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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.

[5 February 2024]

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

REQUESTING THAT THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF URGE INDIA TO STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS

1. INTRODUCTION

Violence against Christians among the Kuki tribes continues to run rampant in Manipur, India following a summer of killings, sexual abuse, and the destruction of homes and churches. As of September 6, 2023, at least 187 have been killed, 70,000 displaced, and over 1,700 homes and 253 churches have been destroyed in just Manipur.(1) Overall, 720 incidents against Christians in India were reported by the end of 2023.(2) Attacks and persecution against the church and Christians in India are at their highest levels and government officials have turned a blind eye, or are actively involved in, these acts against the church.(3) The Prime Minister continues to present himself and the government as welcoming to Christians by hosting several Christian leaders on Christmas day, as well as with statements such as, “[t]he nation proudly acknowledges the contribution of the Christian community.”(4) Members from the United Christian Forum, however, have voiced their skepticism regarding the Prime Minister’s statements and actions: “This is a political gimmick and image-making by Prime Minister Modi ahead of the next elections...We are concerned over the silence of Prime Minister Modi, who praises Christian service publicly but does nothing to stop the increasing violence and persecution of Christians.”(5)

2. BACKGROUND

As we have previously reported, India is still ranked the eleventh most dangerous country in the world for Christians.(6) In Manipur, violent Hindu Meitei tribes continue to attack Christians and drive them out of their homes. They are not only destroying Christians homes, but also churches. The religious persecution and atrocities committed in Manipur, that we reported in our last submission, continue to devastate the people of Manipur.

But the persecution is not just happening in Manipur. Anti-conversion laws are used throughout India to falsely accuse, intimidate, imprison, and attack Christians. Present in India is an unacceptable millennia old caste system, which categorizes individuals and groups based on their skin color and occupation. Many Christians often are in the Dalit or untouchable category, which is outside the caste system. Hindu extremists in the state believe that all Indians should be Hindu, and any faith outside of Hinduism is not welcome in India.(7) 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.(8)

Much of the violence against Christians is instigated by 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.(9) Apparent in 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 organizing the entire society and ensuring protection of Hindu Dharma.”(10) 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. Sadly, this is happening in India, now.

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 following the summer of violence in Manipur

(mentioned above) have remained fraught with violations throughout India. Examples of which are as follows:

As of January 24, 2024, the government of India has placed a ban on foreign funds for World Vision India, a child-focused humanitarian organization in the country.(11)

On January 23, 2023, a Christian couple was threatened and beaten at a police station in Karnataka when the wife was accused of forced conversion.(12)

Since January 13, 2024, nine people, including two law enforcement officers, have lost their lives in Manipur. Additionally, at least a dozen other have sustained injuries in confrontations.(13)

On the weekend of January 13, 2024, three churches were raided and disrupted by extremists, who warned the congregants that there would be further consequences they continued to meet for worship.(14)

On January 17, 2024, nuns from Missionaries of Charity were forced to vacate due to an attack on three school, which were set on fire and two security officers were killed.(15)

On December 20, 2023, a mass burial was held for 87 of the Kuki Christians. Since the violence began in May 2023 in Manipur, individuals of the thousands that were displaced are dying due to the absence of doctors and essential medicine.(16)

On December 14, 2023, a Catholic singer was beaten to death in a lynching in Jharkhand. Three individuals were arrested following the assault. A tribal activist stated that most of the time Christians are targeted due to personal enmity or property disputes.(17)

On December 3, 2023, two Christians were critically injured, and several others wounded, when Hindu nationalists raided a church service in India's Chhattisgarh state. A church leader stated: "It is going to be all the more difficult for Christians to live safely in the state. As the pro-Hindu political party returns to the government in the state in the recent elections, Christians are worried."(18)

In October 2023, a video, marked "Kuki," emerged from Manipur showing the body of a tribal man being burned in a trench after having been beaten. A Kuki representative related that "around five or six people from the community were said to have been burnt alive."(19)

In October, the birthday party of a two-year-old, whose parents are Christian and whose father mentors Children's Bible Club leaders in addition to holding services in his home, was disrupted when anti-Christian extremists invaded their home.(20) Further, the police apparently are also anti-Christian, as they filed a case against the father instead of the illegal trespassers.(21)

The foregoing examples represent only a fraction of the violations that have been occurring for years.

4. REQUEST

As Christian persecution in India continues, we call on India to cease the persecution and persistent violence against Christians. We continue to hope that Prime Minister Modi's statements regarding the government's promise to ensure freedom of faith in India will actually be honored and implemented. Therefore, we call on India to ensure that the guarantee of religious liberty does not become an empty promise, but indeed a true guarantee for all citizens of India, especially the persecuted Christians.

Furthermore, in order to verify Prime Minister Modi's statements regarding religious freedom, we continue to urge that India's anti-conversion laws be repealed, and the false

accusations and arrests must stop. The U.N. should recognize these problems and hold India accountable for these gross human rights violations.

