

## Refugee Review Tribunal

### AUSTRALIA

#### RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

**Research Response Number:** NPL17500  
**Country:** Nepal  
**Date:** 31 August 2005

Keywords: Nepal – Evangelical Christians – Hindu converts to Christianity – Religious violence – Maoists – King Gyanendra – 2005 State of Emergency – Women

This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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#### Questions

1. Are there reports of people, including evangelical Christians, being prosecuted for proselytising? What was their fate?
2. Are there reports of Hindus who have converted to evangelical Christianity facing social ostracism? Have there been reports of violence?
3. Have the authorities become involved in such situations?
4. Are there reports of the Maoists targeting Christians? Have they been harmed?
5. Are there parts of Nepal, particularly Kathmandu, where Christians can safely practice their faith and reside?
6. Are there reports of Christian women being harmed in prison or by police and the military?
7. Is there any evidence the King opposes Christianity?
8. What evangelical Christian groups currently operate in Nepal? Have they reported they have suffered harm?
9. Anything else you feel might be relevant.

#### RESPONSE

A variety of past RRT *Research Responses* provide information on the human rights situation of Christians in Nepal, including information on evangelical Christians, the offence of proselytising, the social effects of conversion, state protection, and the relationship between Christians and Maoist rebels. The following recapitulates the salient points of the most recent and provides additional updated information where relevant (RRT Country Research 2003, *Research Response NPL15862*, 17 April – Attachment 1; RRT Country Research 2004, *Research Response NPL16841*, 8 July – Attachment 2; RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response NPL17207*, 7 March – Attachment 3).

## 1. Are there reports of people, including evangelical Christians, being prosecuted for proselytising? What was their fate?

Proselytising is expressly prohibited under Nepalese law. Clause 1 of the 1990 Constitution states, in part, that “no person shall be entitled to convert another person from one religion to another”. Likewise, section 3(A)(1) of 1992 Civil Code provides that “[n]o person shall propagate any religion in a manner likely to undermine another religion, or convert any one into another religion”. Section 3(A)(1) of the Civil Code also provides that:

In case he [the offender] has only made an attempt to do so, he will be punished with imprisonment not more than three years. In case he has already converted any one into another religion, he shall be punished with imprisonment for not more than six years. If he is a foreign national, he shall be deported from Nepal after completing such sentence (Regional Centre for Strategic Studies 1999, *New Evangelical Movements and Conflicts in South Asia, Sri Lanka and Nepal in Perspective*, ‘Christianity in Nepal: A Brief Historical Outline’, December [http://www.rcss.org/policy\\_studies/ps\\_5\\_4.html](http://www.rcss.org/policy_studies/ps_5_4.html) - Accessed 4 April 2003 – Attachment 4).

While laws such as these are on the books, it would appear that the state does not normally initiate and conduct legal proceedings against people for proselytising on its own accord.

As indicated by the Asian Center for Theology and Mission in 2000:

...of the many Nepali citizens who have been converted to Christ and baptized, only a very few have been arrested, brought to trial, and given jail sentences. His Majesty's government has chosen to take an attitude of “benign neglect” toward the law. Conversion to Christ is considered a “non-cognizable” offense, and **arrest and prosecution will be made only if someone makes a definite and determined complaint and charge against the new Christian** (‘Nepal’ 2000, The Asian Center for Theology and Mission—Resource Centre website <http://www.acts.edu/oldmissions/nepalhist.html> - Accessed 24 August 2005 – Attachment 5).

This accords, generally, with most recent reports of people being prosecuted for proselytising (e.g., ‘Four Christians Released in Nepal’ 2001, Christianity Today website, 12 February <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/107/37.0.html> - Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 6; US Department of State 2004, *Nepal: International Religious Freedom Report for 2004*, 15 September – Attachment 7; ‘Indian couple arrested on charges of religious conversion’ 2005, *The Hindustan Times*, 30 April – Attachment 8).

