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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN NEPAL  
FOR THE 51<sup>ST</sup> SESSION OF THE  
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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## **Status of Human Rights in Nepal for the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the Universal Periodic Review**

### **Introduction**

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in Nepal for the 51<sup>st</sup> session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

### **Background**

2. Nepal is a country located in Asia with a population of approximately 30.1 million people.<sup>1</sup> The country is predominantly Hindu, with 81.2% identifying as Hindu, 8.2% as Buddhist, 5.1% as Muslim, 3.2% as Kirat, 1.8% as Christian, and 0.5% as other.<sup>2</sup> In its 2025 World Watch List, Open Doors ranked Nepal as the 54th worst country for Christians.<sup>3</sup> This ranking stems from the fact that Christians are attacked by radical Hindus and imprisoned by the government because of their faith.<sup>4</sup>

3. Nepal's last review was held on January 21, 2021.<sup>5</sup> As a result of the review, Nepal received 233 recommendations, 196 of which it supported.<sup>6</sup> It was recommended by Haiti, and supported by Nepal, that the government "[t]ake all necessary measures, in particular at the legislative level, in order to protect the rights of persons from religious minorities and in order to guarantee freedom of religion or belief in law and in practice, in accordance with international human rights law."<sup>7</sup> In our last UPR on Nepal, we expressed concern over the escalating violence and harassment of Christians as well as its laws that discriminate against Christians and other religious minorities.

### **Legal Framework**

4. Article 26 of the Constitution of Nepal supports religious freedom, but the same Article also prohibits individuals from converting others to another religion. Under Article 26:

1. Each person shall be free to profess, practice, and preserve his/her religion according to his/her faith.

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<sup>1</sup> *Nepal*, BRITANNICA (July 10, 2025), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nepal>.

<sup>2</sup> *People of Nepal*, BRITANNICA (July 10, 2025), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nepal/People#>.

<sup>3</sup> *Nepal: Persecution Dynamics*, OPEN DOORS INT'L / WORLD WATCH RSCH. 4 (Jan. 2025), <https://www.opendoors.org/research-reports/country-dossiers/WWL-2025-Nepal-Persecution-Dynamics>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Universal Periodic Review – Nepal*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/np-index> (last visited July 10, 2025).

<sup>6</sup> *Infographic – Nepal*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session28/NP/NEPAL.pdf> (last visited July 10, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> *UPR of Nepal (3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle – 37<sup>th</sup> Session): Thematic List of Recommendations*, OHCHR 48, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session28/NP/MatriceRecommendationsNepal.docx> (last visited July 10, 2025).

2. Every religious denomination shall, maintaining its independent existence, have the right to manage and protect its religious places and religious trusts in accordance with law.

Provided that it shall not be deemed to have hindered to make law to operate and protect a religious place or religious trust and to manage trust property and regulate land management.

3. While exercising the right as provided for by this Article, no person shall act or make others act in a manner which is contrary to public health, decency and morality, or behave or act or make others act to disturb public law and order situation, or convert a person of one religion to another religion, or disturb the religion of other people. Such an act shall be punishable by law.<sup>8</sup>

5. Article 158 of the Penal Code of Nepal codifies the punishment for those carrying out conversion activities. Under Article 158:

1. No person shall convert any one from one religion to another or make attempt to or abet such conversion.

2. No person shall do any act or conduct which undermines the religion, opinion or faith of any caste, race, community or convert any one into another religion, whether by inducement or not, in a manner to so undermine or propagate such religion or opinion with the intention of making such conversion.

3. A person who commits, or causes to be committed, the offence referred to in sub-section (1) or (2) shall be liable to a sentence of imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years and a fine not exceeding fifty thousand rupees.

4. If a foreigner commits, or causes to be committed, the offence referred to in sub-section (1) or (2), he or she shall be deported from Nepal within seven days after the date of completion of the service of imprisonment imposed under this Section.<sup>9</sup>

6. Nepal is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).<sup>10</sup> Under Article 18 of the ICCPR:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

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<sup>8</sup> CONSTITUTION OF NEPAL Sep. 20, 2015, art. 26, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Nepal\\_2015](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Nepal_2015).

<sup>9</sup> The National Penal (Code) Act, 2017 (Act. No. 36/2017) (Nepal), art. 158, <https://www.globalanimallaw.org/downloads/database/criminal-code-nepal.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> *Ratification Status for Nepal*, OHCHR, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=122&Lang=EN](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=122&Lang=EN) (last visited July 10, 2025).

