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June 19, 2023

The Honorable Joseph Robinette Biden Jr.
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

RE: Request to Discuss India's Refusal to Mitigate Violent Attacks against Christians with Prime Minister Modi

Dear President Biden:

In light of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to the White House to discuss the U.S.-India partnership, the ACLJ requests that you raise the issue of ongoing violence against Christians and the abuse of anti-conversion laws in India with him.

Violent Hindu mobs attack Christians, kill them, and destroy homes and churches with impunity. In addition, anti-conversion laws are used to falsely accuse, intimidate, imprison, and attack Christians. Just recently in Manipur, Hindu mobs murdered at least 147 Christians and burned down 153 churches, 93 offices, 160 villages, and 4,581 houses. Thousands of Christians became homeless due to these attacks.

Mob attacks are often instigated by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an extremist Hindu nationalist organization. As a longtime member of this group himself, Prime Minister Modi is in the key position to end the ongoing persecution but has done nothing. In fact, members of his political party (Bharatiya Janata Party) are known to be complicit in violence against Christians.

President Biden, because the United States is one of the largest trading partners with India that supports India both economically and militarily, we respectfully urge you to raise these matters with Prime Minister Modi and ask that India take swift action to protect Christians from violence and the abuse of anti-conversion laws. Without the condition to protect its religious and ethnic minorities, India must not enjoy the kind of partnership it currently enjoys with the United States. Please see attached documentation for more detailed information regarding Christian persecution in India.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jordan Sekulow".

Jordan Sekulow
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shaheryar Gill".

Shaheryar Gill
Senior Counsel

CC: The Honorable Antony Blinken

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ADDENDUM TO THE LETTER TO PRESIDENT BIDEN REGARDING PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN INDIA

I. INTRODUCTION

India has been ranked as the eleventh worst place for Christians.¹ Violent Hindu mobs attack Christians, kill them,² and destroy homes and churches with impunity.³ Compounding the acute threat of physical violence is the legal weight of India's anti-conversion laws, which are used to intimidate, imprison, and attack Christians.⁴

Despite severe persecution of Christians and other minorities in India, the United States Government continues to support it in many ways. From 2022-2023, the U.S. was India's largest trading partner and was one of the few countries that India had a trade surplus with, boasting \$28 billion in surplus from trade with our country.⁵ President Sakhivel of the Federation of Indian Export Organizations stated that exports to the U.S. are increasing and that he expects trade with the U.S. to continue to grow over the coming months.⁶ In addition to being "India's largest trading partner and investor," the U.S. is India's "largest source of advanced technology."⁷ India has also been the recipient of defense acquisitions from the U.S. to protect against conflict with China and to transport and provide supplies to deployed Indian troops as well as other support from the U.S. *vis-à-vis* the border disputes with China and Pakistan.⁸ As India continues to lean on the U.S. for both economic and military support, we ask that President Biden encourage Prime Minister Modi to take steps to rectify the miscarriage of justice against Christians. The right to free exercise of religion is integral to American democracy and carefully laid out within our Constitution. This intrinsic right is also codified in international treaties that India is obligated to uphold.

It is well known that India is a dangerous place for Christians and other religious minorities. In its Annual Report, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended that the U.S. government "[c]ondemn ongoing religious freedom violations and support religious organizations and human rights groups targeted for their advocacy of religious freedom."⁹ Additionally, USCIRF recommended that the State Department "[d]esignate India as a

¹ *India*, OPEN DOORS UK, <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/india/> (last visited June 13, 2023).

² *Id.*

³ OPEN DOORS, DESTRUCTIVE LIES: DISINFORMATION, SPEECH THAT INCITES VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA 9 (2021), <https://media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/Destructive%20Lies-Full%20version-DIGITAL-ODUK-2021.pdf>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *U.S. Emerges as India's Biggest Trading Partner in FY23 at \$128.55 Billion; China at Second Position*, THE HINDU (Apr. 16, 2023, 2:40 PM), <https://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/us-emerges-as-indias-biggest-trading-partner-in-fy23-at-12855-billion-china-at-second-position/article66743587.ece#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20has%20emerged%20as,ties%20between%20the%20two%20countries.>

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Surendra Kumar, *The Rise and Rise of India-US Relations*, THE SUNDAY GUARDIAN (May 14, 2023), <https://sundayguardianlive.com/opinion/the-rise-and-rise-of-india-us-relations>.

⁸ Sameer P. Lalwani & Vikram J. Singh, *A Big Step Forward in U.S.-India Defense Ties*, USIP (June 6, 2023), <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/06/big-step-forward-us-india-defense-ties>.

