

Pregnant Woman Beaten in Pakistani Jail Granted Bail

A judge this month granted bail to a Christian woman falsely charged with theft in Abbottabad after police failed to produce evidence incriminating her, she said.

Salma Emmanuel, 30, was freed on bail on Dec. 8. She and her husband were severely beaten for three days when they refused to confess, and she was taken to a hospital in critical condition on Nov. 7, the life of her unborn child also threatened.

Emmanuel told Compass by phone from Abbottabad, 50 kilometers (31 miles) northeast of Islamabad in the Hazara region of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, that the judge granted bail after police failed to produce evidence against her. Her husband, 30-year-old TV repairman Emmanuel Rasheed, had been freed on bail on Nov. 17. Rasheed said that as he was mercilessly beaten, police tried to convert him to Islam.

Emmanuel said that her faith in God was strong from the beginning of her ordeal in the Muslim-majority country, where Christians are routinely denied legal rights.

"Both of us knew we were innocent, and that they would not be able to find anything against us," she said. "We had complete faith in the Lord that He will not forsake us, and our bails are a testimony to the fact."

Emmanuel said that police had discriminated against the couple from the outset.

"The police tortured both of us, and despite our hue and cry that we were not thieves, they continued with their harsh treatment," she said. "Now they have included the other servants in the investigation, but not once have they even

touched them. They have just been questioned.”

The couple lost their life savings—gold ornaments of 100 grams—and both have lost their jobs as a result of the false charges and are depending on relatives to cover their living expenses, she said.

“My husband goes out every day to find work but has been unsuccessful so far,” she said. “This Christmas we didn’t have money to buy clothes for our children, and neither did we have any explanation to make them understand why we were so helpless. But we have witnessed the mercy of the Lord and have faith that this time shall pass, too.”

The couple has three children—the oldest 12, the youngest 5.

Emmanuel’s case was highlighted in Pakistan’s broadcast and print media when she was brought to the hospital in critical condition five months pregnant.

Ghazala Riaz, who employed Emmanuel as a maid in her house a year ago, on Oct. 30 accused the couple of theft, alleging that they had stolen a laptop, 900,000 rupees (\$10,095) and 300 grams of gold ornaments, including Emmanuel’s own jewelry, which Emmanuel had given to Riaz for safekeeping the same day.

Police who beat Emmanuel and her husband threatened to kill her unborn child, but the Christian couple refused to confess a false allegation, they said.

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.