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.<sup>11</sup>

7. This right is also enshrined with similar language in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Under Article 18 of the UDHR:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.<sup>12</sup>

### Religious Persecution

8. Despite Nepal's Constitution guaranteeing the right for everyone to "profess, practice, and preserve his/her religion according to his/her faith,"<sup>13</sup> the government has implemented laws that effectively criminalize proselytization. The government uses these laws to target and arrest Christians who are simply practicing their faith peacefully by sharing their faith with others. These laws directly infringe on the ability of people to "profess, practice, and preserve his/her religion according to his/her faith."<sup>14</sup> Nepal's laws are enforced so strictly that one Nepali evangelist explained that simply carrying a Bible is seen as trying to convert others and that baptisms are the pinnacle of conversion activity.<sup>15</sup>

9. Nepal's Constitutional restriction on the freedom of worship that "no person shall act or make others act in a manner which is contrary to public health, decency and morality, or behave or act or make others act to disturb public law and order situation" is overly burdensome and is in no way necessary to preserve "public health, decency and morality."

10. Additionally, despite supporting a recommendation to "[t]ake all necessary measures, in particular at the legislative level, . . . to protect the rights of persons from religious minorities and . . . guarantee freedom of religion or belief in law and in practice, in accordance with international human rights law,"<sup>16</sup> Nepal has taken no action to implement these recommendations. In fact, the opposite is true. Nepal has not only not reformed its laws restricting religious freedom, but it has made efforts to further enforce restrictions. On April 13, 2024, the Ministry of Home Affairs instructed all seventy-seven district administration offices to fully enforce restrictions on religious conversion activities.<sup>17</sup>

11. In addition to being persecuted under Nepal's laws that restrict religious freedom, Christians are also targeted by Hindu extremists who want to turn Nepal into a Hindu

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<sup>11</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20999/v999.pdf> [hereinafter ICCPR].

<sup>12</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res 217 (III) A, art. 18 (Dec. 10, 1948).

<sup>13</sup> CONST. OF NEPAL SEP. 20, 2015, art. 26, *supra* note 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> Brian O., *Is Christianity Illegal in Nepal? Answers from an Evangelist*, GLOBAL CHRISTIAN RELIEF (Oct. 15, 2024), <https://globalchristianrelief.org/christian-persecution/stories/is-christianity-illegal-in-nepal/>.

<sup>16</sup> *UPR of Nepal (3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle – 37<sup>th</sup> Session): Thematic List of Recommendations*, OHCHR 48, *supra* note 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Nepal: Increasing Pressure from Both Government and Hindu Extremists*, OPEN DOORS INT'L (May 14, 2024), <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/articles/stories/Nepal-Increasing-pressure-from-both-government-and-Hindu-extremists/>.

kingdom.<sup>18</sup> Christianity has been growing in Nepal and is viewed as a threat by Hindu extremists. A 2023 report shows that Christianity has grown by an estimated 68% in just the last decade.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, this has led to an increase in attacks against Christians by Hindu extremists. The government has been unwilling to stop these attacks and, in some cases, officials have sided with the Hindu extremists.<sup>20</sup>

12. Below, we have highlighted just a few cases of Christians being arrested for practicing their faith and being attacked by Hindu extremists.

13. In February 2025, more than a dozen U.S. citizens and one Indian citizen were detained and questioned about their Christian activities in southeastern Nepal.<sup>21</sup> After being questioned by authorities, they were released but were warned that they could face future consequences if they continued evangelizing.<sup>22</sup>

14. On June 15, 2024, a Hindu group disrupted a church service in Madhesh province.<sup>23</sup> As the group members disrupted the service, they also assaulted the pastor, threatened the congregation, stole Bibles, and destroyed musical instruments.<sup>24</sup>

15. In March 2024, eleven Christians were arrested for converting Hindus to Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Of those arrested, four were Nepali citizens and seven were Australian.<sup>26</sup>

16. On March 2, 2024, a mob attacked a church in Lumbini province by throwing stones and bricks at the building.<sup>27</sup>

17. In January 2024, a Christian pastor was sentenced to one year in prison by the Nepali Supreme Court for evangelizing.<sup>28</sup>

18. On September 8, 2023, two Christians were arrested in Kathmandu<sup>29</sup> after locals reported that they were distributing pamphlets about Jesus.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Hindu Organisations Stop Christian Conversion in Nepal: Send Back Indians Taken to Nepal for Conversion, Smear Faces with Black Paint and Beat up Pastor*, OPINDIA (Sep. 17, 2024),

<https://www.opindia.com/2024/09/hindu-organisations-stop-christian-conversion-in-nepal-send-back-indians/>.

