separate occasions for their participation in house churches. In July of the same year the nine men were charged with "acting against national security" and sentenced to five years in prison each. Unfortunately the men lost their appeals in March 2020 but later that same month four of the men were temporarily released from detention due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Jubilee Campaign was pleased to learn recently that the Supreme Court reviewed the case and found that attendance at house churches did not logically amount to acts against national security. We are hoping for an acquittal soon.



PLEASE PRAY:

- That the Iranian regime will cease the practice of unjustly arresting and imprisoning faith minorities for prolonged periods of time.
- For the health of Mahrokh Rokhsareh Ghanbari - who is currently suffering health issues alongside her husband - and for her ultimate acquittal.
- That Hossein Kadivar, Khalil Dehghanpour, Kamal Naamanian, Mohammed Vafadar, Abdolreza Haghnejad, Shahrooz Eslamdoust, Mehdi Khatibi, Babak Hosseinzadeh, and Behnam Akhlagi will receive full acquittals in light of the Supreme Court's ruling that participation in house churches does not constitute a crime against national security.

NEPAL



In late March 2020, **Pastor Keshav Acharya** had received a phone call in which a man requested to come to Pastor Keshav's home so they could pray together for his wife's health. Instead, Kaski District Police arrived and arrested Pastor Keshav in front of his family. He was originally charged with misleading the public about the COVID-19 for a series of videos circulated depicting him praying for an end to the pandemic, and he was detained for two weeks before being released on bail. Shortly after his first release, Pastor Keshav was re-arrested on new charges of "outraging religious feelings" and "attempting to convert" people to Christianity. He once again was released after his wife paid his bail. In May, Pastor Keshav was arrested a third time and transported to a faraway and

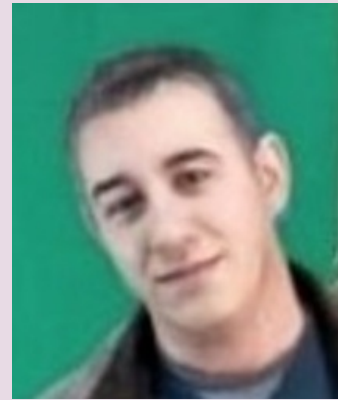
isolated detention center where he was held for 99 days until release. In November 2021, Jubilee Campaign was disheartened to receive news that Pastor Keshav was found guilty of his charges and has been sentenced to two years in prison, which he as already been summoned to serve. In December, we learned that Pastor Keshav's lawyer is planning to submit a bail application for Keshav and that it is likely to receive a favorable outcome.

PLEASE PRAY:

- That Pastor Keshav's attorney is able to submit the bail request and that it is accepted.
- For the health and safety of Pastor Keshav, his family, and his legal team from any extremist Hindus in Nepal who may be angered by Keshav's faith identity and his lawyers' advocacy on the case.

ALGERIA

In June 2021, Algerian authorities in the city of Oran arbitrarily closed **Pastor Rachid Seighir's** Oratoire Church and arrested both Seighir and the salesman of the church's bookstore, Nouh Hamini. Both were charged with "distributing publications or any other propaganda undermining the faith of a Muslim" and sentenced to two years in prison each accompanied by a fine of 500,000 dinars. Pastor Seighir and Hamini both initially appealed their sentences and received suspended one year prison sentences. In September 2021, Pastor Seighir appealed his sentence once again but this time was met with a rejection; however, he has reiterated that he will continue to appeal his charges and sentences until he receives a favorable outcome.



PLEASE PRAY:

- That God will continue to provide Pastor Seighir with the strength and perseverance to continue appealing the unjust charges against him.
- For a swift reopening of Pastor Seighir's Oratoire Church and associated bookstore, as well as the 16 protestant churches that the Algerian government continues to force indefinite closures upon.

PAKISTAN

Prior to his arrest in 2012, Pakistani Christian man **Zafar Bhatti** was an evangelist and spread the Gospel in door-to-door visits throughout his community, and he also established an NGO "Jesus World Mission" aiming to assist those in poverty. In July 2012, a local Islamic leader complained to Rawalpindi authorities that he had been receiving blasphemous text messages from an unregistered phone number, though he was obviously unable to identify the individual sending the messages. Without having any connection to the case, Bhatti was arbitrarily detained and charged with blasphemy for allegedly sending the blasphemous messages. During his five years of pre-trial detention, Bhatti was repeatedly physically assaulted in attempts to extract a false confession, though he proclaimed his innocence; his remarks were further backed by the fact that the phone from which the messages were being sent was found to be registered under another individual's name.

Regardless, in 2017 Bhatti was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to life in prison; during his time in detention since, Bhatti has rebuffed threats that he renounce Christianity and convert to Islam, and he has developed heart disease and diabetes. Centre for Legal Aid Assistance & Settlement (CLAAS) has been working to appeal Bhatti's sentence since 2017, and until September 2021 Bhatti's appeal had been arbitrarily

postponed 27 times. Recently in December, British Asian Christian Association (BACA) too up Bhatti's case, and Rawalpindi Sessions Court Judge Shehzad heard their arguments for acquittal, including lack of evidence and lack of witnesses. Despite Judge Shehzad's positive response to these arguments and requests for more detailed information - both of which led to Bhatti's legal team assuming that there would be a swift acquittal - Judge Shehzad rejected the appeal and sentenced Bhatti to death for alleged blasphemy. Bhatti's wife Nawab Bibi has been inconsolable and worries that her husband may become the first Pakistan individual whose death sentence for blasphemy is actually carried out.

PLEASE PRAY:

- That Pakistan abolishes its blasphemy laws which directly contribute to the arrest and prolonged imprisonment of faith minorities.
- That the Holy Spirit will offer peace and healing to both Zafar Bhatti - who has heart disease and diabetes - and his wife who is currently suffering emotionally regarding her husband's sentencing.
- That Bhatti's legal team is able to successfully appeal Bhatti's charges and achieve an acquittal after the decade he has spent in detention.

Jubilee Campaign will continue to advocate for the release of prisoners of conscience around the world who are imprisoned solely on account of their faith. It is our calling and our privilege to be a vital voice for those suffering in silence. In the words of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

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