

United Nations Special Procedures
Universal Periodic Review
Submission on the Republic of India

**Religious Intolerance, Hate Speech
and Situations of Extremist Violence in India**
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Are **BOLDED** in this document; relevant international legal obligations UNDERLINED.

Pax Christi International is a non-profit, non-governmental Catholic peace movement working globally on issues of human security, disarmament and demilitarisation, human rights and concerns relative to religion and violent conflict. The organisation has held Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC since 1979.

Summary

Recent events in India have revealed a worrisome trend toward greater intolerance and violence toward religious minorities. About 80 percent of Indians are Hindu, 14 percent are Muslims, 2 percent are Christians and the remaining 4 percent are followers of other religions or none. In years past, India has been noted for its high level of religious tolerance.

However, this reputation has been widely compromised in more recent years. Despite constitutional protection for the freedom of religion, the Indian government has been unable or unwilling to ensure security for religious minorities. This has been most notable in cases of public hate speech and violent actions that have been directed against Muslims and Christians by members of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Pax Christi International calls for prompt and decisive measures to address incidents of hate speech and violence against religious minorities and urges a clear commitment on behalf of the Indian government to strengthen democratic principles of religious pluralism.

Hate speech used by public figures and challenges to religious freedoms

On 7th November 2011, the General Secretary of the World Hindu Council appealed for a new Indian Constitution that allows for ‘anyone who converts Hindus to be beheaded.’ In the present climate of deepening religious intolerance, such statements constitute a threat to peace and are injurious to good relations within Indian society.

These statements are especially reprehensible when coming from nationally-known religious figures and should be addressed with appropriate seriousness. The failure to do so can result in further aggression and violence against minority groups.

A stronger public commitment is urgently needed at this time to counter the populist appeal to Hindu nationalism (Hindtva) to justify practices of exclusion and violent speech toward religious minorities. Indeed, the Indian

Supreme Court has cited the Hindu capacity ‘to think synthetically’ and to affirm other religions’ potential to ‘complement each other for the well-being of the world and mankind’ as strong motivation for addressing all violence against minority religious groups.

Resurgence of violence against particular religious groups

Since the 2008 Mumbai attacks, tensions have mounted against Muslims in India. The Indian government has employed counterterrorism measures to arbitrarily arrest and detain large numbers of Muslim nationals. Harsh policies of this nature, if not moderated by conformity to sound civil police practices, can have the effect of encouraging more generalised discrimination and even violence against the Muslim minority in India.

Numerous attacks against Christians continue regularly, most notably in Orissa, Karnataka and Gujarat, although certainly not limited to these states. These include beatings, attacks on Christian schools and the occurrence of suspicious deaths. Such incidents are becoming more common in parts of India and exhibit a growing trend toward religious intolerance. Especially worrying is the collaboration of local police forces that has occurred in some instances.

Frequently cited as justification for discrimination and violence against Christians is an objection to conversions. Pax Christi International unequivocally denounces any form of coercion and forced conversion. At the same time, the freedom to choose and practice one’s religion is recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is upheld by the Constitution of India. The Government of India must do all in its power to guarantee this freedom and to promote peaceful relations between religious communities in the country.

Recommendations

Pax Christi International joins other human rights organisations to urge prompt, independent and impartial investigations into all reports of intimidation, hate speech and violence directed toward religious minority groups in India. We also appeal to the UPR Working Group to call upon the Government of India to:

- 1. reaffirm its commitment to Article 25 of the Indian Constitution that guarantees the freedom of religion for all its citizens;**
- 2. comply with binding international legal obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 2);**
- 3. bring charges against Praveen Togadia, General Secretary of the World Hindu Council, under section 295A of Indian Penal Code for public and injurious remarks made toward non-Hindus in India;**
- 4. step up measures to prevent religious violence, protect religious minorities and promote inter-communal peace;**
- 5. address legal, juridical and administrative reasons for impunity for perpetrators of hate speech and other acts of violence against religious minorities in India;**
- 6. establish national working groups of diverse stakeholders to develop a plan of action for public education and prevention of discrimination and violence against all minority groups in India.**