In the most recent instance, an Indian couple who ran a school for orphans in southern Nepal were arrested “for their alleged involvement in converting students to Christianity”. As indicated by the sources consulted, the couple “were taken into custody by district authorities after complaints were received that “the couple were forcing students of the school to adopt Christianity”. They were detained for about 2 weeks before being released (‘Indian couple arrested on charges of religious conversion’ 2005, *The Hindustan Times*, 30 April – Attachment 8; ‘Indian couple held in Nepal for alleged conversions’ 2005, *The Hindustan Times*, 29 April – Attachment 9; ‘Nepal “Releases” Christian Couple, But Hindu Militants Plan Protests, Human Rights Group Says’ 2005, Worthy News website, sourced from BosNewsLife Center, 13 May <http://www.worthynews.com/print.php> - Accessed 25 August 2005 – Attachment 10). According to the account of the arrest published by Compass:

Babu and Sabitri Varghese were arrested on April 27 after a disgruntled former employee stole a photo of an adult's baptism from a photo album and told the police that the couple was baptizing Hindu children into Christianity.

According to Janis Viren, president of EquipNepal, an American charity that provides financial support to the orphanage, the former employee had tried to extort money from the Vargheses. When that failed, he gave the photo to police and made accusations that were printed in a local newspaper...

According to Babu, the newspaper editors printed an initial report and then demanded 100,000 rupees (\$2,300) from the Vargheses. When the couple refused to pay, the newspaper printed another photo, along with calls for Babu and his wife to be jailed for six years for forced conversions.

On April 1, a police officer called at the Varghese home and asked the couple to appear for questioning. On April 21 they were summoned again but despite waiting for hours, the Chief District Officer (CDO) spoke with them for just a few minutes, reportedly accusing them of "teaching the Bible and teaching prayers and making Christians. Don't you know this is a Hindu country?" he said.

On April 22, the Vargheses were questioned for four-and-a-half hours by a man who they recognized as the leader of Arya Samaj, a Hindu organization which had previously criticized their work at the orphanage.

The couple was summoned again on April 27 and this time was taken into custody (Page, S. 2005, 'Nepal accuses couple of "forcibly converting minors": Bab and Sabitri Varghese imprisoned, await trial', Human Rights Without Frontiers website, sourced from Compass, 10 May [http://www.hrwf.net/html/2005PDF/Nepal\\_2005.pdf](http://www.hrwf.net/html/2005PDF/Nepal_2005.pdf) - Accessed 25 August 2005 – Attachment 11).

In February 2003, 3 Christians were also arrested and detained by police for proselytising in the Pyuthan district after police found "Bibles and Christian literature" in their bags. The sources consulted state that the three were charged with "carrying Christian literature, preaching Christianity, and attempting to convert others into Christianity". They were detained for about 5 months before the charges were dropped. The men were released on 11 September 2003. In this instance, the police appear to have instigated the arrest on their own accord ('Three Christians detained for 'Proselytizing'" 2003, The Christian Post website, 17 March

[http://www.christianpost.com/article/asia/110/full/three\\_christians\\_detained\\_for\\_%E2%80%9Cproselytizing%E2%80%9D/1.htm](http://www.christianpost.com/article/asia/110/full/three_christians_detained_for_%E2%80%9Cproselytizing%E2%80%9D/1.htm) - Accessed 24 August 2005 – Attachment 12; US Department of State 2005, *Nepal: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices—2004*, 28 February – Attachment 13).

The most well known recent case of persons being prosecuted for proselytising occurred in October 2000. On that occasion, a Norwegian national, Trond Berg, was arrested on 29 October 2000, along with Nepalese and Indian nationals, on the allegedly trumped up charge of proselytising. He was detained for three and a half months before the case against him was dismissed at trial. According to media accounts, Berg was arrested after "being attacked by a mob. It was led by a man who claimed the Norwegian church had promised to pay him \$1,000 if he converted" ('Four Christians Released in Nepal' 2001, Christianity Today website, 12 February <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/107/37.0.html> - Accessed 23

August 2005 – Attachment 6; ‘Indian couple held in Nepal for alleged conversions’ 2005, *The Hindustan Times*, 29 April – Attachment 9)

## **2. Are there reports of Hindus who have converted to evangelical Christianity facing social ostracism? Have there been reports of violence?**

The US Department of State’s 2004 *International Religious Freedom* report states that:

[t]hose who convert to other religions may face isolated incidents of violence and sometimes are ostracized socially, but generally they do not fear to admit their affiliations in public...

