

29th June 2020

EFI STATEMENT ON THE CUSTODIAL KILLINGS IN SATHANKULAM, TAMIL NADU

Evangelical Fellowship of India condoles the custodial death of P. Jayaraj (59) and his son, Emmanuel Benicks (31), and condemns their gruesome torture in the police station of Sathankulam town of Thoothukudi district in Tamil Nadu.

The two belonged to the Nadar Christian community and owned a mobile phone store in the town. The father and son were arrested on 19 June by Sathankulam Police on the charge that they had defied COVID-19 lockdown regulations. The family said they were sodomized with rods by two sub-inspectors and two constables. They were bleeding profusely when they were produced before Magistrate P. Saravanan who overlooked their trauma and remanded them again to police custody on 20 June.

With fatal internal injuries, Benicks died in the Kovilpatti Government Hospital on 21 June. Jayaraj died the next morning. The police have also been accused of fomenting case and communal tensions in the city.

The Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India on 21 February had reported a case from the same police station in which seven Christian pastors were taken into custody and assaulted. The police – Sub Inspector Raguganesh and Head Constable Murugan – beat them with batons causing injuries on their legs and backbone. The Christians were later released after human rights groups intervened in the matter.

Evangelical Fellowship of India calls on competent authorities for justice in the custodial death of Jayaraj and Benicks. Though the accused officers have been suspended, but they are free to terrorise witnesses. They must be arrested and charged with murder. According to the National Crime Records Bureau data of 2018, Tamil Nadu accounts for second-highest deaths in police custody. Gujarat being the first.

Evangelical Fellowship of India calls on the Central Government to take immediate measures in initiating police reforms in the country. Police brutality has become a global concern and continues to be a major cause of worry in the Indian subcontinent. The impunity with which police officers have thrashed and tortured civilians during lockdown curfews in every state has been widely covered in print and audio-visual media.

Minorities and Dalits are the worst victims. Thus far in 2020, the Religious Liberty Commission of EFI has reported 132 incidents of religious persecution against the minority Christian community in India. Despite the COVID-19 lockdown, reports of violence against Christian pastors and church members have continually poured in from all over the country.

Released by



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