



Call for Solidarity from Church of North India

Church in shock as a Minister is arrested in Kashmir

The Diocese of Amritsar, Church of North India, has been hit hard in recent times as Christians were threatened and churches in the Punjab were attacked in 2010. Then one of the diocesan schools in Tanmarg, Kashmir, was burnt down by antagonists in the same year.

The Church of North India, Diocese of Amritsar, embraces the north Indian states of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu-Kashmir. Being the Christian Church in this region demands considerable sensitivity, particularly in the majority Muslim region of Kashmir. Indeed, the diocese under the able leadership of the Rt Rev P K Samantaroj, Bishop in Amritsar, (pictured above) has exercised ministry with great commitment to the wellbeing and welfare of all Kashmiri's. Education and health services have been provided for many years and this has taken place irrespective of religious identity or caste.

Hence recent accusations that have led to the arrest of the Presbyter at All Souls Church, Srinagar, has created a great deal of concern and dismay among Kashmir's tiny Christian community. Rev Chandra Mani Khanna was issued with an order by the Grand Mufti in Srinagar to appear before the Shariat court. He was accused of converting local people to Christianity.

For more than a year young Kashmiri people have been coming to the church seeking teaching from Rev Khanna. There has been no intentional outreach programs and the church does not proselytise. Rather, these people came out of their own interest and motivation to the church.

After some time, these seekers asked to participate in Holy Communion. Rev Khanna explained that baptism is required before receiving the Eucharist and these young Kashmiris then requested baptism.

Rev Khanna explained that as a priest, he could not deny these people the right to baptism. In two ceremonies, one in July and the other in August, these people were baptised by Rev Khanna. Someone secretly videoed the ceremony on their mobile phone and released it on You-Tube, This caused a deal of angst and unrest among many Muslims around the world.

Rev Khanna is under no legal obligation to appear before the Shariat court but he did so out of respect and in order to maintain good relations in the community. The court hearing took place over a period of four hours on 26th October and Rev Khanna is still waiting for a verdict.

However, Rev Khanna was then picked up at his home just recently to be arrested and kept in police custody. He has not received any written communication concerning charges laid against him. The Bar Association of Kashmir has warned its members against representing Rev Khanna. He remains under arrest in police custody. His colleagues fear that his life could be in danger.

Bishop Samantaroj says "the whole Christian community is hurt because the Christian Mission work in the state of Kashmir has been carried out with utmost commitment for the benefit of the majority Muslim population....it is unfortunate that the long sacrificial ministry of the Church has not been considered while arresting Rev Khanna for allegedly causing communal disharmony."

Indeed, it appears as though the church is being targeted while there is obvious discrimination being exercised against Christians. This is a great concern for the Christian Church across India where sincere, credible efforts are being made to live in diversity and to respectfully engage with people of other faiths.

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Your Invitation to Stand with the CNI

We are urged to raise concerns and to appeal for Rev Khanna's release.

Please address your concerns and make your appeal in writing to:

The Honourable President of India
Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil
Rashtrapati Bhavan
New Delhi 110 004
INDIA

The Honourable Prime Minister of India
Dr Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister's Office
South Block
New Delhi 110 – 001
INDIA

The Honourable Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir
Sri Omar Abdullah
Civil Sectt
Jammu-Tavi 180 001
Jammu and Kashmir
INDIA

Her Excellency High Commissioner to Australia
Mrs Sajatha Singh
3-5 Moonah Place
Yarralumla
ACT 2600

The Honourable Kevin Rudd
Minister for Foreign Affairs
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Also consider writing to your local Federal Parliamentary representative.

In your letter consider the following points:

- Rev Khanna has not committed any crime. His actions also do not undermine or contradict the constitution of the Indian Republic.
- Rev Khanna and the Church of North India are committed to sensitive, respectful relationships with people of other faiths. There is a long, proven tradition established here by the church in Kashmir over a period of more than one hundred years.

- Appeal for the immediate release of Rev Khanna from police custody and express concerns about his welfare and ongoing risk to his life while he remains in custody.

- Appeal for the fair treatment and for the acknowledgement of the rights of all India's citizens as guaranteed under the constitution.

- Note that the Christian community in Kashmir is particularly vulnerable and appeal for the protection on minority groups throughout India.

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