

H.E. Prof. Dr. Ram Swarth Ray,

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the charges against pastor Keshav Acharya and the status of religious freedom in Nepal.

In 2021, Keshav Acharya was sentenced to two years of imprisonment, on charges of having “outraged religious feelings” and “attempting to convert”. Upon appeal, he is waiting to have his case heard in the High Court. The court case has, on the day of writing, been delayed three times and was supposed to commence on June 16.

Keshav Acharya has been subject to recurring suppression from the Nepalese authorities. On March 23 2020, he was arrested without a warrant. Mr. Acharya was given a bail at 5000 Nepali Rupees. In April 2020 he was again arrested, this time on religious grounds. The bail, which disproportionately was set at 500,000 rupees, was paid in May 2020. Mr Acharya was rearrested the same month, from the premises of the court, and relocated to Dolpha. He was handcuffed and without access to food during the transport.

The Nepalese authorities’ treatment of Mr Acharya indicates a lack of respect for religious freedom and the rule of law. Nepal’s constitution defines its ‘secular state’ as one that ‘protection of religion and culture handed down from time immemorial’. However, the protection of religious freedom is not sufficiently practiced in the Nepalese judiciary and police, as it leaves non-Hinduists with few rights in practice. As we see in Mr Acharya’s case, he is being treated with unnecessary suspicion. Nepal has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and is as such legally bound to protect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the freedom to ‘have and adopt a religion or belief of his choice’ (Article 18).

I kindly request your intervention in ensuring that:

- All charges against Mr. Keshav Acharya are dropped immediately, as they conflict with the right to religious freedom as defined in the international human rights law conventions to which Nepal is a part;
- Mr. Keshav Acharya’s court case is no more delayed, should the charges not be dropped;
- Nepal continues to work towards realising religious freedom for all, not privileging one religion in a way that conflicts with the freedom of religion or belief for others.

Sincerely,