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NEPAL | Roundtable Seeks Charges Dropped

CSW has joined 24 other members of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable in signing an open letter to the Attorney General of Nepal calling for the immediate dropping of all charges against Christian Pastor Keshav Raj Acharya. The letter was sent to the Attorney General of Nepal on July 19 and has received no response thus far.

Pastor Keshav, who leads Abundant Harvest Church in Pokhara, was first arrested on March 23 after a video of him saying that the coronavirus could be healed through Christian prayer was uploaded on YouTube on Feb. 22. The pastor denies uploading the video.

On April 8, the pastor paid a bail amount, but he was not released. On April 9, he was charged with “outraging religious feelings” and “attempting to convert” under Sections 156 and 158 of the Nepalese Penal Code, and the District Court subsequently ordered a bail amount on April 19. Despite having paid this amount on May 13, Pastor Keshav was arrested for a third time and was immediately transferred to Dolpa District Police Office.

Pastor Keshav was finally released from Dolpa prison June 30 after his lawyer deposited a bail amount. The pastor is awaiting a final hearing of his case, and the charges against him remain in effect.

In the open letter, the organizations state, “In summary, a total of three charges have been filed against Pastor Keshav. The authorities handling of the case shows a lack of concern for rule of law and an unlawful limitation of freedom of speech and religion guaranteed by the Nepali constitution... Left unchecked, the arrests and rearrests of Pastor Acharya will set an unhealthy precedent that will further deteriorate the safeguards promulgated under Article 26(1), restricting the freedom of religion and belief of Christians and other religious minorities for simply expressing basic tenets of their belief.”

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "The charges against Pastor Keshav are completely unfounded, and the handling of his case represents a grave and ongoing miscarriage of justice. CSW joins members of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable in urging the Nepalese government to drop all charges against him immediately and without condition. We call on Nepal to respect its international commitments to protect and promote the right to freedom of religion or belief in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which it is a Party, and as a member of the UN Human Rights Council."