Those who choose to convert to other religions, in particular Hindu citizens who convert to Islam or Christianity, sometimes are ostracized socially. Some reportedly have been forced to leave their villages. While this prejudice is not systematic, it can be vehement and occasionally violent. Hindus who convert to another religion may face isolated incidents of hostility or discrimination from Hindu extremist groups. Nevertheless, converts generally are not afraid to admit in public their new religious affiliations (US Department of State 2004, *Nepal: International Religious Freedom Report for 2004*, 15 September – Attachment 7)

Christian sources also report that conversion remains a courageous act in Nepal and that “Christians still face ostracism and isolation from family members, neighborhoods and even entire villages in many cases” (‘Where folks go to church on Saturday’ 2004, Global Ministries website, September <http://www.globalministries.org/missionaries/sa10-wr3.htm> - Accessed 31 August 2005 – Attachment 14). Christian sources also note that the repercussions of converting can “include...being killed” (‘Nepal’ 2000, Mission Review website cache of <http://missionreview.com/index.php?loc=ct&ct=NPL&> – Accessed 31 August 2005 – Attachment 30).

The threat of social ostracism faced by Christian converts appears to be particularly acute in south Asia for the fact, noted by the Regional Center for Strategic Studies and others, that evangelical movements in the region emphasise “total conversion, and a break from society, inclusive of its cultural ties” (‘Conclusion: The Activities of Christian Evangelical Groups, and the Possibility of Conflict and Violence in South Asia?’ Undated, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies website [http://www.rcss.org/policy\\_studies/ps\\_5\\_5.html](http://www.rcss.org/policy_studies/ps_5_5.html) - Accessed 31 July 2003 – Attachment 15; ‘Gaborieau, M. 2002, ‘Christian Minorities in the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal’, in M. Hussain and L. Ghosh eds., *Religious Minorities in South Asia: Selected Essays on Post-Colonial Situations*, Volume 1, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Manak Publications, New Delhi, p. 99 – Attachment 16). (For an example, see ‘First let me go and bury my father’ 2004, Interserve website, 15 January <http://www.interserve.org.nz/home/articles/Priorities.htm> - Accessed 31 August 2005 – Attachment 17).

Writing about the evangelical movement in Nepal, the Regional Center for Strategic Studies observes that the decision to become a Christian in Nepal is “wrought with fear, guilt, stress, and the constant worry of being ostracized”. Its report, which is attached, provides a number of examples (‘Conclusion: The Activities of Christian Evangelical Groups, and the Possibility of Conflict and Violence in South Asia?’ Undated, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies website [http://www.rcss.org/policy\\_studies/ps\\_5\\_5.html](http://www.rcss.org/policy_studies/ps_5_5.html) - Accessed 31 July 2003 – Attachment 15).

On the same point, it is also significant to note that within the context of Brahmanical social stratification, Christians in Nepal have been relegated to the status of “low castes” (untouchables). Historically, this is to be seen in Clause 2 of Nepal’s old Penal Code which stated, in part, that that a convert out of Hinduism must “must join the untouchable class of the Hindu race” (Regional Centre for Strategic Studies 1999, *New Evangelical Movements and Conflicts in South Asia, Sri Lanka and Nepal in Perspective*, ‘Christianity in Nepal: A Brief Historical Outline’, December [http://www.rcss.org/policy\\_studies/ps\\_5\\_4.html](http://www.rcss.org/policy_studies/ps_5_4.html) - Accessed 4 April 2003 – Attachment 4; Gaborieau, M. 2002, ‘Christian Minorities in the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal’, in M. Hussain and L. Ghosh eds., *Religious Minorities in South Asia: Selected Essays on Post-Colonial Situations*, Volume 1, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Manak Publications, New Delhi, – Attachment 16).

Contemporary accounts of discrimination indicate that Christians are still affected by such thinking. A report by *Christianity Today*, dated 3 April 2000, provides the following two accounts:

“I came from a strong Hindu family and belonged to the Kshatriyas, the second-highest caste family in Nepal,” says Bogati. “When I went back to my village after I became a Christian, one of my uncles would not allow me into the house. I had become an untouchable.”

Additional discrimination takes place within the community. Neighbors consider a change in religion as tantamount to deserting the community and showing contempt for their culture. Peter, a worker with the International Bible Society, and his family were banished from their village when he refused to follow Hindu traditions at his father’s death (Stephen, A. 2000, ‘The Church at the top of the world’, *Christianity Today*, Volume 44, Issue 4, 3 April – Attachment 18)

Writing about the Christian community in Nepal, Marc Gaborieau also comments on conversion and the experience of being ostracised by Christians living in isolated villages dominated by Hindus and Buddhists:

...The situation is rather difficult for them because they are looked down the other as impure. Exchange of food and marriages are just not possible between Christians and non-Christians...

