



Date: October 7, 2021

To,

Shri Atif Rasheed

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National Commission for Minorities
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Subject: Complaint against attacks on churches throughout the country

Dear Sir,

We, at Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP) are writing to you to bring to your attention spurious attacks carried out by extreme right-wing goons in mobs, in different parts of the country. Multiple churches including in areas of Roorkee, Uttarakhand, Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh Mahasamund, Chhattisgarh were reported over the Gandhi Jayanti weekend i.e., between October 2 and October 3, 2021. We believe that these called for a concerted *suo motu* investigation by the Hon'ble National Commission for the Minorities.

In Roorkee, Uttarakhand, a right-wing mob allegedly vandalized the church where worshipers were attending Sunday's congregational prayers and many of them were seriously injured.

The Church is located in Solanipuram Colony, Roorkee and those attending the prayers told media-persons that at around 10 A.M, a right-wing mob consisting of women also came to the prayer hall and shouted slogans against the church and its people. The mob accused those in the church of "carrying out religious conversion of some Hindus under the garb of charity work in the area" and then suddenly began to vandalise the Church premises. The worshipers have also alleged that they were "physically manhandled" by the mob. Reportedly, five Christians were injured and one of them, Rajat Kumar, is in critical condition.

On Sunday, October 3, when the prayers were about to start, the attacking mob shouted slogans like 'Vande mataram' and 'Bharat mata ki jai', entered the church and started beating everyone in the prayer hall. Sumit Kumar, church volunteer told The Wire that the attackers damaged the CCTV cameras to destroy evidence which indicates that there was meticulous planning and a conspiracy behind the violent attack.

*The news report of The Wire dated October 5, 2021 is annexed hereto as **Annexure A***

The case has been registered at Roorkee Kotwali under Indian Penal Code Sections 395 (dacoity), 295 (injuring or defiling place of worship with intent to insult religion of any class), 296 (disturbing religious assembly), 323 (punishment for voluntarily causing hurt), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace), 506 (punishment for criminal intimidation), and 427 (mischief causing damage) on the complaint filed by Prio Sadhna Lance, the church pastor's wife. She has alleged that the mob members belonged to Hindutva outfits. Although the FIR has been lodged, no arrests have been made yet.

Besides these provisions of criminal law, such actions are a flagrant violation of the fundamental rights of individuals and communities under the Indian Constitution, especially Article 14 (right to equality), 19(1)(a) (right to freedom of speech and expression), 21 (right to life) and 25 (freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion)

Lance said that the mob went on a rampage at the church for about 40 minutes and while she has named a few people from the mob in the FIR, the police have made no arrests yet.

On the stead, the police have registered a case against Lance and nine others for threatening and attacking another woman, identified as Kavita.

The BJP state president Madan Kaushik claimed that the church was being used for the conversion of Hindus. "Those involved in the incident were actually residents of the same colony who were angry at the conversion that used to take place in the church. The incident is actually a neighbourhood matter that has been blown out of proportion," said Kaushik, reported The Wire.

Lance has dismissed these allegations and said, "I worked as a teacher in a KV school and after retirement I am managing everything from my savings and pension. The allegation that we are luring people with money for conversion is politically motivated because elections are just round the corner."

Other isolated incidents

In Maharajganj, Uttar Pradesh, Pastor Durgesh Bharti was leading a prayer meeting in the home of other Christians in the village of Nasirabad. Some fanatics arrived and started to mistreat and threaten them. After a while they called the police. The police arrived and took Pastor Durgesh into custody at the Police Station in Paniyara.

In Maharajganj, in Uttar Pradesh, the prayer meeting of Pastor Shrinivas Prasad was interrupted by violent elements.

In the state of Chhattisgarh, in the village of Kusumi, some Christians were attacked twice by the villagers: once in the morning and another in the afternoon, according to information from the "Chhattisgarh Christian Forum". The villagers entered the small room used as a chapel, devastated it and beat a 12-year-old boy who was inside.

In Karnal, in the state of Haryana, a Christian woman and about 25-30 other faithful were attacked by members of an extremist group during a Sunday liturgy. They were threatened, beaten, put to flight and the house where the Christians were praying was ransacked.

In Jwalapur, in Uttarakhand, radical Hindu groups, also accompanied by some police officers, interrupted a religious service, threatening the Christians present.

In Asola Fatehpur Beri, in the area of the capital New Delhi, 12 men went to the home of Pastor Santosh Dan and threatened him for announcing the Gospel, accusing him of trying to convert people through deception or illicit means. They told him not to let any Hindus into his house for any reason.

In Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh, Evangelist pastor Prerit and his Church were attacked allegedly by a right wing, which came to disrupt their Sunday worship.

There were also reported incidents in these northern states of false complaints filed against church pastors alleging that they were conducting forceful religious conversions. Such cases of harassment were reported between October 2 and October 3 itself.

Impact

Such attacks as they have taken place in smaller towns and villages across northern states within just 2 days and all have been alleged to have been committed by some right-wing goons is an indication that these attacks were orchestrated and planned so that members of the Christian minority community are attacked and harassed. Clearly, these attacks had a motive of subverting the members of the community and creating an environment of fear psychosis on communal lines.

Such expression of extreme hate with a clear communal objective to establish religious hegemony upon a community that is already a minority in numbers in the country, is deplorable and against the constitutional values that we uphold as citizens of this country.

