

# **‘Allah’ Challenges Ministries in Malaysia**

## **Controversy Christian**

The controversy over the use of the word *Allah* in Malaysia will return to court on May 8.

The Court of Appeal will hear the challenge by six state Islamic authorities against the 2009 ruling upholding the right to publish the Arabic word for God in church literature. The Islamic councils for Selangor, Federal Territory, Kedah, Malacca, Johor and Terengganu insist that the word *Allah* was exclusive to Islam.

The conflict threatens to drive a wedge between Christians and the majority Malay-Muslim community. Tempers flared in the initial argument, and 10 places of worship nationwide—including churches, mosques and a gurdwara—were attacked following the High Court decision. Several mission schools were also damaged.

While politics seems to be more the overtone than religious persecution, Bill Lohr with Faith Comes by Hearing says it's still a tricky situation. The bigger issue is how this idea might spread to other Muslim-majority countries where FCBH has partners.

“We’re not a translation organization. We do the recording, so our translating partners, obviously, have to do this work before us,” he says. “So it affects two different groups of people: the translators, and then it affects our work in recording, as well.”

Whether or not they use the word *Allah* in their recordings, Lohr says they take their cues from the national translation team that speaks the language.

For the most part, "They push forward and almost all translators will use it, if that's the case in the translation," Lohr explains. "We will continue to record that language, but it is something that will continue to come up."

That brought the question of whether their partners are targeted by extremists who resent a recording team's presence. Unfortunately, Lohr says, "we've had issues recently, and it is a highly-Islamic area. We had a recording team in there, and they didn't want a recording team to be in there; it wasn't even an issue of the word 'Allah.' It was just the recording. We've had threats against them, and that will always continue."

Lohr goes on to attribute the expected push-back to their vision: "We're providing the true Word of God, and there's a conflict there. We know, as Christians, that there's going to be a continuing conflict, and there's really nothing that we're going to do to change that. But we do need to be aware that the issue is going to come up."

However, the outreach devised two ways to approach the situation. First, they find the right recording team. "We have some people who are committed to getting God's Word into a format that people can use," Lohr notes. "So when they go into these countries, they know exactly what they're facing."

Second, FCBH is making use of technology so that the recording team can stay out of sight. "There's a very unique thing that's coming up that will help in some of these situations, and that's virtual recording. We're actually doing recording online."

It means participants don't have to risk their safety, explains Lohr. "We can go and get voices of people who speak those languages; they don't necessarily have to live in that region. They can be anywhere in the world if they have a computer, microphone, and internet connection."

Regardless of the ruling on May 8, Malaysia's predicament seems to be a precedent-setting one for Christians. If *Allah* is deemed exclusive to Islam, it will be dangerous for gospel workers to use. Even if the ruling upholds the High Court's decision that the term is an Arabic word used in common language, the ruling is likely to provoke hostile response.

Lohr says, "It really is a prayer of protection for the teams that are there, the translators that are there. And we would ask for prayer that this new technology that's come up would really be able to take off and would be able to expand."