...new Christian minorities do not as yet feel fully secured either politically or judicially...conversion is now legal; but proselytism is not; and are only tolerated (Gaborieau, M. 2002, ‘Christian Minorities in the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal’, in M. Hussain and L. Ghosh eds., *Religious Minorities in South Asia: Selected Essays on Post-Colonial Situations*, Volume 1, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Manak Publications, New Delhi, pp. 101-103 – Attachment 16).

A recent report by International Christian Concern demonstrates the extent of community antipathy to conversion in rural Nepal:

(ICC) – In rural tribal communities of Nepal, choosing to follow Christ can lead to ostracism, rejection or, as in the recent case of one woman, death. According to Christian Aid’s contacts in Nepal, the lady was a member of the Santhal tribe in the eastern part of the country. She was recently led to Christ by a native missionary. When her family and neighbours found out about her decision, they beat her so badly that she had to be hospitalized. After five days in the hospital, she passed away. Local police arrested several people and charged them with her murder. However, Christians in the village, led by the native missionary who worked among them, chose to forgive the murderers and withdrew the case (‘Murder and Forgiveness in Tribal Village’ 2005, International Christian Concern website, 20 June

<http://www.persecution.org/newsite/newsdetail.php?newscode=1010> – Accessed 25 August – Attachment 19).

International Christian Concern provides a list of earlier incidents. The list is attached ('Asia: Nepal' 2002, International Christian Concern website, June <http://www.persecution.org/Countries/nepal.html> - Accessed 31 August 2005 – Attachment 20).

Other examples are provided in the US Department of States' *International Religious Freedom Report* for 2004. As indicated:

...on July 26, 2003, Buddhist and Hindu villagers attacked members of a small Christian house church in the northern part of the country, resulting in hospitalization for at least one church member and the destruction of houses and cornfields belonging to Christians. Reportedly, Buddhist authorities in the village repeatedly had asked Christians to give up their faith, and when they refused, the Buddhists joined with Hindu villagers to attack the Christians. In a separate incident, a Nepali evangelist allegedly witnessed an attack in mid-June 2003 on a newly built Christian church in Beldangi, Jhapa district. These reports cannot be confirmed...

Some Christian groups report that Hindu extremism has increased in recent years. Of particular concern are the Nepalese affiliates of the India-based Hindu political party Shiv Sena, locally known as Pashupati Sena, Shiv Sena Nepal, and Nepal Shivsena. During late 2001, Muslim leaders complained that Hindu fundamentalists increased their campaigns of anti-Islamic pamphleteering and graffiti. Government policy does not support Hindu extremism, although some political figures have made public statements critical of Christian missionary activities. Some citizens are wary of proselytizing and conversion by Christians and view the growth of Christianity with concern... (US Department of State 2004, *Nepal: International Religious Freedom Report for 2004*, 15 September – Attachment 7).

### **3. Have the authorities become involved in such situations?**

As many of the reports accompanying this response indicate, the authorities are sometimes involved in the mistreatment of Christians, including converts and alleged proselytisers, in Nepal. Some examples highlighting their direct involvement include:

- Instances where police have allegedly killed pastors ('Christians in Crisis Prayer Alert' 2005, Christians in Crisis website. May <http://www.christiansincrisis.net/pdf/May2005.pdf> - Accessed 25 August 2005 – Attachment 21; 'Christians pressure on Hindu King' 1999, Nepal News website, 23 August <http://www.nepalnews.com.np/contents/englishweekly/awake/1-95/f-pagers.htm> - Accessed 26 August 2005 – Attachment 22).
- Instances where police have attacked Christians, as in 1999 when they led an attack on "a crowd of Christians preparing for an Easter service". According to one report, "[t]wenty-eight Christians were hospitalized" on that occasion ('Christians in Crisis Prayer Alert' 2005, Christians in Crisis website. May <http://www.christiansincrisis.net/pdf/May2005.pdf> - Accessed 25 August 2005 – Attachment 21; Buchan, A. 1999, '28 Christians Hospitalized after Police Disrupt Good Friday Service', HRWF website, sourced from Compass, 7 April <http://www.hrwf.net/html/nepal1999.html> - Accessed 26 August 2005 – Attachment 23).