⁹ U.S. COMM'N ON INT'L RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, ANNUAL REPORT OF THE U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 24 (2023).

‘country of particular concern,’ . . . for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act” and “[i]mpose targeted sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom.”¹⁰ To date, the State Department has not implemented that recommendation.

II. PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN INDIA BY VIOLENT MOBS AND UNDER ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS

Present in India is a millennia old caste system, which categorizes individuals based on their skin color and occupation into five separate groups.¹¹ There are Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (farmers, traders, and merchants), Shudras (laborers), and Dalits, who are considered the “untouchables” and outside the caste system.¹² 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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶ 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.

As a longtime member of the nationalist group himself,¹⁷ Prime Minister Modi is at RSS’s political forefront and arguably its most efficacious proponent. Through his longtime support of the RSS and his passing of nationalist policies,¹⁸ Prime Minister Modi is in the key position to end the persecution of Christians in India but has done nothing. Moreover, members of his political

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Albee Ning, *The Caste System in India*, ASIA HIGHLIGHTS, <https://www.asiahighlights.com/india/caste-system> (Dec. 1, 2022).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ See OPEN DOORS, *supra* note 3.

¹⁴ Blessy Mathew Prasad, *Dalit Christians – Why Do They Remain at the End of the Stick 75 Years After Independence?*, THE CITIZEN (May 3, 2022, 7:29 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>.

¹⁵ 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>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

party (Bharatiye Janata Party) are also known to be complicit in violence against Christians and other minorities.¹⁹

Violent, religiously motivated attacks against Christians in India are rapidly increasing. In 2021, there were 761 incidents of violence reported,²⁰ and in 2022, there were 1198 incidents.²¹ In the first three months of 2023, there were already 600 reports of attacks against Christians.²² As these attacks steadily increase, India's government does little to prevent the rising hostility and persecution.

In May 2023, violent clashes broke out between the predominantly Hindu community and predominately Christian tribes in Manipur.²³ The violence began on May 3 and lasted for weeks.²⁴ Mobs of people, motivated by ethnic differences, destroyed Christian homes and churches.²⁵ As confirmed by our sources on the ground, at least 147 Christians were murdered, 220 Christians were injured, and 58 Christians are missing. Additionally, 153 churches, 93 offices, 160 villages, and 4,581 houses were burned down. These attacks resulted in many being displaced from their homes, including 9,000 who chose to flee the area and about 20,000 who were evacuated by the government and placed in camps in order to prevent further escalation.²⁶ The government deployed military forces to the region, even ordering them to "shoot on sight" to enforce a curfew, but the government's actions were unsuccessful in quelling the violence.²⁷

During the attacks in May, the Christian Pastoral Training Center in Imphal was raided four times, which included burning vehicles and looting the building.²⁸ There were also reported physical attacks on people based on their Christian identity.²⁹ A witness to one of the attacks reported that, despite repeated calls, police failed to intervene.³⁰ The next day, the attackers set the church on fire by stacking the pews in the church and using a gas accelerant.³¹

In addition to such attacks, Christians face a constant threat of being maliciously prosecuted under India's anti-conversion laws. While India's government turns a blind eye to the physical brutalization of Christians, it actively participates in the discrimination and abuse by

¹⁹ See Amom Malemnganba Singh, *The BJP and the Rise of Communal Violence*, SOUTH ASIAN VOICES (Feb. 7, 2022), <https://southasianvoices.org/the-bjp-and-the-rise-of-communal-violence/>.

²⁰ FED'N OF INDIAN AM. CHRISTIAN ORGS. OF N. AM., FIACONA ANNUAL REPORT 2022 (2022).

²¹ FED'N OF INDIAN AM. CHRISTIAN ORGS. OF N. AM., FIACONA ANNUAL REPORT 2023 (2023).

²² Jenan Taylor, *Christians Face Rising Hate as India's Anti-Conversion Laws Unleash Violence*, THE MELBOURNE ANGLICAN (Apr. 18, 2023), <https://tma.melbourneanglican.org.au/2023/04/christians-face-rising-hate-as-indias-anti-conversion-laws-spread/>.

²³ Amrit Dhillon, *Indian Troops Ordered to 'Shoot on Sight' Amid Violence in Manipur*, THE GUARDIAN (May 5, 2023), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/05/indian-troops-ordered-to-shoot-on-sight-amid-violence-in-manipur>.

²⁴ *Nine Killed as Ethnic Violence Continues to Grip India's Manipur*, AL JAZEERA (June 14, 2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/14/nine-killed-in-new-ethnic-violence-in-indias-manipur#:~:text=Since%20May%2023%2C%20at%20least,state%20governed%20by%20the%20BJP>.

