

Priest, nun languish in jail for killing crane chicks



August 25, 2012: A Catholic priest and a nun accused of killing crane chicks and violating forest laws continue to languish in a North Indian jail. Fr. Simon D’Cunha and Sr. Deena completed 17 days on Friday, in a sub jail in Haldwani, a town in Uttarakhand state.

“We are very much disappointed and sad that bail has been denied to them,” Bishop Anthony Fernandes of Bareilly told ucanindia.in. The prelate said they had expected them to be out on bail on Aug. 17. The duo was arrested Aug. 8 for violating the wildlife act when they allegedly killed more than 250 white crane chicks while

trimming a tree in a school compound.

A district court rejected their bail application on the ground that their act was “inhuman and anti-environmental and done deliberately,” Father Pius D’Souza, diocesan chancellor and education secretary, told ucanindia.in. Fr. D’Cunha is the manager of Prabhat Tara Junior School in Pachuakhera, another town in Uttarakhand. Sister Deena, a member of the Queens of the Apostles congregation, is its principal.

Bishop Fernandes said that they have already appealed to the High Court that has fixed the hearing for Aug. 29. The prelate said the priest and the nun were ignorant about the wildlife act and had no intention to kill the chicks. “The entire diocese has been praying for the duo since their arrest,” added the prelate who has visited the duo in jail several times.

He and Father D’Souza said initially the priest and the nun were “very upset” but now they have taken it as a challenge. “They conduct prayer services and counsel other prisoners,” Fr. D’Souza said. The bishop said the nun was hospitalized for a few days as she was kept in a crowded cell with no proper place to sleep. Even Fr. D’Cunha is also unwell, he added. Fr. D’Souza said the school set up in 1975 caters to poor students from five villages, and only 5 percent of them are Catholic. The rest are Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.

“The villagers are very shocked by the arrest,” said Fr. D’Souza and added village council chiefs had met the local sub deputy magistrate to plead for the Church people’s release. “But the poor villagers are helpless and they can’t do anything more,” Fr. D’Souza added.