- Instances where police have arrested individuals for suspected proselytising on their own accord or, as in many of the cases already mention, on the basis of false allegations made by individual complainants ('Four Christians Released in Nepal' 2001, *Christianity Today* website, 12 February <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/107/37.0.html> - Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 6; Indian couple held in Nepal for alleged conversions' 2005, *The Hindustan Times*, 29 April – Attachment 9).
- Reports that Nepal's Refugee Coordination Unit ordered the destruction of a makeshift Christian church at a Bhutanese refugee camp in 2003. According to a HRWF report, on that occasion "[t]he operation was enforced by the police" (Fautre, W. 2004, 'Religious Freedom Limited for Christians in Refugee Camps: A Church Building Destroyed', Human Rights Without Frontiers website, 13 December [http://www.hrwf.net/html/2004PDF/Nepal\\_2004.pdf](http://www.hrwf.net/html/2004PDF/Nepal_2004.pdf) - Accessed 26 August 2005 – Attachment 24).

#### **4. Are there reports of the Maoists targeting Christians? Have they been harmed?**

A variety of sources report that Christians and Christian institutions have been targeted by Maoist rebels. Recent examples include the following:

- In August 2005, the *Christian Monitor* reported that Maoists had beaten a Christian pastor and disrupted a church service in rural Nepal. According to its report, the pastor was accused "of being an agent of the American government" ('Pray for the Persecuted of Nepal' 2005, *Christian Monitor* website, 8 August [http://www.christianmonitor.org/documents.php?type=Prayers&lang=English&item\\_ID=216&action=display&](http://www.christianmonitor.org/documents.php?type=Prayers&lang=English&item_ID=216&action=display&) - Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 25).
- In July 2005, a Nepalese media report indicated that a Christian Missionary school had been bombed by Maoists in eastern Nepal ('Seven killed by Maoist ambush' 2005, *Gulf Times* online edition, 24 July [http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu\\_no=2&item\\_no=45655&version=1&template\\_id=44&parent\\_id=24](http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=45655&version=1&template_id=44&parent_id=24) – Accessed 22 August 2005 – Attachment 26). In the same month, a Christian news source reported that Maoists had also closed down churches in parts of the Kathmandu Valley (Henderson, M. K. 2005, 'Nepal: Christianity growing in spite of a nation in turmoil', ASSIST News Service website, 9 July <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/s05070030.htm> - Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 27).
- In May 2005, a Christian website reported that a Christian pastor had been "beaten by a Nepalese officer who believed he was carrying food to the rebels" and then, when "his activities attracted attention", "a Maoist commander" ('Pastor continues ministry even after beatings' 2005, John Mark Ministries website, 23 May <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/15136.htm> - Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 28).

In July 2004, *Christianity Today* published a report indicating that Maoists had bombed a Lutheran World Federation project in western Nepal. According to sources cited in the report, Maoists "have [also] prevented Christian from preaching in some villages and asked them to

leave villages under their control” (Stephen, A, 2005, ‘Terror on Top of the World’ 2004, *Christianity Today* website, July <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/007/24.21.html> - Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 29).

The US Department of State also observes in its latest report on human rights in Nepal that:

[t]here are unconfirmed reports that Maoists suppressed religious observance in areas under their control through intimidation and harassment (US Department of State 2004, *Nepal: International Religious Freedom Report for 2004*, 15 September – Attachment 7).

According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide’s 2005 *Nepal—Country Profile*:

Christians face pressure from three main sources. Firstly, Christians can find themselves targeted by militant Hindu groups. Secondly, the Maoist rebels in some areas harass Christians, threatening them if they attend church and forcing young Christians to join them under threat of death. Thirdly, Christians are often caught up in battles between the Maoists and the security forces. Some have been killed indiscriminately by both sides and some are targeted by the government as suspected Maoist rebels... (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2005, *Nepal—Country Profile*, June <http://www.csw.org.uk/Resources/Profiles/images/Nepal.pdf> - Accessed 29 August 2005 – Attachment 31).

### **5. Are there parts of Nepal, particularly Kathmandu, where Christians can safely practice their faith and reside?**

The sources consulted mostly indicate that Christians can, relatively speaking, safely practice their faith in many parts of Nepal. As indicated recently by Christian Solidarity Worldwide:

In practice, there is relative freedom for Christians to assemble and worship. Non-Hindus are allowed to offer religious education and to sell religious books...

