



nepal

PERSECUTION 101






Nepal's religious minorities continue to face significant barriers to religious freedom in one of the world's youngest democracies

In 2008, after years of pro-democracy stirrings across the country, Nepal officially declared itself a democratic republic, abolishing its 240-year-old monarchy and paving the way for a constitutional government. The constitution, ratified in 2015, has some language protecting religious freedom, but vaguely enough to allow a law today that criminalizes proselytization. In addition, social pressure in the more than 80% Hindu country leaves many religious minorities ostracized from their communities and cut off from essential rights and government services.

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QUICK FACTS



Type of Government

Federal
Parliamentary
Republic



Chief Executive

Pushpa Kamal
Dahal of the
Communist Party
of Nepal since
December 2022.



Total Population

30.8 million
2023 estimate



Religious Demography

81.2% Hindu - 25 million
8.2% Buddhist - 2.5 million
3.2% Kirat - 1 million
2.3% Christian - 700,000



Ethnic Demography

16.5% Chhettri
11.3% Brahman-Hill
6.9% Magar
6.2% Tharu
5.6% Tamang
5% Bishwokarma
48.5% Other



TYPES OF PERSECUTION



Barriers to Conversion

Nepal criminalizes the spreading of one's religion, punishing those who share their faith with up to six years in prison and later deportation in the case of foreign missionaries.



Social Pressure

Religious minorities across Nepal are ostracized by their communities, in some cases even being barred from burying their dead in traditional burial grounds.



ICC IN NEPAL

A population smaller than many U.S. cities spread over an intensely mountainous country roughly the size of Georgia, Christians in Nepal often find themselves isolated and cut off from the support and resources necessary for survival. Small pockets of Christianity exist throughout the country, but they often face severe social pressure from their communities. ICC works with many of these ostracized believers, helping them to forge sustainable incomes in places where hostile neighbors may have taken away their earlier livelihood.

An estimated 12,000 churches were shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, cutting pastors off from already-meager congregational support. What's more, many Christians were denied government aid because of their faith. ICC was privileged to help many of these pastors and their congregants with the delivery of essential food aid, a critical lifeline during a challenging time for the Nepalese church.

“Situated between India and China, Nepal has long been overlooked by the international community. As that begins to change, we must protect vulnerable Christian communities around Nepal and work to ensure their ability to worship freely.”

—Jeff King

Political Backgrounder for Religious Freedom Issues in India

After 240 years under monarchy, Nepal declared itself a democratic republic in 2008. The move was the result of a years-long pro-democracy movement and was heralded by many in the international community as a positive step towards increased rights and freedom for the Nepalese people.

Nepal finally ratified its constitution in 2015 after years of drafting and delays. The document, which was written with input from across Nepalese society, had language protecting the right to religious freedom. “Each person shall be free to profess, practice, and preserve his/her religion according to his/her faith,” Article 26 (1) reads. Unfortunately, Article 26 goes on to ban “disturb[ing] the religion of other people” and “convert[ing] a person of one religion to another religion,” effectively making it illegal to be a pastor in Nepal.

“There shall be no discrimination in the application of general laws,” the Constitution reads, “on the grounds of origin [or] religion...” Contrary to this provision, Chapter 19 of the Muluki Ain, or general code of Nepal, states that “no one shall propagate any religion in such manner as to undermine the religion of other nor shall cause other to convert his or her religion.” Religious minorities are regularly arrested and charged under this law, which goes beyond its neighbor India’s bans on forcibly converting another to criminalize participation in the act of conversion in any way at all. In Nepal, proselytization carries with it the threat of up to six years in prison and subsequent deportation in the case of foreigners.

In neighboring India, no national-level law exists prohibiting conversion. Though also greatly concerning from a human rights perspective, its anti-conversion laws are limited to individual states and ostensibly only target forced conversions. In contrast, Nepal’s anti-proselytization and anti-conversion laws are national and regulate all conversions, even voluntary ones, though it is worth noting that India’s laws do, in practice, regulate much more than just forced conversions. In fact, in many cases they serve as a de jure and de facto prohibition on nearly all minority religious practice.

The U.S. Department of State highlighted its own concerns with Nepal’s anti-proselytization laws in a report published in 2023. “*Multiple religious groups in the country,*” the report said, “*[continue] to reiterate that the constitutional and criminal code provisions governing religious conversion and proselytism [are] vague and contradictory and [open] the door for prosecution for actions carried out in the normal course of practicing one’s religion.*” Though the Nepalese government continues to claim that it offers complete religious freedom to its people, its anti-proselytization laws make it a country of grave concern on that front.

US Government Designations

YEAR	USCIRF Recommendation	State Dept. Action
2001	None	None
2002	None	None
2003	None	None
2004	None	None
2005	None	None
2006	None	None
2007	None	None
2008	None	None
2009	None	None
2010	None	None
2011	None	None
2012	None	None
2013	None	None
2014	None	None
2015	None	None
2016	None	None

YEAR	USCIRF Recommendation	State Dept. Action
2017	None	None
2018	None	None
2019	None	None
2020	None	None
2021	None	None
2022	None	None
2023	None	None

Resources and Reports

[State Department 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom – Nepal Chapter](#)

[Civil Society Leaders in Nepal Convene Seminar on Interfaith Tolerance and Religious Freedom](#)

[COVID-19 Relief in Nepal](#)

