



***"Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise
Him, my salvation and my God."
~ Psalm 42:11 ESV***

INDIA: Ministry Couple Sentenced for Alleged Conversions

Sources: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, International Christian Concern, The Times of India, UCA News

On July 30th, 2024, an amendment to Uttar Pradesh's anti-conversion legislation was passed in an effort to strengthen the state's existing laws. In particular, major changes were made to the severity of punishments imposed on convicted individuals. Since the amended law was brought into effect, a pastor and his wife were found guilty on January 22nd and sentenced to five years' imprisonment. They were also fined 25,000 rupees (about \$420 CAD) each.

Pastor Jose Pappachan and his wife Sheeja were accused of attempting to convert "vulnerable people." The complainant in the case added that the pastor and his wife had allegedly conducted "mass conversions" during a gathering on December 25th, 2022.

However, the ministering couple argued that they were simply providing education and encouraging sobriety among members of the impoverished Dalit community.

Both Pastor Jose and Sheeja served eight months in prison during 2023 before being released on bail. At the bail hearing, the High Court ruled that distributing Bibles, encouraging education and acts of public charity do not constitute attempts to conduct forced religious conversions. Despite this positive former ruling, the original charges against the Christians were upheld, leading to their recent conviction on January 22nd. The couple intends to appeal the local court's decision.

Christian leaders and lawyers in India have expressed concerns that this judgement may serve as a precedent for the hundreds of other believers who have been arrested in Uttar Pradesh under anti-conversion laws. For additional reports on Christian persecution in India, including a video interview about a similar bill that was recently introduced in the Rajasthan state assembly, go to our [country profile](#).

- ***May God work powerfully within the lives of this recently convicted couple, granting them the strength to serve as vibrant witnesses of His love, hope and peace while commencing with their prison sentences.***
- ***Pray that these believers' request for an appeal will be approved and that court officials will rule in their favour, leading to the acquittal and release of Pastor Jose and Sheeja.***
- ***Also prayerfully remember the many other Christians throughout India who must contend with the country's harmful anti-conversion laws, asking that they would receive divine wisdom as they seek to faithfully share the Gospel message.***



A church in India.
Photo: Flickr / Nevil Zaver ([cc](#))

NIGERIA: Numerous Recent Atrocities in Chibok Area

Sources: International Christian Concern, Open Doors

In the latest onslaught of violence by Boko Haram terrorists, Christian communities near Chibok, Borno State, were recently targeted by a string of coordinated attacks. The devastating raids resulted in several deaths, the destruction of dozens of homes, and the forced displacement of more than 4,000 followers of Jesus.

Since December 22nd, seven villages have reportedly been assaulted, with at least ten believers losing their lives. After attacks on the villages of Shikarkir and Yirmirmug during the early morning hours of January 20th, more than 1,500 residents were forced to flee for safety. In Shikarkir, eight people had been killed and a total of 57 homes were destroyed. Only three villages in the Chibok LGA (local government area) were left unscathed.

According to witnesses, the militants particularly targeted Christians, sometimes demanding that the believers convert to Islam or face death. As a result, churches and homes belonging to followers of Jesus were destroyed, while properties owned by Muslims had been completely untouched. Christian leaders have expressed concerns that new believers – including those from Muslim backgrounds – are also being enticed by the assailants to convert to Islam with promises of safety if they complied.

Those who have fled the villages are mostly women and children. Some of the displaced villagers have travelled as far as the border near neighbouring Cameroon in search of shelter. Many other believers sought refuge in the town of Chibok after their homes were destroyed.

The violence against Christians has been intense in Nigeria. In 2024 alone, over 3,000 believers lost their lives – meaning that more Christians were killed in this West African nation than everywhere else in the world combined. Late last year, VOMC's *Closer to the Fire* podcast host, Greg Musselman, interviewed Pastor Gideon, a Nigerian church leader whose family was tragically killed during a devastating attack in December 2023. To hear this believer's incredible testimony of forgiveness and hope, go to VOMCanada.com/video/ng-gideon.

- ***Pray that the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit will surround all those who have recently lost loved ones, homes and/or communities due to these violent attacks.***
- ***May God graciously guide, encourage and strengthen the hearts of our persecuted Nigerian brothers and sisters in Christ, helping them to overcome the dire conditions they face and live resilient lives of hope and forgiveness.***
- ***Specifically pray that those who sustained injuries during the attacks will experience God's healing – both physically and emotionally – and that the thousands of displaced believers who have lost their homes and possessions will receive needed practical provisions, shelter and safety.***



Boko Haram terrorists.

REPORT UPDATE

KYRGYZSTAN: New Religion Law Takes Effect

Sources: Forum18, Barnabas Aid, Mission Network News

On December 12th, 2024, a draft bill was introduced to the parliament of Kyrgyzstan which proposed significantly tighter restrictions on the country's existing religion law. Referred to as a "very dangerous law," the draft legislation sought to enact stricter registration requirements, prohibit the public sharing of one's faith, and mandated that religious communities possess a minimum of 500 adult members in order to gain legal status. For more information, see our [previous report](#).

Regrettably, the law passed through parliament and came into force on February 1st. When asked about the consequences of the



Parliament building in Kyrgyzstan.
Photo: Flickr / Katie Putz ([cc](#))

new legislation, Floyd Brobbel, CEO for for Voice of the Martyrs Canada, explained that the intensified restrictions were implemented by officials in their attempts to further stifle Christian activities within the nation. "We will see these restrictions [curtailing] the church from doing the work of the church – restricting the freedom of Christians on how they can worship, where they can worship, how they can share their faith, [as well as] how they can be witnesses to their neighbours and do good."

- *Pray that the Lord would swiftly intervene in this situation, urging the parliamentary officials to mitigate their stance on freedom of religion and thus revoke the recently passed restrictions.*
- *May God give His church the strength to endure, reminding our Kyrgyz brothers and sisters in Christ that – despite the increased pressures – they can confidently fix their eyes on the One who has “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18).*
- *In general, pray that the country’s believers will be encouraged in their faith and that they will find new initiatives for effective outreach so the saving message of Jesus can continue being proclaimed in their communities and beyond.*

The "Persecution & Prayer Alert" is a ministry of:
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