[However] Christians experience registration problems. Churches cannot be registered with the government or own property... Because the Christian community is not legally recognised, no land is provided for Christian burial. After experiencing great difficulties, a Christian School has been allowed to become the first Educational Trust to register in Nepal. But no body or organisation can be recognised with “Christian” in its name.

On the whole Nepal allowed non-Hindus to practice their religion and to maintain their places of worship. However, Christians suffer discrimination in every day life. For example, they are routinely denied employment in public services such as the police and army. While such discrimination still exists, it is inaccurate to assert that there is full religious freedom and equality for adherents of all faiths (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2005, *Country Profile—Nepal*, June <http://www.csw.org.uk/Resources/Profiles/images/Nepal.pdf> - Accessed 29 August 2005 – Attachment 31).

Another report by *Christianity Today* from 2000 provides the following account of religious freedom in Kathmandu:

It is Saturday in Nepal, and hundreds of people dressed in their best churchgoing clothes crowd together outside a large hall in the capital city [*sic*] of Katmandu.

Saluting each other with folded hands and saying “Jai Masih” (the Nepali expression for “Praise the Lord”), they take off their shoes, making their way inside to squat on a carpeted

floor just before 10:30 a.m. Except for a handful of expatriates, the Nepali Isai Mandali (Gyaneshwor) Church is filled with first-generation Nepali Christians who have braved social and religious constraints to follow Jesus Christ. Every inch of space is taken and those who are late reluctantly sit outside. At the first strains of a Nepali song, all 2,000 hands, young and old, lift in praise to God. This amazing sight brings tears to my eyes. Ten years ago an open church meeting of this nature would have been impossible. The days when government agents infiltrated churches as spies, and Christians were persecuted or imprisoned, are also long gone...

"I was often called in by the police, and had to move several times as we were not allowed to have worship services," says Karthak, senior pastor of Gyaneshwor Church in Katmandu. "We could not declare ourselves as Christians openly, so we started in a small way as the constitution prevented us from preaching"...

From 15,000 in 1970 to an estimated 400,000 Christians today, Nepal has one of the fastest-growing Christian populations among the 3.6 billion people throughout Asia's 51 countries, according to scholars in Christian missions...

Although there are thousands of Christians in Katmandu, their presence is barely discernible. The sole traditional churchlike structure in Katmandu is Catholic and lies secluded off a main road set among houses. After meeting informally for five decades in the Jesuit run St. Xavier's School, the Catholics registered as a nonreligious, non government organization in 1993, calling it the Nepal Catholic Society. This gave them the right to buy property for the community.

The Catholic organization bought a piece of property from another Christian who ran an orphanage and Bible school. Work on the Assumption Church complex started in 1993 and a cathedral was completed four years later in 1997.

Other believers meet in homes and rented halls, but there are no signboards to announce the Christian presence. For example, Gyaneshwor Church is identified by a small sign at the gate, while Christian offices and bookshops are not identified at all. Christian groups are not allowed to register with the government as openly Christian...

The pursuit of religious freedom, outside of Hinduism or Buddhism, has had a painful history in Nepal. Hindu and Buddhist traditions formed a historic bulwark against the growth of Christianity...

Under Panchayat, Christians (as well as other distrusted groups) were persecuted and at least 300 pastors and Christians were jailed. Many Christians suffered police brutality, and at least one died because of it. Through this difficult time, the church was driven underground and Nepali Christians practiced secret lives of prayer...

Since most Nepali congregations are the result of work by Nepalis themselves, Christians from Nepal are evangelists at heart. Nepali Christians-many of whom are illiterate-share the gospel frequently and informally, sometimes over a cup of hot tea. Crusade-style evangelism is unknown to them...

Public criticism of Christianity is accepted and vitriolic. For the past year, Nepal's mass media have launched an extensive campaign against Christians, accusing them of destroying the Nepalese culture...

