

Evangelists Not Intimidated by Nepal's Anti-Conversion Law

In about a month and a half, Nepal is supposed to have a new constitution ready to go.

Faced with an Aug. 31 deadline, there's a high risk of a collapsed peace process should the draft not be completed by that time.

The new deadline is the extension of another deadline at the end of May which was missed. The May target came about as the result of a 2008 election that eventually brought about an accord between the Maoist rebels and the government. However, the peace was hinged on meeting a two-year mandate for a new constitution.

The political chaos that could result from another miss could permanently derail what's been accomplished since the civil war ended in 2006.

With such dire warnings ringing in their ears, lawmakers set about working on something they could finish quickly: the penal codes. According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide, a committee established by the government to review those submitted a proposal that would ban all religious propagation.

The concern is that this revision mirrors similar anti-conversion laws throughout India and pushes even further away from religious freedom. Christians have been sounding the alarm over the proposed changes, but Ty Stakes, regional director for HCJB Global Asia Pacific, says their partners are much more steady in their response: "They've experienced persecution before. Almost everybody I know that is a Christian has experienced some sort of persecution from their

families.”

Stakes points out that 25 to 30 years ago, there were hardly any Christians in Nepal. He estimates that today there are probably over 700,000 Christians. They were the trailblazers, so hardship and oppression isn't seen by them as a new thing. “Many of the leaders I know that are older, who lived through the times before the mid '80s and earlier (and were Christians), have been in jail, and they have been prosecuted previously by the government for their faith,” Stakes says.

However, because the church is growing, there are many new believers who haven't experienced persecution yet, and there are questions about the “chilling effect” rumors of trouble might have on evangelists. The answer is simple, Stakes notes: “My friends in Nepal see the political instability as evidence of a continued open door for them to reach out to their communities, to their people for the gospel.”

History brings a great deal of strength and confidence to the foundation laid by the gospel. Stakes says, “The advantage they have is a generation of people who are right there, right now, that can say to the many, many people who have come to Christ in the last decade or so, ‘This is going to be okay. We've lived through this before. Get ready.’ They can prepare for it and speak to it from their experience.”

HCJB Global equips these evangelists for evangelism and church planting. “These are the guys that God has brought to us who want to see a greater evangelism blanket put out there with local radio, so we help them do local radio,” Stakes says.

Many have also established small Bible training schools, as well as leadership training schools, working on the principle of grassroots. “The leadership development process is always behind,” he continues, “so they just keep struggling ahead and teaching people to teach other people.”

With the indigenous church structure setting deep roots, are

there concerns that an anti-conversion law will undo years of work? Stakes notes, "This isn't a done deal yet. The legislation is not in place, and it's not being enforced on any level. The situation for Christians to reach out to their communities hasn't changed as of today."

A new draft constitution is supposed to be presented Aug. 31. There's time to pray. Stakes suggests: "Pray that God will keep the door open, and that He will create momentum in the political process so that as He's working out His will in governments and leadership all around the world, He'll do that in Nepal and will continue to allow the opportunity for the Nepali Church to grow."