

[Christians Accused In Aid Misuse Scam](#)

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USAID funds are used for conversion programs

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The International Organization Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA/Nepal) has generated controversy by proselytizing in Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. ADRA is the humanitarian aid branch of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, an international organization. It has ten million members and is worth an estimated \$15.6 billion. With 5,400 schools, the church has the largest Christian school system after the Roman Catholics. Critics charge that it has been violating the terms and conditions for operating in Nepal by carrying out illegal conversion activities.

ADRA was the subject of a lengthy two-part critical report in the August 13 and 14, 1998, issues of the Los Angeles Times, one of the world's largest and most prestigious newspapers. In just the last two years, write investigators Eric Lictblau and Tom Gorman, ADRA received "US\$85 million in federal cash, food and freight, plus tens of millions more from other nations." "The aims of the overseas relief effort are no doubt righteous," they state, "bringing medicine to the sick, food to the hungry, schooling to the unlearned. But they are entrusted largely with US public funds to do it, and that is the nub of many of the problems. Along with that assistance have come

serious questions about how it has been used--from accusations of corruption to complaints of unlawful proselytizing." It is illegal to use US government money for conversion work, they explain, but the distinction can be hard to maintain. The article quotes a relief worker in Africa, "If I'm going to build a road, I'm going to have it go past an Adventist church." The article covers global problems with ADRA's activities internationally and specifically cites the situation in Nepal as an example of the pursuit of conversion goals under the guise of humanitarian aid. Many of the organizations sharing the USAID's \$1.4 billion yearly budget are Christian. The agency attempts to see that the aid is not used for conversion. But the situation is that villagers do not know better and believe the aid being given is dependent upon their converting, even when conversion is not directly demanded as a condition of the aid.

The specific allegations against ADRA Nepal include the use of Asian Aid funds to proselytize students by sending them to study in their colleges in Roorkee and Pune in India; the conversion of students at the Nepal Adventist School by insisting they to attend the Banepa City Church operated in the student's hostel in Banepa; the misuse of duty-free facility to import recording equipment by recording Christian materials; and in covert programs of proselytization.

The matter came to a head a year ago when veteran leader of the UML political party and former Education Minister Modnath Prashrit said that ADRA Nepal is carrying on religious conversion by spending millions of rupees. ADRA denied all allegations made against the organization.

Following the formal complaint lodged against ADRA with the Ministry of Health, a committee was formed under the convenorship of Dr. Durga Prasad Manandhar, Special Secretary of Ministry of Health. The Committee requested ADRA to stop raising funds for the Adventist School in Banepa, shut down its recording studio and in general adhere to the guidelines set down when the organization entered the country.

At a press conference convened by the Nepal-based World Hindu Federation figures were presented showing that by 1998 over 400,000 people in Nepal have been converted to Christianity, up from 5 in 1951. They claimed that many of the 81 international non-governmental organizations working in Nepal engage in

conversion to some degree. They pointed out that the combined budgets of the INGOs is equal to half of Nepal's total government expenditures, giving the INGO's extraordinary influence.

Gyanendra Ghale, a disgruntled former employee of ADRA, presented audio and visual facts during the WHF press conference in which he showed how USAID grants were used by ADRA for conversion in Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. He has dozens of internal documents to back up his charges. Subsequent to these revelations, the government changed in Nepal, and the new government was unwilling to imperil badly needed foreign aid by pursuing the charges against ADRA--who tactfully curtailed their more controversial projects.

It is illegal to convert a person in Nepal to another religion, but the law is not enforced. A man is liable to be imprisoned for three years if found trying to convert a person, six years if successful. But since 1990, no person has been imprisoned, although hundreds of thousands have been converted. Networking among the Hindu organizations will greatly help to expose the missionaries involved. If not done, the Hindus will

have a great price to pay for their indifference.

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