After suffering for years, the church in Nepal has found strength in spite of persecution. Now that overt religious persecution has declined, Christians in Nepal are reassessing their purpose and overall mission. One enduring realization is that Christians in Nepal remain vulnerable. There were several incidents of official harassment in 1999. If Nepali law is strictly enforced, severe restrictions on Christians could again be in effect. Faced with this dilemma, Nepali

Christians ask themselves: Does the church in Nepal fear persecution in the future? It is a question that many do not want to consider. (Stephen, A. 2000, 'The Church at the top of the world', *Christianity Today*, Volume 44, Issue 4, 3 April – Attachment 18).

Information was not found in the sources consulted on whether there are parts of Nepal where Christians can safely reside.

## **6. Are there reports of Christian women being harmed in prison or by police and the military?**

Reports were not found in the sources consulted on whether Christian women are harmed in prison or by police and the military.

Please consider the following documents:

- RRT *Research Response NPL16841*, dated 8 July 2004, which provides background information on the situation of women Nepal (RRT Country Research 2004, *Research Response NPL16841*, 8 July – Attachment 2);
- The US Department of State's latest report on human rights abuses in Nepal for 2004, which provides information on women, prison conditions, police and the military (US Department of State 2005, *Nepal: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices—2004*, 28 February - Attachment 13);
- A recent statement to UNHCR by the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC), which provides a snapshot of the current human rights situation in Nepal (UNHCR 2005, 'Written Statement submitted by the Asian Legal Resource Centre, a non-governmental organisation in general consultative status', UNHCR website, 11 February [http://www.alrc.net/doc/doc/chr61/pdf/64-ALRC-11a-Torture\\_and\\_zero\\_rule\\_oflaw\\_in\\_Nepal.pdf](http://www.alrc.net/doc/doc/chr61/pdf/64-ALRC-11a-Torture_and_zero_rule_oflaw_in_Nepal.pdf) - Accessed 31 August 2005 – Attachment 32).

## **7. Is there any evidence the King opposes Christianity?**

Information was not found in the sources consulted on King Gyanendra's attitude toward Christianity. However, in February 2005, reports indicated that Christians were "wary" after he suspended parliament and introduced martial law. RRT *Research Response NPL17207* explores aspects of the issue in full (RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response NPL17207*, 7 March – Attachment 3).

In light of the information provided in *Research Response NPL17207*, it may be relevant to note that the King's administration recently announced a new law which "gives new powers to the state to enable it to control and regulate programmes run by NGOs and their activities" ('Nepal: New NGO law spells end of autonomy, say activists' 2005, *Reuters* website, 17 August <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/5d1c99c9bf6a01d2f66bb76560496d13.htm> - Accessed 22 August 2005 – Attachment 33).

## **8. What evangelical Christian groups currently operate in Nepal? Have they reported they have suffered harm?**

Nepal is apparently home to a plethora of Christian groups and has become, to quote one source, “a mission tourist center” (Stephen, A. 2000, ‘The Church at the top of the world’, *Christianity Today*, Volume 44, Issue 4, 3 April – Attachment 18).

According to Marc Gaborieau, “there are about 200 protestant churches of various denominations in Kathmandu” alone. Furthermore:

[n]ow that preaching is done openly, it is possible to locate the large variety of Protestant denominations who are active all over the country: Lutherians, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, Evangelicals, Adventists of the seventh day, Mormons, Witnesses of Jehovah, Pentecostists etc. There does not seem to be a common umbrella organisation uniting all these denominations: but three organisations which are actively engaged in uniting several of them, are The United Mission to Nepal (the oldest one established from the 1950s), The Nepal Christian Fellowship and the Nepal Bible Society (Gaborieau, M. 2002, ‘Christian Minorities in the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal’, in M. Hussain and L. Ghosh eds., *Religious Minorities in South Asia: Selected Essays on Post-Colonial Situations*, Volume 1, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Manak Publications, New Delhi, pp. 101-103 – Attachment 16).

According to *Christianity Today*:

From 15,000 in 1970 to an estimated 400,000 Christians today, Nepal has one of the fastest-growing Christian populations among the 3.6 billion people throughout Asia's 51 countries, according to scholars in Christian missions...

...Today, more than a dozen American mission groups have more than 100 personnel in Nepal. In most cases, the Nepali government requires outside agencies to agree not to proselytize...

...Christians are encouraged to join small groups after their baptism. Nearly 300 such fellowships have mushroomed in Katmandu. But over the years, those fellowships have led to denominational association (which was unknown before 1990) and, in a few cases, splintered congregations... (Stephen, A. 2000, ‘The Church at the top of the world’, *Christianity Today*, Volume 44, Issue 4, 3 April – Attachment 18).