The intention behind these attacks seems to be to subjugate the community and its members which will create fear in them while even going to church and worship their god, thus seriously impeding their right to practice their religion. No society should reach such limits of threat for a community that they fear from exercising their fundamental rights.

This Hon'ble Commission is endowed with safeguarding the minority communities and hence, it is utmost importance that cognizance of these incidents is taken and since the attacks were so spurious and widespread, the Commission also issue a statement condemning these acts and urging the police to take strict action against these anti-social elements that are violating the rights of the minority community.

We are hopeful that this esteemed Commission will do the needful to protect the interest of minorities in India so that targeted violence does not destroy the social and secular fabric of our democratic country.

Persecution Relief, an organisation that provides support to persecuted Christians in India and records hate crimes against the community, releases reports about hate crimes against Christians. As per its third quarterly report in 2020 titled, "Hate Crimes against Christians in India", over 450 cases of attacks on the minority community had been recorded. From August 2020 to October 2020, Persecution Relief recorded 157 cases of such hate crimes. Its quarterly report released lists these crimes to include 4 murders, 46 attacks, 32 crimes against women, 43 false complaints against

Christians, 45 cases of ‘collusion of authority’, 22 boycotts, 20 church attacks, and 21 unjust arrests. Hate Crimes against Christians in India have risen by an alarming 40.87 percent, even at a time when the nation was under Covid-19 lockdown. Persecution Relief’s half yearly report of 2020 has on record 293 cases of hate crimes against Christians, including five rapes and six murders. In the same months of 2019, Persecution Relief had recorded 208 such incidents. From January 2016-June 2020, Persecution Relief states that they have recorded more than 2067 cases where Christians have been attacked in India.

*The SabrangIndia articles dated July 31, 2020 and October 15, 2021 is annexed hereto as **Annexure B** and **Annexure C**.*

The attacks on Christians in India have a long historical background which dates back to the 1990’s, for instance the attacks on Christians in Gujarat in the late 1990’s as also documented in a Human Rights Watch report. A majority of reported incidents of violence against Christians in 1998 occurred in Gujarat. Between January 1998 and February 1999, the Indian Parliament reported 116 incidents of attack on Christians in India. When the HRW team visited Dangs, Gujarat in 1998, they were told how the Hindus removed ornamentations from the churches in the region, on December 25, 1998.

*The Human Rights Watch report is annexed hereto as **Annexure D**.*

And almost 20 years later, similar instances continue to take place to harass the minorities. In December 2020, the doors of every church in the city of Silchar, Assam were closed on Christmas eve with Police and CRPF deployed inside in anticipation of violence by Bajrang Dal. Ramakrishna Mission has a long tradition of celebrating Christmas and worshipping Jesus Christ. Portraits of Jesus Christ and Mother Mary are placed next to the idol of Sri Ramakrishna and Mother Sarada and cakes are decorated the same way every year to mark the birth of Jesus. But all such rituals were disrupted by the Sangh Parivar.

*The SabrangIndia report dated December 26, 2020 is annexed hereto as **Annexure E**.*

India has a long-standing history of printing books with extremist content that militate against the constitutional vision in some privately run schools, clearly used for the dissemination of blatantly partisan and prejudicial ideas, again which are anti-Constitutional. CJP’s sister publication Sabrang communications (now SabrangIndia) has documented many such issues in **Communalism Combat**, its monthly magazine. In 1999, the Vidya Bharati schools used textbooks with statements about the followers of Christianity read, “It is because of the conspiratorial policies of the followers of this religion that India was partitioned. Even today Christian missionaries are engaged in fostering anti-national tendencies in Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal, Bihar, Kerala, and other regions of our country because of which there is a grave danger to the integrity of present-day India”.

*The Communalism Combat cover story from October 1999 is annexed hereto as **Annexure F**.*

This historical injustice and systematic alienation is important to be considered before taking into account such violent hate crimes. It is imperative that the culprits in all of these incidents do not go unpunished and are brought to book, arrested and taken through due process of law and that such acts are not taken lightly by the police and are dealt with firmly. Mere registration of FIR against a



few or in case of a mob, against unidentified persons does not serve the purpose and does not prove as a deterrent for such future attacks. We urge that this Commission take up this matter with all state level DGPs and especially of these states of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Delhi to issue strict directions that such cases of attacks with communal motives and attacks on religious places or against religious heads or against religious worshippers are dealt with stringently and given adequate weightage in conducting investigation and taking the matter to court.

Prayers

We humbly urge this Hon'ble Commission to

1. Take cognizance of the church attack by the mob in Solanipuram Colony, Roorkee, Uttarakhand under section 9(d) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992
2. Take cognizance of all other church attacks as mentioned hereinabove under section 9(d) of the National Commission for Minorities, 1992
3. Conduct a full-fledged suo motu Inquiry/Investigation into all these attacks and release a report to the country
4. Issue a statement condemning these attacks nationwide urging police to take stringent action
5. Issue guidelines/advisory to all State Police Departments to deal with communally motivated and partisan attacks in a stringent manner
6. Take any other action as it may deem fit

Yours sincerely,

Citizens for Justice and Peace

Nandan Maluste, CJP President

Teesta Setalvad, CJP Secretary

Annexures

- Annexure A The Wire report dated October 5, 2021
- Annexure B SabrangIndia report dated July 31, 2020
- Annexure C SabrangIndia report dated October 15, 2020
- Annexure D Human Rights Watch report
- Annexure E SabrangIndia report dated December 26, 2020
- Annexure F Communalism Combat, October 1999



defending human rights in the courts and beyond