

Pakistan Police Beat Pregnant Christian, Husband for Three Days

A Christian couple is facing false charges of theft after police in Abbottabad severely beat the pregnant woman and her husband for three days when they refused to confess, they told Compass.

Salma Emmanuel was taken to a hospital in critical condition on Nov. 7, the life of her unborn child also threatened, she said.

In Abbottabad, 50 kilometers (31 miles) northeast of Islamabad in the Hazara region of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, the 30-year-old Emmanuel and her husband, Emmanuel Rasheed, a 39-year-old TV repairman, said that they were inexplicably arrested after the Muslim woman who employed Emmanuel as a maid had allowed the Christian woman to temporarily store some of her jewelry at her employer's house.

Emmanuel told Compass by phone that police arrested them on Nov. 5, keeping her at the Women's Police Station for interrogation and her husband at the City Police Station—where they told Rasheed he would be released, he said, if he renounced Christ and became a Muslim.

Emmanuel said that upon reaching the police station, an inspector identified only as Nazia and two other policewomen started punching and kicking her and striking her with batons, demanding that she “confess her crime.”

“I begged them for mercy, pleading that I am five months pregnant, but they continued their merciless onslaught for over three hours,” she said. ‘They continued to try to force me to admit to the crime, even threatening that they would

kill my baby, but I refused to confess a false allegation.”

She said that after three days, when she was “on the verge of dying,” police called her brother-in-law to the station and told him to take her to a hospital.

“I had complete faith in Jesus and trusted that He would rescue me and Emmanuel from this great problem,” she said. “It was our faith that kept us going ... this was the first time either of us had ever encountered the police, let aside being charged in any case, so you can imagine what we underwent.”

Emmanuel was treated at Benazir Shaheed Hospital, where doctors began efforts to save her and the fetus.

Although the doctor on duty confirmed that her body bore marks of severe violence, Deputy Superintendent of Police Aziz Afridi denied that police had tortured her. After reports of the violence reached local media, however, the deputy inspector general of Haraza Division, Dr. Naeem Khan, ordered an investigation.

As Emmanuel was fighting for her life at the hospital, Rasheed was undergoing a similar treatment at the City Police Station.

“The police beat me up mercilessly,” he said. “They kept on asking me to confess to the burglary, but I did not submit to their pressure. It was *Eid al-Adha* [Muslim Festival of Sacrifice, a three-day public holiday in Pakistan] on Nov. 7, and their torture continued during those days.”

Rasheed said police tried to convert him to Islam while he was in custody.

“A policeman offered to remove the theft charges against me if I was willing to renounce Christianity and convert to Islam,” he said. “I told him that no matter what happens, I will not renounce my faith, nor would I confess the false charges made against us.”

Emmanuel said she started working as a maid at the home of Ghazala Riaz around a year ago. She was one of four servants who returned to their homes each day after finishing their tasks. On Oct. 30, she said, she had gone to a jeweler to get her gold ornaments (about 100 grams) polished in preparation for her brother's wedding when Riaz phoned her in need of some work at the house.

"I went straight to madam's home, and before starting my work, I asked her to keep my jewelry in her cupboard for safety, and that I would take it home the next day," Emmanuel said. "Madam put the jewelry in her locker, and I returned home after ending my chores, without even the slightest idea of what was going to happen next."

Emmanuel said that at about midnight, Riaz called her and told her that there had been a burglary at the house, with 900,000 rupees (\$10,095), 300 grams of gold ornaments, including Emmanuel's jewelry, and a laptop missing.

The Christian couple rushed to Riaz's house, where police had already arrived.

"Madam told the police that my ornaments were also among those taken by the burglars. The police recorded my statement and also asked questions of my husband," she said.

The couple has three children—the oldest 12, the youngest 5—so one of the parents stays home with them when the other goes to work, Rasheed said.

"The police allowed us to go home after three or four hours, but in the afternoon they raided our house and took both of us into custody on an informal report," Rasheed said, adding that police told them that the Muslim family suspected that they were involved in the burglary.

"My wife and I protested at this false allegation and asked the police to consider the fact that we had also suffered a

great loss, but they wouldn't listen to us," he said.

Police released them on the evening of Nov. 1 after trying various tactics to get a favorable statement, Rasheed said.

"In the meantime, the police obtained a search warrant of our house and combed through our belongings, but they could not find anything from our home," he said.

On Nov. 5, under pressure from an army colonel related to the Muslim family, police again picked up the couple from their home, they said. The three days of beatings followed.

"We may be poor, but our poverty has never shaken our faith in God," Rasheed said. "He has always provided for our needs, and I knew He would release us from this misery because we are innocent."

He happily told how police were unable to find any evidence against the couple, leading to his release from jail on bail on Nov. 17. His wife's bail hearing has been set for Dec. 8.

The burglary charges are not the only test of the couple's faith. Emmanuel, who was also working as a child-minder in a local school besides working as domestic help, has lost both her jobs. When Rasheed was jailed, his employer immediately found a replacement.

"I used to earn about 7,000 rupees (\$80) per month, while Salma used to earn around 5,000 rupees (\$56) per month," he said. "At the moment both of us are jobless and are being looked after by our relatives ... They are the ones who pooled money to hire us a lawyer, otherwise it would have been difficult for us to fight this case."

As Emmanuel heals, she said her heart goes out to those wrongly accused of crimes.

"Madam and her family did not name any of their Muslim servants in the investigation, but we stand vindicated after

the police could not find any evidence against us,” she said. “Even though I’ve lost my gold ornaments, which I had saved for my daughter, I have faith that God will compensate for our loss.”

Christian rights advocate Napoleon Qayyum told Compass this was not the first incident in which a Christian maid has been illegally detained and tortured in Pakistan, which is more than 95 percent Muslim. Last year in April, a 14-year-old Christian maid, Sumera Pervaiz, was illegally detained and tortured by an air force officer in Islamabad, he said. No action was taken against the family, he added, because of their influential status.

“I wrote a letter to the chief justice of Pakistan’s Supreme Court, which was also published in the press, requesting him to take notice of the sad incident, but there has been no response from the country’s apex court,” Qayyum said. “It seems that, like other government institutions, the judiciary is also ignoring the rights of minorities.”