In its undated report on the evangelical movement in South Asia, the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies provides the following “incomplete list” of the main evangelical/Protestant congregations operating in Nepal:

1. United Mission to Nepal
2. Nepal Christian Fellowship.
3. International Nepal Fellowship
4. Nava Jeevan Church
5. The Children of God
6. The Four Square Church
7. Assemblies of God
8. Baptist Missionary Society, UK

- 9.Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- 10.Church Missionary Society
- 11.Church of North India
- 12.Church of Scotland
- 13.Church of South India
- 14.Lutheran World Service.
- 15.World Vision
- 16.Committee for Service Overseas
- 17.Danish Santal Mission
- 18.Evangelical Free Church of Finland
- 19.Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- 20.Finish Evangelical Luthran Mission
- 21.Gossner Mission
- 22.Interserve/ BMMF
- 23.Japan Antioch Mission
- 24.Japan Overseas Christian Medical Cooperative Service
- 25.Korea Christian Medico-Evangelical Association
- 26.Campus Crusade for Christ
- 27.Mennonite Board of Missions
- 28.Mennonite Central Committee
- 29.Norwegian Himal-Asia Mission
- 30.Orebro Mission
- 31.Presbyterian Church in Canada
- 32.Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- 33.Presbyterian Church in Korea
- 34.Presbyterian Church Synod of Mizoram, India.
- 35.Presbyterian Church USA
- 36.Regions Beyond Missionary Union
- 37.Swedish Free Mission
- 38.Swiss Friends for Missions in India and Nepal
- 39.Tear Fund

40. United Church of Canada
41. United Church of Christ in Japan
42. United Methodist Church (USA)
43. Wesleyan Church
44. World Concern, USA
45. World Mission Prayer League
46. Nepal Every Home Concern
47. Adventist Development and Relief Agency
48. Jehovah's Witness
49. The Evangelical Alliance Mission
50. The Mormon Church
51. Nepal Bible Society
52. Good News of Nepal
53. Bible Training Centre for Pastors
54. Morning Pastors Fellowship
55. Gathsamani Church (Regional Centre for Strategic Studies 1999, *New Evangelical Movements and Conflicts in South Asia, Sri Lanka and Nepal in Perspective*, 'Christianity in Nepal: A Brief Historical Outline', December [http://www.rcss.org/policy\\_studies/ps\\_5\\_4.html](http://www.rcss.org/policy_studies/ps_5_4.html) - Accessed 4 April 2003 – Attachment 4).

A restricted search revealed that at least two of the abovementioned groups have filed reports that they have suffered harm. For example:

- On 5 April 2005, the International Nepal Fellowship (INF) reported that an INF bus was "burned out...by a group of Maoist sympathisers" ('INF report escapes bus blaze' 2005, International Nepal Fellowship website, 5 April [http://www.inf.org/news/20050405\\_01\\_01.html](http://www.inf.org/news/20050405_01_01.html) - Accessed 31 August 2005 – Attachment 34);
- On 29 April 2004, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) reported that a bomb explosion damaged one of its regional offices in western Nepal. According to its report, the LWF stated that a local Maoist leader had claimed responsibility for the attack. On 1 July 2004, *Christianity Today* also published a report indicating that Maoists had bombed another Lutheran World Federation project in western Nepal ('LWF regional office in Nepal damaged in bomb explosion' 2004, Lutheran World Federation website, 29 April <http://www.lutheranworld.org/News/LWI/EN/1442.EN.html> - Accessed 31 August 2005 – Attachment 35; Stephen, A, 2005, 'Terror on Top of the World' 2004, *Christianity Today* website, July

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/007/24.21.html> - Accessed 23 August 2005  
– Attachment 29).

## 9. Anything else you feel might be relevant.

It may be relevant to note that an account of Christian groups in Nepal cannot easily be disassociated from a parallel account of NGOs and INGOs. This stems primarily from the fact, noted and dealt with in *Research Response NPL17207*, that Christian groups in Nepal “cannot be registered with the government” as churches (RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response NPL17207*, 7 March – Attachment 3).

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Google search engine

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	<i>REFINFO</i>	IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)
RRT	<i>ISYS</i>	RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices</i> .
RRT Library	<i>FIRST</i>	RRT Library Catalogue

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