

Nepal Pastor Sentenced for Prayer to Heal COVID

A court in Nepal sentenced a pastor to two years in prison under the country's harsh anti-conversion law for merely saying that prayers can heal COVID-19.

The District Court in Dolpa sentenced Pastor Keshab Raj Acharya to two years in prison and a fine of \$165 (20,000 Rupees) for suggesting on social media that prayer could bring healing from the coronavirus, the U.S.-based persecution watchdog International Christian Concern says.

Pastor Acharya was first arrested on March 23 last year from his home in Pokhara, Gandaki Pradesh Province, on charges of spreading false information regarding COVID. Though he was released, he was rearrested moments later on charges of "outraging religious feelings" and "proselytizing."

After more than three months in prison, he was released in July 2020, after paying bail equal to about \$2,500.

In a video published on social media, Pastor Acharya prayed in front of his congregation, "Hey, corona—you go and die. May all your deeds be destroyed by the power of the Lord Jesus. I rebuke you, corona, in the name of Lord Jesus Christ. By the power of the ruler of this Creation, I rebuke you. . . . By the power in the name of Lord Jesus Christ, corona, go away and die."

After his release last July, Acharya had told *Morning Star News* that it was a "very difficult" time for him.

"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," he says.

After his release, Acharya says he believes government officials and police worked against him.

Christians have been under attack since before the promulgation of the country's new constitution in September 2015. The constitution establishes Nepal as a secular country but also effectively bans evangelism, as it states that no one is allowed to make an attempt to convert people of other religions to his or her own. It also calls for the protection of Hinduism, the majority religion.

Anugrah Kumar, taken from The Christian Post.

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