



Afghan Christian Widow and Daughters Stranded in India, Fear Persecution in Homeland

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Washington -- International Christian Concern (ICC) has learned that an Afghan Christian widow and three of her daughters were denied refugee status by the UN in New Delhi, India for the second time last month despite fears that being deported to their homeland may mean imprisonment for apostasy.

An Afghan widow and three of her daughters, whose names cannot be disclosed for security reasons, received a deportation notice from the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs after their first application for asylum was rejected by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in October 2009. When the mother reapplied in July 2011 with her three daughters and the child of a fourth, widowed daughter, only the widowed daughter and grandchild were accepted. The others are no longer permitted to correspond with the UNHCR office and are currently living in India as illegal immigrants.

"All members of the family left Afghanistan for the same reason, all of them are Christians, and all are facing the same kind of problem," said Obaid S. Christ, a leader of the Afghan Christian community in New Delhi. "If two members of the same family are recognized as refugees and four others are denied, there is definitely something wrong with the UNHCR judgment system. We believe that the UNHCR office blindly closed their application without making any inquiry, investigation, or considering the new facts and real danger that these women are facing back in their home country."

The UNHCR in New Delhi came under increasing pressure in June 2011 after rejecting the applications of eight Afghan Christian families who had recently fled persecution in their homeland. Like the widow and her three daughters, all eight families were denied on the basis that they failed to meet the criteria set forth in Article 6B of the UNHCR Statute which states that a person can receive refugee status if "[he or she has a] well-founded fear of persecution by reason of his race, religion, nationality or political opinion..." Two of the eight cases have since been accepted, two have been reclosed, and the rest have yet to be reopened.

The UNHCR's failure to recognize religious-based asylum seekers in India and other countries led Congressman Jeff Duncan to introduce an amendment to the FY12 Foreign Relations Authorization Act that elevates the importance of international religious freedom in the UNHCR. The amendment, proposed in July, requires the UN body to conduct a review of refugee-based claims and provide religious freedom training for its staff in order to "prevent future grief for refugees on religious freedom grounds."

Aidan Clay, ICC Regional Manager for the Middle East, said, "In 2011, at least two Christians in Afghanistan were imprisoned by the Karzai administration, another was brutally beheaded by the Taliban, and nearly all Afghan Christians lived in fear of persecution. There is no evidence to suggest that the situation for Christians is improving, but every indication that it is only getting worse. Deporting the Christian widow and her three daughters back to Afghanistan will lead to inevitable hardship, if not imprisonment or even death. We urge the UNHCR to immediately reopen and approve this family's applications for asylum."

[International Christian Concern](#)

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