²⁵ Anto Akkara, *Christians Targeted in Bloody Ethnic Conflict in India's Manipur State*, NATIONAL CATHOLIC REGISTER (May 17, 2023), <https://www.ncregister.com/news/christians-targeted-in-bloody-ethnic-conflict-in-india-s-manipur-state>.

²⁶ Dhillon, *supra* note 23.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ Akkara, *supra* note 25.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

prosecuting Christians under these anti-conversion laws, which are used to harass, intimidate,³² and imprison Christians.³³ These laws are passed under the guise of protecting Hindus from being *forcibly* converted to other religions, but they are actually used to falsely accuse Christians and to try to prevent them from practicing and sharing their faith.³⁴ About twelve Indian states have already enacted anti-conversion laws, which prohibit conversion, require notification to the government of intent to convert, and have a presumption of guilt.³⁵ Attacks by Hindu nationalists are also followed by false accusations of forced conversions.

On April 30, 2023, over twenty Hindu nationalists attacked the home of a pastor in Daharipatti Village in Uttar Pradesh.³⁶ The attack took place while Christians were gathered for a prayer meeting.³⁷ Approximately twelve people were injured when the attackers charged the home and beat the Christians with sticks.³⁸ Incredibly, after the attack, it was not the extremists who were arrested, rather it was three Christians, including two pastors, who were arrested under the state's anti-conversion laws.³⁹

In December 2022, Hindu nationalists attacked Christians in at least twenty villages in Chhattisgarh in order to force them to “re-convert” to Hinduism.⁴⁰ Despite the fact that the Adivasis (indigenous tribal people) are not Hindus, the Hindu nationalists label them as Hindus.⁴¹ Like the anti-conversion laws in several other Indian states, Chhattisgarh's law also prohibits conversion by allurement, force, or fraud.⁴² As defined, allurement could even include education or medical assistance to a Hindu. However, “conversion” under this law does not include returning to an “ancestor's original religion or [the individual's] own original religion.”⁴³ Due to this provision, Hinduism is effectively exempt from the law since extremist Hindus consider it to be the only “original religion” in India. While Hindu nationalists falsely accuse Christians of *forcibly* converting others to Christianity, they commit violence to re-convert people, yet no action is taken against these attackers. The Indian government fails to recognize the persecution of Christians as shown by its recent affidavit submitted to the Supreme Court of India, where the government stated that “there is no communal violence against Christians in India,” despite the number of cases of violence against Christians rising in recent years.⁴⁴

³² *India, supra* note 1.

³³ OPEN DOORS, *supra* note 3.

³⁴ *India, supra* note 1.

³⁵ USCIRF Releases New Report on India's State-Level Anti-Conversion Laws, USCIRF (Mar. 14, 2023) <https://www.uscirtf.gov/release-statements/uscirtf-releases-new-report-indias-state-level-anti-conversion-laws>.

³⁶ Int'l Christian Concern, *Three More Christians Arrested in India*, PERSECUTION (Apr. 3, 2023), <https://www.persecution.org/2023/04/03/three-more-christians-arrested-in-india/>.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ Int'l Christian Concern, *Anti-Christian Riots in India Surge Across 20 Villages: Hundreds of Christians in Chhattisgarh Forced to Flee into Forests*, PERSECUTION (Dec. 22, 2022), <https://www.persecution.org/2022/12/22/anti-christian-riots-in-india-surge-across-20-villages/>.

⁴¹ Suraj Yengde, *Adivasis are not Hindus. Lazy Colonial Census Gave Them the Label*, THE PRINT (Mar. 9, 2021), <https://theprint.in/opinion/adivasis-are-not-hindus-lazy-colonial-census-gave-them-the-label/618051/>.

⁴² Chhattisgarh Dharma Swatantrya Adhinyam [Freedom of Religion] Act, 1968, § 3 (Oct. 19, 1968).

⁴³ Chhattisgarh Dharma Swatantrya Adhinyam [Freedom of Religion] (Amendment) Act, 2006, Bill No. 18 of 2006, § 2 (2006).

⁴⁴ *Dismay as Indian Government Dismisses Claims of Christian Persecution*, OPEN DOORS UK (Apr. 27, 2023), <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/latest-news/india-court-update/>.

These are just a few examples of the violent attacks that take place in India against its Christian minority almost daily. In addition, many pastors are imprisoned over false charges of converting Hindus to Christianity. It is imperative President Biden remind Prime Minister Modi the urgent need for protecting India's Christian and other minority populations for India to be legitimately called the world's largest democracy. Without the condition to protect its religious and ethnic minorities, India must not enjoy the kind of partnership it currently enjoys with the United States.