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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

**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.

[23 August 2023]

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

## **REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. RECOGNIZE THE CONTINUING AND GROWING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN INDIA AND HOLD INDIA ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In just the last two months, June and July of 2023, there have been a staggering number of reports of Christian persecution happening in India. A country whose Prime Minister boasted that, “[m]y government will ensure that there is complete freedom of faith and that everyone has the undeniable right to retain or adopt the religion of his or her choice without coercion or undue influence.” Who then further went on to claim that “[his] government will not allow any religious group, belonging to the majority or the minority, to incite hatred against others, overtly or covertly.”<sup>(1)</sup> Unfortunately, these claims seem to be empty words when looking at what is actually occurring in India.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

As we have previously reported, India is currently ranked the eleventh most dangerous country in the world for Christians to live.<sup>(2)</sup> In the last five years, India has seen a dramatic increase in violence against Christians,<sup>(3)</sup> and unfortunately that trend seems to be growing exponentially. Violent Hindu mobs attack Christians, kill them, and destroy homes and churches with impunity, and unfortunately, the devastation in Manipur that we reported in our last submission, continues.

In addition, anti-conversion laws are used to falsely accuse, intimidate, imprison, and attack Christians. Present in India is a millennia old caste system, which categorizes individuals based on their skin color and occupation into five separate groups.<sup>(4)</sup> There are Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (farmers, traders, and merchants), Shudras (laborers), and Dalits, who are considered the “untouchables.”<sup>(5)</sup> Although India has outlawed discrimination based on a person’s caste, much of the modern-day persecution of low caste groups considered unclean and low-born still occurs, especially through the misuse of anti-conversion laws at the hands of the Hindu majority.<sup>(6)</sup> Christians are a particular target of the fundamentalist Hindus because Christianity undermines India’s caste system. Those belonging to the upper castes fear that Christianity will free lower castes from their socially and politically low status.<sup>(7)</sup> As a result, Christians face relentless persecution.

Much of the violence against Christians is instigated by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an extremist Hindu nationalist organization that aims to change India from being a secular, religiously diverse country into one that acknowledges Hinduism as the only original religion of the land.<sup>(8)</sup> Apparent in the RSS’s mission statement is their belief in “erosion of the nation’s integrity in the name of secularism,” and the belief that the remedy for this erosion is “through organising the entire society and ensuring protection of Hindu Dharma.”<sup>(9)</sup> What this means for Christians and other religious minorities in India is an extinguishing of their rights in the name of Hinduism, leading to increased intolerance.

### **3. VIOLATIONS**

According to the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations (FIACONA), a charitable organization that gathers on the ground information concerning religious persecution of Christians in India, the months of June and July 2023, have been fraught with violations, continuing the devastation in Manipur documented in our last report. Here are just a few examples:

On August 3, 2023, a woman stripped and raped by a mob in Manipur, claims the police were complicit, after a video was circulated documenting the event.(10)

On July 26, 2023, a Christian orphanage, housing seventy-three children, in Madhya Pradesh was raided and shut down for alleged “conversion.”(11)

On July 23, 2023, a church was shut down and seven people, including a pastor and a woman were arrested and charged under anti-conversion laws in Uttar Pradesh.(12)

On July 23, 2023, a Christian man with Bethlehem Gospel was arrested for allegedly luring poor people to convert to Christianity.(13)

On July 19, 2023, two men and a Christian priest were sentenced to two years of rigorous imprisonment under the Madhya Pradesh Religious Freedom Act for converting community members.(14)

On July 17, 2023, police arrested a man for unlawful conversion for allegedly converting 230 Dalit families to Christianity.(15) The police also confiscated Bibles and other Christian books.(16)

On July 3, 2023, a case was registered against nineteen Christians, with ten of them being arrested for unlawful conversion in Uttar Pradesh.(17)

On July 2, 2023, fresh violence erupted again in Manipur.(18) Four people were killed, three people injured, three churches and twenty-nine houses were torched, one of those killed was beheaded.(19)

In July 2023, seven Christians were brutally attacked during a Sunday church service in Chhattisgarh, with all seven sustaining life-threatening injuries.(20)

In June alone, United Christian Forum (UCF) reported that there were eighty- eight incidents of violence against Christians (about three per day).(21) It also acknowledged that thirty-five pastors are still imprisoned, with all of them being repeatedly denied bail.(22)

On June 21, 2023, a catholic church was attacked and vandalized in Bangalore.(23)

On June 10, 2023, tribal Christians in Chhattisgarh protested against a call from Hindus to remove them from a list of people eligible for government benefits in jobs and educational institutions.(24)

On June 9th, 2023, the violence in Manipur continued from May, when Meitei militants disguised in Indian Army uniforms violently attacked a church.(25) The attack occurred around dawn during their morning prayers.(26) Because the villagers had no suspicions as to the attackers’ real identity, they assumed the attackers were there for a regular Army combing operation. After the villagers gave way to the militants, the militants opened fire with automatic rifles. The attackers killed three innocent Christians and injured two more.

Again, these violations reported above represent just a few of those that occurred in the last few months in India.

#### 4. REQUEST

As Christian persecution in India is increasing almost on a daily basis, we continue to call on India to stop the persecution and escalating violence against Christians. We are encouraged by Prime Minister Modi’s statement that his government will ensure that there is complete freedom of faith allowed in India. However, we call on India to ensure that the guarantee of religious liberty does not turn out to be empty words, but indeed a true guarantee for all citizens of India, especially the persecuted Christians.

Furthermore, in order to verify Prime Minister Modi's statement that everyone has the right to retain or adopt the religion of their choice, India's anti-conversion laws must be repealed, and the false accusations and arrests must stop. The U.N. should recognize and hold India accountable for these gross human rights violations.

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