



6.5.14

## NEPAL | CSW Concerned By Calls to Ban Religious Conversions

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is concerned by reports that Bhagat Singh Koshiyari, the Vice Chairman of the Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has called for a total legal ban on conversions from one faith to another in meetings with senior politicians from Nepal.

According to local press reports, while on an unofficial visit to Nepal from May 30 to June 1, Koshiyari met with senior leaders from the main political parties in Nepal, including Prime Minister Sushil Koirala and the Chairman of the Maoist party, Pushpa Kamal Dahal. He reportedly asserted that religious conversion is an illegal and criminal offense, which should be stopped immediately and that Western countries are assisting Nepal to convert Hindus to Christianity.

The BJP claimed a decisive victory in the recent Indian General Election, securing more than 50% of seats in the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament). The party has close ties to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist group which views India as a Hindu nation in which Christian and Muslim minorities are considered as outsiders who threaten national integrity.

Nepal was the only official Hindu state in the world until 2006, when the parliament declared the nation to be a secular republic. The Constituent Assembly is at present involved in drafting the new constitution, incorporating the human rights essential for a fully democratic state. The framing of the constitution is governed by Nepal's Treaties Act of 1991, which requires the nation's laws to conform to the principles and precepts of the International Treaties it has signed and ratified. There is pressure from some political parties to restore the Hindu monarchy.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Mr. Koshiyari's comments are of concern given that they appear to be an attempt to persuade Nepali leaders and political parties not to include freedom of religion or belief in the new constitution and laws of Nepal. The freedom to choose and change one's faith is guaranteed in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Nepal has signed and ratified, and the right to change one's religion or faith must be upheld as an essential part of any constitution which adheres to international human rights principles. CSW continues to urge all political and religious leaders in Nepal to ensure that the new Constitution and Penal Code guarantee all citizens the right to express and share their beliefs, the right to choose and change their religion or belief, as well as the right not to believe in any religion."