

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ROUNDTABLE

Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 2050

Dear Mr. President,

We write today to express our concern regarding the religious freedom situation in India. We ask that you raise the situation of religious persecution of Christians and other minorities in India as you meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in private and in public during your upcoming visit to India.

The United States and yourself, Mr. President, have made a clear stand for religious freedom not least during your remarks at the US-led United Nations General Assembly event on Religious Freedom. We ask that you stay true to your promises and religious freedom commitments.

The religious persecution carried out by the government of Prime Minister Modi is not restricted to Indian citizens alone, US citizens who work for Christian organizations are regularly deported and or denied entry upon arrival at Indian airports. **As recently as October 2019, police arrested a US Pastor from Tennessee, Bryan Nerren in Bagdogra airport in Northeast India.**¹ The police arrested him on the grounds of failing to declare funds after they had interrogated and cleared him in New Delhi, asking him if he was Christian and if the money was for Christians or Hindus. Authorities have confiscated the pastor's funds and passport and while he has now been released, he is still waiting to receive his passport. Senator Alexander and Senator Blackburn are working on his case. The boldness of the authorities' arrest and discrimination of a US national because of his faith - shows that actors of religious persecution in India, afforded government impunity, further emboldens state and non-state extremists to continue their discriminatory and abusive actions towards non-Hindus. Last year, the Chief of Immigration at Chennai airport deported a team of Episcopal Pastors from the Council of Churches (USA) visiting Chennai and threatened that he will not let another American Christian enter his country again.

We are concerned about how mob violence, which includes severe beatings, harassment and threats of Christians, Muslims and other non-Hindus; are not addressed or prosecuted by the local governments or police. According to Open Doors, at least 1497 Christians were attacked from November 2018 to October 2019. When individuals go to report their cases they themselves often get arrested or questioned. In addition, police have used excessive force against demonstrators protesting the Citizenship Amendment Act, including many students. Within a week of its introduction in December 2019, 25 deaths were reported, all in states governed by the Prime Minister-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).²

¹ Brinley Hineman, "More than 3 months after arrest in India, Shelbyville pastor may soon return to US," Daily News Journal, January 14, 2020 accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.dnj.com/story/news/2020/01/14/shelbyville-tnpastor-bryan-nerren-stuck-india-arrest/4424408002/>.

² "India: Deadly Force Used Against Protesters," Human Rights Watch, December 23, 2019, accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/23/india-deadly-force-used-against-protesters>.

In January 2020, in the state of Andhra Pradesh, attacks and harassment by upper-caste Hindus led a 40-member church congregation to stop meeting. Local Hindu extremists there beat the pastor badly as the extremists were trying to build a wall outside the pastor's home to block church members from attending worship services. A first information report was filed with the police but there has been no arrest.³ Another similar case happened in Southern India, where Hindu extremists interrupted a Church service taking photos of the Christian children, claiming forced conversions; when the children asked them to stop, the Hindu extremists beat up the Christian children and then they filed a police complaint against the congregation. When the congregation made it to the police station to report the incident, the police tried to find fault with the Christians for using their home as a place of worship.⁴ These cases are not isolated, mob violence and discrimination when reporting the violent incidents to the police are common.

In addition to the mob violence, states in India are enforcing “anti-conversion” legislation. While the government of India defends these laws as, “important safeguards against coercion and inducement to convert or reconvert from one religion to another in a multi-religious society,” they have only been applied towards Christians, and have restricted the right to worship, even in private, and have emboldened Mr. Modi's Hindu nationalists. These laws together with the anti-cow slaughter laws have been used discriminatorily against non-Hindus and Dalits. According to Human Rights Watch, extremist Hindu groups have killed 50 people and injured over 250 in response to rumors they trade or have killed cows for beef since May 2015; including Muslims who were also beaten and forced to chant Hindu slogans. Anti-conversion laws have been implemented in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand states, all during the time when Prime Minister's BJP party is/was in power.

Unfortunately, every single time, citizen tribunals have found that the mob belongs to the ruling party, BJP and its affiliated organizations. Due to the erosion of rule of law, its leaders enjoy total immunity for their violence against Christians and other religious minority groups.⁵

Far-reaching legislations introduced by Prime Minister Modi's government affecting longstanding secular and liberal values of India has the potential to create large scale civil unrest in India, as has been documented. Such unrest could be very detrimental to the interest of the United States not only in India but also across the region from Afghanistan to Indonesia if not beyond.

While we should develop economic and trade opportunities for US companies in India, we must also do that without compromising our cherished values or undermining our commitment to protecting over 100 million people who practice Christianity in India besides the over 200 million other religious minorities.

In conclusion, President Trump, at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), you urged every nation to, “increase the prosecution and punishment of crimes against religious communities,” we respectfully ask, therefore, that you raise the issue of impunity regarding mob violence against

³ “Church Decimated after Upper-Caste Hindus Stir Hostilities in Andhra Pradesh, India,” Morning Star News, February 13, 2020, accessed February 19, 2020, <https://morningstarnews.org/2020/02/church-decimated-after-upper-caste-hindu-stir-hostilities-in-andhra-pradesh-india/>.

