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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.

[11 August 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 Senseless Violence

1. INTRODUCTION

Christians in India live in constant fear of being attacked, killed, or arrested because of their faith. Much of this stems from the strict implementation of anti-conversion laws that the Hindu majority have weaponized against Christians.(1) Mere accusations that Christians are engaging in conversion activities are enough to incite a mob to harass and attack Christians who are simply gathered together to worship and pray.

2. BACKGROUND

Article 25 of India's Constitution states that, "all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion," but that this right is "[s]ubject to public order, morality and health . . ."(2) India is also a party to the ICCPR,(3) which provides everyone with the right to "adopt a religion or belief of his choice" and the freedom to "manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."(4) Despite these enshrined protections, Christians face extreme persecution every day. In fact, Open Doors has ranked India as the 11th worst country for Christians in its 2024 World Watch List.(5)

Just last year, there were at least 1,570 reported attacks carried out against Christians, and at least 268 churches were destroyed.(6) Sadly, life is not improving for Christians in India. As of June 2024, the United Christian Forum (UCF) has reported 361 incidents targeting Christians this year alone.(7) Many of these attacks stem from false allegations of religious conversions.(8) These false allegations have led to Christians being arrested, beaten, and killed, and their homes being ransacked.

3. VIOLATIONS

India's anti-conversion laws essentially criminalize individuals for practicing their faith, especially if that faith is Christianity. In July 2024, the Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha passed an amendment to its anti-conversion law, making it even more dangerous.(9)

In July 2024, Allahabad High Court, Justice Aggarwal, rejected the bail application of a Christian accused of religious conversion.(10) In his rejection, Justice Aggarwal expressed that if unlawful religious conversion activities were permitted, it would result in India's Hindu majority population becoming the minority,(11) fully publicizing his bias and disregard for religious freedom.

In June 2024, the Rajasthan government announced it was creating a new anti-conversion law.(12) This is yet another example of a state implementing laws that will be used to target and arrest Christians.

While anti-conversion laws are being used to persecute Christians in many states in India, the Supreme Court of India recently noted in a hearing regarding the Uttar Pradesh's anti-conversion law that "some parts [of the law] may seem to be violative of the fundamental right to religion guaranteed under Article 25 of the Constitution."(13) Although this statement is encouraging, a verbal comment is insufficient. The Supreme Court must be willing to officially implement such views, putting an end to these laws once and for all.

Additionally, mobs that attack Christians have been emboldened by anti-conversion laws to target and silence the Christian minority. Further, government authorities and police have colluded with Hindu extremist groups and have turned a blind eye to the atrocities being carried out against Christians.(14) Some authorities even brush these atrocities aside as

personal or property disputes rather than religiously motivated attacks.(15) Below, we have highlighted just a few cases of Christians being attacked or arrested for practicing their faith in the past couple of months.

On July 21, 2024, a Christian pastor attended a prayer meeting located next to a Hindu temple.(16) When the pastor arrived, a mob attacked the house and accused those gathered of carrying out illegal conversions and even reported it to the police.(17) The mob followed the pastor as he left, pulled him out of his car, and beat him with rods.(18)

On July 14, 2024, approximately 150 Hindu extremists attacked a house church in northern India.(19) The mob broke into the house, vandalized it, and beat the Christians using wooden logs.(20) The attack continued until police arrived and dispersed the mob.(21) Five Christians were severely injured in the attack.(22)

On July 8, 2024, twenty-two-year-old Nilesh Kumar was killed, and his body was found hanging from the ceiling of a shed.(23) Nilesh and his family have been threatened repeatedly by Hindus in the community because of their conversion.(24) In fact, one of the suspects arrested for murdering Nilesh had previously been arrested for threatening the Kumar family.(25)

In July 2024, two Hindu organizations, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal, reported that some Christians were converting people to Christianity by giving people benefits.(26) As a result of these accusations, four Christians were arrested.(27)

On June 24, 2024, a twenty-two-year-old Christian was killed in Chhattisgarh.(28) She was helping her family prepare their field when a mob of extremist Hindu nationalists, including her extended family, attacked her and her family.(29) During the attack, her uncle slit her throat, and the rest of her family managed to run to safety.(30) Previously, her uncle had threatened her and her family to renounce Christianity or be killed.(31)

Over a twenty-day period in June 2024, thirteen Christians were sent to prison over allegations of religious conversions.(32)