(1) Press Release: “The crisis in Manipur has reached a breaking point”: United Nations experts call on Indian government to address violent clash and religious freedom violations in Manipur, ADF INTERNATIONAL (Sept. 6, 2023), <https://adfinternational.org/news/un-manipur#:~:text=The%20crisis%20in%20Manipur%2C%20where,and%20largely%20Christian%20Kuki%20Tribes.>

(2) Attacks in India Escalated in 2023, PERSECUTION.ORG (Jan. 10, 2024), <https://www.persecution.org/2024/01/10/attacks-in-india-escalated-in-2023/>.

(3) Id.

(4) Anto Akkara, India’s Modi hosts Christian leaders for Christmas amid rising persecution, CATHOLIC NEWS AGENCY (Dec. 29, 2023, 1:15 PM), <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/256401/india-s-modi-hosts-christian-leaders-for-christmas-amid-rising-persecution.d>.

(5) Id.

(6) India: Hindu extremists believe true Indians are Hindu, and minorities are persecuted, OPEN DOORS: WORLD WATCH LIST (2024), <https://www.opendoors.org.au/world-watch-list/india/>.

(7) Id.

(8) Blessy Mathew Prasad, Dalit Christians – Why Do They Remain at the End of the Stick 75 Years After Independence?, THE CITIZEN (May 3, 2022, 6:29 AM), <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/13/21812/Dalit-Christians---Why-Do-They-Remain-At-the-End-of-the-Stick-75-Years-After-Independence.>

(9) Lauren Frayer & Furkan Latif Khan, The Powerful Group Shaping the Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India, NPR (May 3, 2019, 10:39 AM), <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/03/706808616/the-powerful-group-shaping-the-rise-of-hindu-nationalism-in-india>.

(10) Id.

(11) UCA News reporter, India bans another Christian NGO from receiving foreign funds, UCA NEWS (Jan. 24, 2024, 8:00 AM), <https://www.ucanews.com/news/india-bans-another-christian-ngo-from-receiving-foreign-funds/103925>.

(12) Diana Chandler, Christian couple beaten by mob during questioning at police station in India, THE PATHWAY (Jan. 25, 2024), <https://mbcpathway.com/2024/01/25/christian-couple-beaten-by-mob-during-questioning-at-police-station-in-india/>.

(13) Livemint, Manipur violence: 2 killed, 5 injured in fresh clashes between rival ethnic groups, MINT (Jan. 30, 2024, 10:10 PM), <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/manipur-violence-2-killed-5-injured-in-fresh-clashes-between-rival-ethnic-groups-11706626689453.html>.

(14) Three Indian Churches Raided by Radical Hindus, Pastors Arrested, PERSECUTION.ORG (Jan. 18, 2024), <https://www.persecution.org/2024/01/18/three-indian-churches-raided-by-radical-hindus-pastors-arrested/>.

(15) UCA News reporter, Two killed as fresh violence erupts in India’s Manipur, UCA News (last updated Jan. 22, 2024, 12:11 PM), <https://www.ucanews.com/news/two-killed-as-fresh-violence-erupts-in-indias-manipur/103867>.

(16) Anugrah Kumar, 80 Christians die after being displaced by violence in Manipur, THE CHRISTIAN POST (Jan. 14, 2024), https://www.christianpost.com/news/80-christians-die-after-being-displaced-by-violence-in-manipur.html?utm_source=Weekend&utm_campaign=Weekend&utm_medium=newsletter.

(17) Nirmala Carvalho, Jharkhand: Tribal Christian beaten to death, three people arrested, PIME ASIA NEWS (Dec. 20, 2023), <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Jharkhand:-Tribal-Christian-beaten-to-death,-three-people-arrested-59791.html>.

(18) Karen Faulkner, India: Hindu Nationalists Attack Church, Two Christians Critically Injured, Others Wounded in Chhattisgarh State, WORTHY NEWS (Dec. 11, 2023), <https://www.worthynews.com/91458-india-hindu-nationalists-attack-church-two-christians-critically-injured-others-wounded-in-chhattisgarh-state>.

(19) Vijaita Singh, Video of man's body being burnt surfaces in Manipur, THE HINDU (last updated Oct. 9, 2023, 9:23 PM), <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/video-from-manipur-shows-tribal-mans-body-being-burnt-in-a-trench/article67397062.ece>.

(20) Lyndsey Koh, India: Religious extremists invade Christian home, disrupt toddler birthday party, MISSION NETWORK NEWS (Oct. 03, 2023), <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/india-religious-extremists-invade-christian-home-disrupt-toddler-birthday-party/#:~:text=Threats%20and%20targeting%20of%20Christians,coming%20up%20Sunday%2C%20November%205.>

(21) Id.