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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 May 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Requesting that India Repeal all Anti-Conversion Laws and Take Immediate Steps to Protect Christians from Religious Persecution

1. Introduction

India is one of the worst places for Christians and other religious minorities because of Hindu nationalism, particularly from Hindu extremists who believe that no faith other than Hinduism is welcome in India.(1) Further, more and more states in India have implemented anti-conversion laws, which have created a hostile environment.(2) These laws have resulted in Christians being falsely accused of carrying out religious conversions, and these accusations have led to Hindu mobs terrorizing Christians and churches.(3) Additionally, Hindu extremists threaten Christians to denounce their Christian faith.(4) Because of this, India is ranked as the eleventh most dangerous country in the world for Christians.(5)

2. Background

Despite Christians only accounting for 2.3% of India's population, violence against Christians in India continues to rise.(6) In 2022, there were 1,198 reports of violence perpetrated against Christians.(7) In 2023, there were 731 incidents of violence against Christians.(8) Now, in just the first seventy-five days of 2024, there have already been 161 documented cases of violence against Christians.(9) This means that on average, there are approximately two cases of violence being carried out every day against Christians in India.

Persecution against Christians is not just carried out by Hindu extremists.(10) In some cases, there are examples of state-sponsored harassment where police have filed false allegations of religious conversions against pastors and religious leaders for praying at social gatherings.(11) In fact, in the first seventy-five days of 2024, approximately 122 Christians have been detained or arrested because of false accusations of carrying out religious conversions.(12) A report issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India on February 7, 2024, stated that "[a]ttacks on Christians continue to increase in different parts of India. Destruction of homes and churches, harassment of personnel serving in orphanages, hostels, educational and healthcare institutions on false allegations of conversion have become common."(13)

3. Violations

The incidents listed below are merely the tip of the iceberg of a long list of violent attacks being perpetrated against Christians. Religiously motivated attacks against Christians are all too common, and the government has not taken meaningful action to stop the violence.

On May 4, 2024, Kosa Kawasi, a twenty-two-year-old man, was attacked and killed by a mob that was led by his uncle and cousin.(14) Members of Kosa's family became angry when he converted to Christianity and refused to renounce his Christian faith.(15) His family, and members of the community, then tried to evict him and take his assets.(16) Even though Kosa had sought intervention from the police, no action was taken and the police described the attack as a "property dispute."(17) Kosa's wife was also injured in the attack, but was able to flee to a local hospital where she received treatment for her injuries.(18)

In April 2024, a group of Sikhs attacked a Christian pastor and other Christians with swords and knives in Punjab state.(19) The attackers were mad that they were conducting religious activities and told the pastor that "[w]e have warned you earlier as well to not conduct church and not convert people, but you have not paid heed."(20)

On February 28, 2024, attackers burned down a prayer hall in Ramanagara.(21) The attackers broke into the prayer hall and dumped petrol throughout the hall before setting it on fire.(22)

On February 13, 2024, at least twenty Christians were injured following a confrontation with a mob of Hindus.(23) The confrontation arose over a land dispute regarding a public road near a Methodist Church.(24) The Hindu mob used bricks from a construction site to attack the Christians, which resulted in twelve Christians being sent to the hospital, with three among them in critical condition.(25) While police registered the case, no arrests were made.(26)

On February 6, 2024, village leaders summoned twelve Christian families and ordered that they deny their Christian faith.(27) This led to a mob attacking the Christians with axes, knives, and sticks.(28) The Christians fled and hid in the jungle until police were able to negotiate an agreement between the Christians and the village leaders two days later.(29) However, just four days later, villagers gathered at the home of one of the Christian families and demanded that they recant their faith.(30) When they refused to do so, the family was chased into the jungle by a group of approximately twenty men.(31) One man was able to escape, but the attackers beat his father until he passed out.(32) Sadly, the son has not been able to return home to see his kids and family out of fear that he will be attacked again.(33) He said: "I cannot go back home to see my children . . . Our assailants are on the watch, eyeing on our house, waiting for me to return. God is our only hope. Please pray for us. I can see no way forward."(34)

That same month, eight Christians were attacked as they were leaving a church service at a local house in Chhattisgarh.(35) According to a witness, a Hindu mob began harassing the pastor and members of the congregation as they were leaving a church service.(36) The mob proceeded to beat the Christians with clubs before emergency services arrived and took the Christians to a hospital to be treated for their injuries.(37) Previously, radical Hindus had accused the Christians of carrying out forced religious conversion activities.(38)

In February 2024, a Hindu group called the Kutumba Surakshya Parishad told Christian schools in Assam state to remove all Christian symbols, including clothing such as religious habits and cassocks.(39) This decree was issued because the Hindu group was worried that Christian schools were being used to carry out religious conversions.(40) According to the president of the Kutumba Surakshya Parishad, "Christian Missionaries are converting schools and educational institutes into religious institutes. We will not allow it."(41)

4. Request

As egregious as these violations are, we want to point out again, that these are just a few examples of the rampant persecution occurring in India. Therefore, we want to remind India of its obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which enshrine the "right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion," including the right for everyone to "individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."(42) India must take action to repeal anti-conversion laws, which clearly inhibit the ability of its citizens to practice and adopt a religion of their choice. Further, anti-conversion laws have been used to legitimize harassing and attacking Christians who are simply practicing the tenets of their faith. India must take immediate steps to ensure that everyone can practice his religion without being arrested or attacked. Finally, India must also ensure that its police, courts, and government are not complicit in the persecution of Christians. Rather, its mandate must be to protect its Christian citizens from attacks and injustice and fully prosecute and punish the perpetrators. India must put a stop, once and for all, to the unrestrained and pervasive persecution of its minorities.

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