On May 5, 2024, a Christian man named Motiram and his father were attacked by villagers who demanded that Motiram renounce his Christian faith.(33) When Motiram refused, the villagers attacked both him and his father with sticks and stones.(34) Motiram was in the hospital for nearly a month while recovering from his injuries.(35)

On May 4, 2024, a Christian man in Chhattisgarh was killed by his own relatives because of his Christian faith during a village celebration.(36)

On March 31, 2024, police stopped two buses carrying 110 passengers for allegedly traveling to an event where religious conversions were taking place.(37) Police then arrested two individuals for allegedly violating anti-conversion laws in Uttar Pradesh.(38)

On March 13, 2024, several Christians were severely attacked and hospitalized in Chhattisgarh.(39) The attackers also damaged their property and forced them from their homes.

On February 3, 2024, Pastor Josemon Pathrose was arrested, and his vehicle and Bible were seized after being accused of running a “conversion racket.”(40)

4. REQUEST

The above cases demonstrate how religiously motivated attacks on Christians are all too common, and the government is taking no action to stop it. In fact, through the enforcement of anti-conversion laws, the government is actively taking part in the persecution of Christians. The Supreme Court of India has correctly suggested that anti-conversion laws are not compatible with its Constitution. The Court must officially implement its views.

India must protect the rights enshrined in its Constitution and immediately repeal all anti-conversion laws that restrict the ability of Christians to freely practice their faith. Further, India must take action to prosecute and stop religiously motivated attacks from being carried out against Christians. It is imperative that all of India's citizens can peacefully practice their faith without the fear of being killed, beaten, attacked, harassed, or arrested. India must uphold the protections enshrined in its own Constitution and the ICCPR.

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- (1) India, OPEN DOORS.
 - (2) India Const. art. 25.
 - (3) Status for India, OHCHR.
 - (4) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, adopted Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171.
 - (5) India, supra note 1.
 - (6) 2023 Persecution of Minority Christians, FIACONA, fiacona.org.
 - (7) Memorandum Pertaining to the Targeted Violence and Hostility Against the Christian Community from Dr. Michael Williams, Nat'l President of the United Christian F., to Shri Kiren Rijju, Honorable Union Minister 1 (July 20, 2024).
 - (8) Id.
 - (9) U.P. Assembly Passes Stringent Bill on Anti-Conversion Law, THE HINDU (July 30, 2024).
 - (10) Christian Forum Sees "Saffron-Tinge" in Allahabad High Court Ruling, MATTERS INDIA (July 5, 2024).
 - (11) Id.
 - (12) In the Process of Making Anti-Conversion Law, Rajasthan Govt Tells SC, THE WIRE (June 19, 2024).
 - (13) Indian Supreme Court: Anti-Conversion Law May be "Unconstitutional", CATH. NEWS AGENCY (June 4, 2024).
 - (14) United Christian Forum Submits Detailed Memorandum to Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju Highlighting Targeted Violence Against Christian Community, FIACONA (July 25, 2024).
 - (15) Id.
 - (16) Nirmala Carvalho, Christian Pastor Attacked in India After Being Accused of "Illegal Conversion", CRUX (July 29, 2024).
 - (17) Id.
 - (18) Id.
 - (19) Attack in India Ends Church's In-Person Worship Services, MORNING STAR NEWS (July 26, 2024).
 - (20) Id.
 - (21) Id.
 - (22) Id.
 - (23) Pastor and Family Devastated by Death of Son in India, MORNING STAR NEWS (July 22, 2024).
 - (24) Id.
 - (25) Id.
 - (26) Nirmala Carvalho, Uttar Pradesh, Four Christians Arrested on Conversion Charges, ASIA NEWS (July 15, 2024).
 - (27) Id.
 - (28) Nirmala Carvalho, Christian Woman Brutally Murdered in India, CRUX (July 6, 2024).
 - (29) Id.
 - (30) Id.
 - (31) Id.
 - (32) 13 Christians Jailed in Northern Indian State, UCA NEWS (June 26, 2024).
 - (33) Williams, supra note 7.
 - (34) Id.
 - (35) Id.
 - (36) Id.

(37) Bijay Kumar Minj, Two Christians Arrested in India on Easter Sunday, UCA NEWS (Apr. 2, 2024).

(38) Id.

(39) Williams, *supra* note 7.

(40) Pastor's Ordeal Shows Challenges Christian Leaders Face in India, MORNING STAR NEWS (June 7, 2024).