<sup>20</sup> *Churches Targeted as Nepal's Christians Come Under Renewed Attack*, CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY INT'L (Oct. 12, 2023), <https://www.csi-int.org/news/nepal-churches-targeted-as-christians-come-under-renewed-attack/>.

<sup>21</sup> *Nepalese Government Detains, Questions 17 U.S. Citizens on Proselytization Charges*, INT'L CHRISTIAN CONCERN (Feb. 10, 2025), <https://www.persecution.org/2025/02/10/nepalese-government-detains-questions-17-u-s-citizens-on-proselytization-charges/>.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *Nepal: Persecution Dynamics*, OPEN DOORS INT'L / WORLD WATCH RSCH. 8 (2025), *supra* note 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> *Nepali Christians Face Trial Under Stringent Anti-Conversion Law*, UCA NEWS (Apr. 5, 2024), <https://www.ucanews.com/news/nepali-christians-face-trial-under-stringent-anti-conversion-law/104688>.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> *Nepal: Persecution Dynamics*, OPEN DOORS INT'L / WORLD WATCH RSCH. 8 (2025), *supra* note 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> Kumar Singh Bist, *Two Christians Wrongly Arrested in Kathmandu on Alleged Religious Preaching Charges: A Prayer Appeal to Churches Worldwide for Their Release*, CHINA CHRISTIAN DAILY (Sep. 14, 2023), <https://chinachristiandaily.com/news/world/2023-09-15/two-christians-wrongly-arrested-in-kathmandu-on-alleged-religious-preaching-charges-a-prayer-appeal-to-churches-worldwide-for-their-release-13215>.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

19. Over a two-week period in 2023, seven churches were attacked across Nepal.<sup>31</sup> These attacks began after Hindu extremists became upset and objected to the construction of a church that would be located near a Hindu temple.<sup>32</sup> Hindu extremists began threatening the pastor and the case was referred to the district government.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, authorities sided with the Hindu extremists and shut down the church.<sup>34</sup>

20. In April 2023, two Christian women were arrested after they were accused of forcibly carrying out religious conversions.<sup>35</sup>

21. On September 14, 2021, two Catholic nuns from South Korea were arrested and detained in Nepal for allegedly coercing Hindus to convert.<sup>36</sup> The nuns, who worked with poor children in Pokhara, were arrested after police received an anonymous complaint.<sup>37</sup> The two nuns were granted bail two and a half months after they were arrested.<sup>38</sup>

22. As we stated above, professing your faith and living according to the teachings of your faith is a right that is guaranteed under Nepal's Constitution. This fundamental right is also guaranteed in international human rights instruments such as the UDHR and the ICCPR. Again, the UDHR provides that everyone has the right to "change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."<sup>39</sup> As demonstrated by its laws and the examples above, Nepal clearly does not desire to truly provide and protect the right to religious freedom for all its citizens.

### Recommendations:

23. It is critical that Nepal take immediate steps to reform its laws to ensure that everyone has the fundamental right to freedom of religion. As shown above, Nepal is failing to uphold the rights enshrined in the UDHR and the ICCPR and it must work to ensure that its laws align with these fundamental human rights documents. The right to freedom of religion should be available to all people, not just those belonging to the majority religion. Christians and other religious minorities must be able to freely and peacefully practice their faith without fear of being arrested, attacked, or their churches destroyed.

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<sup>31</sup> *Two Nepalese Churches Attacked in Growing Trend*, INT'L CHRISTIAN CONCERN (Sep. 5, 2023), <https://www.persecution.org/2023/09/05/two-nepalese-churches-attacked-in-growing-trend/>.

<sup>32</sup> *Churches Targeted as Nepal's Christians Come Under Renewed Attack*, CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY INTERNATIONAL (Oct. 12, 2023), <https://www.csi-int.org/news/nepal-churches-targeted-as-christians-come-under-renewed-attack/>.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Nepal: Full Country Dossier*, OPEN DOORS INT'L / WORLD WATCH RSCH. 7 (Mar. 2024), <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/country-dossiers/WWL-2024-Nepal-Full-Country-Dossier.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Rock Ronald Rozario, *Korean Missionary Nuns Held in Nepal on Conversion Charges*, UCA NEWS (Oct. 27, 2021), <https://www.ucanews.com/news/korean-missionary-nuns-held-in-nepal-on-conversion-charges/94721>.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> *Nepal Grants Bail to Four Korean Missionaries, Including Two Nuns*, CRUX (Nov. 19, 2021), <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-asia/2021/11/nepal-grants-bail-to-four-korean-missionaries-including-two-nuns>.

<sup>39</sup> G.A. Res 217 (III) A, *supra* note 12.