⁴ “Hindu Extremists in Southern India Beat Christian Children, Accuse Worshippers,” Morning Star News, February 4, 2020, accessed February 19, 2020, <https://morningstarnews.org/2020/02/hindu-extremists-in-southern-india-beat-christian-children-accuse-worshippers/>.

⁵ “Indian Christian forum demands withdrawal of ‘bogus’ charges of forced conversions,” World Watch Monitor, November 13, 2018, accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/christian-forum-demands-withdrawal-of-bogus-charges-of-forced-conversions/>.

Christians and religious minorities India with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Please also raise the case of the US pastor, the anti-conversion laws, and urge the government of India to show itself willing to enact and enforce policy to protect religious liberty for all.

As you promised in UNGA, “no matter the case, America will always be a voice for victims of religious persecution everywhere.” **We ask that you do not let the voices of persecuted Christians, Muslims and other religious minorities in India go unheard.**

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Organizations

AdvanceUSA

American Muslims Against Terrorism and Extremism (AMATE)

Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience

CAP Freedom of Conscience

NGO with ECOSOC consultative status at the United Nations

Center for Pluralism

Christian Freedom International

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Christ's Mandate for Missions

Council on Minority Rights in India (CMRI)

Concerned Methodists

Family Research Council

Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations (FIACONA)

Great Truth

Human Rights Without Frontiers (Brussels)

Institute For Religious Freedom and Tolerance

Institute on Religion and Democracy

International Christian Concern (ICC)

Jubilee Campaign USA

Life Mission to the Nations church

Minaret Foundation

Minh Van Foundation

Open Doors USA

Persecution Relief

Save the Persecuted Christians

Tahrir Alnisa Foundation

The Desire of All Nations

The Tide ministry

William Wilberforce Center

Individuals

Joseph Aji

Piping engineer

Deena Ananth

Personal note:

Dear President,

We applaud you on your generous gesture of visiting our country India. You have an awesome opportunity to make this trip one that will earn you the favour of our Lord Jesus Christ if you will speak on behalf of the persecuted Christian minority. The Modi government has been speaking of annihilating the Christians should they not leave India by the year 2023.

I would like to reiterate a verse from the book of Esther:

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

Esther 4:14

Please understand we might be living in the USA but our families and loved ones are still in India and it is with much earnestness, we make this appeal knowing that you will stand for the Christians.

Kim Bongiorno

Co- founder

Moral Action Ministry

Bella Comelo
Representative
Asian Indian Community
Diocese of Oakland (EPC)

Deva Devasahayam

Don Shenk
Director
The Tide Ministry

Earl Thurner
President
The Desire of All Nations

Koshy George
President
Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations

Lazarus George

Thilak George
Joint Secretary
Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations

Dr. Mike Ghouse
Center for Pluralism

Sekhar Henry
Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations

Lauren Homer
President
Law and Liberty International

Dr Fabong Jemchang
Chairman
National Youth Council of Nigeria.

Laura L. Kirby
Representative Bektashi community

John Prabhudoss
Chairman
Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations

Jorge Márquez
Pastor and founder
"Life for Nations Mission" Church

Personal note:

We express our concern for religious persecution in India that produces death and death threat to Christians. On the occasion of President Trump's visit to this nation, we request that religious freedoms be brought before this outrage.

Rober J. Marro

Advocacy Director
Council on Minority Rights in India

Carl McClanahan

Allen O. Morris

Executive Director
Concerned Methodists

Personal note:

I'm sending this message expressing concern about a lack of equal treatment for all faith communities in India. I respectfully request that, just as members of the Hindu faith here in United States do not have their rights abridged in any way but are free to worship and compete in the marketplace without any bias, Christians and members of other faiths be granted that same freedom in the country of India.

I thank you in advance for any action you will take in this area.

Scott Morgan

President
Red Eagle Enterprises

Dr. Jorge Parrott

President
CMM World Missions & CMM College of Theology

Personal note:

We love India and have been many times and support many Christian friends there.

Enoch Rajendran

Luis Rodrigues

Fred Semendy

Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations

Mark Singer

Co-founder
Moral Action Ministry

Samuel Sukumar

Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations

Imam Dr. Talib M. Shareef, USAF-Retired

Masjid Muhammad, The Nation's Mosque
President
American Muslims Against Terrorism and Extremism (AMATE)

Shibu Thomas

Founder

Persecution Relief

Fr Joseph Varghese

Executive Director

Institute For Religious Freedom and Tolerance

Daniel J. Weber

Lead Staff Attorney

William Wilberforce Center

Jeffrey G. Weber

Executive Director

William Wilberforce Center

Kelly Yaegernann

The Way To Happiness