

# Indian pastor charged with forced conversion

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(Christian Today)

A pastor in India and his wife have been arrested and charged under the controversial forced conversion laws, reports Release International.

The police have locked their church and placed it under police guard, after a man who was baptised levelled charges of forced conversion and allurement.

Police raided the church on August 4 and took Pastor Sam Oommen into custody, along with his wife and two children. They later returned the children to a well-wisher.

Pastor Oommen, of the Full Gospel Church of God in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, has been charged under the controversial Anti-Conversion Law.

Release International's partners say the charges are false and the man who brought them was baptised with his consent. But so far efforts to release the pastor and his wife on bail have proved fruitless.

'India's growing anti-conversion movement puts the church in real jeopardy,' says Andy Dipper, the Chief Executive of Release International, which serves persecuted Christians worldwide.

'Christians who talk of heaven could be charged with allurement, and those who speak of sin and judgment could be charged with conversion by force. Christian relief and charity workers could also find themselves accused of bribing people to become Christians.'

Growing numbers of states are being pressed to bring in these laws by Hindu militants. They're concerned at conversions among the Dalits – the lowest of the low of Indian society. The laws are also backed by right-wing nationalists who believe that to be Indian is to be Hindu and will not tolerate other faiths.

'These laws pose a growing threat to the millions of Christian believers in India and those of other religions,' says Andy Dipper.

Release International's Indian partners describe a 'vicious campaign of arresting innocent servants of God under fabricated stories'. And they warn the laws are being 'abused by people with ulterior motives'.

Anti-conversion laws are now in force in five states, reports news agency Compass Direct – Gujarat, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh. Similar laws have also been passed but are yet to be implemented in Arunachal Pradesh and Rajasthan states.

Through its international network of missions Release International supports Christians imprisoned for their faith and their families in 30 nations. It supports church workers, pastors and their families, and provides training, Bibles, Christian literature and broadcasts. Release International is a member of the UK organisations Global Connections, the Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Network.

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