



URGENT

Date: November 5, 2024

To,

Shri S. Chockalingam

Chief Electoral Officer, Maharashtra,
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Dr. Kiran Kulkarni

Additional Chief Electoral Office
Maharashtra State Election Commission

Subject: MCC Violation complaint against the Serial Hate Offender, Suresh Chavhanke for delivering anti-Muslim & Islamophobic speech and derogatory remark against the LGBTQ community in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra on October 20, 2024

Respected Sir,

We, at Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), a human rights movement dedicated to advancing the constitutional rights of all Indians, are deeply concerned about the gross violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra due to the hate-filled rhetoric of Suresh Chavhanke, editor-in-chief of Sudarshan News. Through his speech, he attacks LGBTQ+ community, described them as a propaganda tool aimed at undermining Hindu families and eroding Hinduism, which he labels as "cultural terrorism." He also attacks on Christians while falsely claiming that they are specifically targeting Ahmednagar for conversion efforts. Additionally, he asserts that the phrase "Allah hu Akbar" is a supremacist statement intended to provoke Hindus. These comments were made at the Ahilyabai Holkar Anniversary celebration on October 20, 2024 in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra.

His speech not only mischaracterizes Muslims, Christians and Islam as enemies of the nation but also perpetuates dangerous misinformation about LGBTQ identities, framing them as threats to Hindu family structures. By dragging religion into the political discourse during the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, Chavhanke's statements directly contravene the guidelines intended to ensure free and fair election process. This inflammatory rhetoric fosters a divisive narrative that equates the survival of Hinduism with the suppression of other beliefs, inciting fear and polarization during a politically sensitive time.

We would like to bring to your attention to the instigating speech video that has surfaced from the Ahmednagar event, urging you to take stringent action against the perpetrator to ensure that these

hate-driven speeches are not left unchecked, and the peace and harmony of our country is not affected direly.

Extracts from the Speech:

“Men marry men, male marry male. A woman should marry a woman. Have you heard of LGBTQ? What going on is this? This is disinformation. Why should the family system be broken, while Hinduism and our Hindustan is surviving today beyond the thousand years reckoning of Islam. And if anything, the main reason for its survival is the Hindu family system and the contribution of women to it is the greatest.” **(Time Stamp: 00:01 – 00:39)**

“So, if it survives, if it remains strong, if it remains as a feminine force, then Hinduism or India cannot be enslaved and therefore it must be broken. Instead of increasing the feeling of devotion, dedication in her, lust should be increased in her, ambition should be increased in her.” **(Time Stamp: 00:41 – 01:05)**

“This perception leads to many cultural attacks on us, what I call cultural terrorism. And yet such a great storm has come. Many countries could not last more than 30 years. Could not fight against this storm. And we struggle for 1000 years.” **(Time Stamp: 01:06 – 01:29)**

“I would like to give an example of a district in India which has been on the funding target of --- - for 200 years. In which there is a Nagar district. But for your information, 100 years later than us, Christians and Christians targeted Kanyakumari and now Kanyakumari has become Christian dominated. That district passed from the hands of the Hindus. But despite having the Nagar District in their hands for 200 years, they have not let the Nagar District be completely in their hands yet. What is the position of women in it? Women are the cause of sin. Before this went to happy There was not much revolt.” **(Time Stamp: 01:32 – 02:24)**

“What is your status? You know what *Allah Hu Akbar* means. Allah is the best and He is the only Lord. Do you agree?” **(Time Stamp: 02:27 – 02:40)**

“Guru is a holy word. Maulana is, Madani Harshad Madani. I put on the camera and started talking to him on Allah Hu Akbar. I asked what is the meaning of Allah Hu Akbar? He said that Allah is the best and the only one. I said to him, is Allah the greatest? So, he said yes. I said how can Allah be greater than Mahadev?” **(Time Stamp: 02:54 – 03:17)**

“If you want to say something in your mind, you can say it. We even call our Mhsoba big. But does the biggest say? I have a big one in mind. Someone may believe in Devi. Someone believes in God. Someone may believe in Vishnu. Someone may believe in Mahadev. Someone may believe in Brahma. Someone may believe someone else. But why did we ever say that is the big one. But 5 times a day we are being told that Allah is the best through loudspeakers from lakhs of mosques in this country.” **Time Stamp: 03:17 – 03:56)**

The video had been uploaded on Telegram by Hindutva Watch on October 23, 2024.

The video of the speech has been downloaded by CJP and is marked and annexed hereto as Annexure-A.

The video can be accessed through this link: <https://t.me/hindutvawatchin/653>

The statements presented are deeply offensive for several reasons. Firstly, they propagate harmful stereotypes about LGBTQ+ individuals, framing same-sex relationships as a threat to traditional family structures in Hinduism. This reinforces discriminatory attitudes and contributes to societal stigmatization of LGBTQ+ people, denying their right to exist and love freely. Secondly, the remarks imply that women's value is intrinsically tied to their roles in maintaining a patriarchal family system, reducing their agency and reinforcing regressive gender norms. This perspective not only undermines women's autonomy but also promotes a narrow view of their contributions to society.

Additionally, the speaker's comparison of religious identities—dismissing the significance of Islamic beliefs while elevating Hinduism—fosters communal tensions and intolerance. This rhetoric can incite hostility and deepen divides between religious communities, threatening social cohesion. Finally, the use of terms like “cultural terrorism” trivializes the real struggles faced by marginalized groups and misrepresents genuine cultural exchanges as threats. Overall, such statements contribute to a divisive atmosphere, hindering the pursuit of equality and mutual respect in a diverse society.

It is important to mention that, these statements are problematic as they incite religious intolerance and promote a divisive narrative that questions the legitimacy of Islamic beliefs. By contrasting "*Allah Hu Akbar*" with Hindu deities, the speaker fosters an environment of polarization, especially during elections when communal identities can be exploited.

Divisive background of Suresh Chavhanke

Suresh Khanderao Chavhanke, a habitual hate offender, serves as the chairman and chief managing director of Sudarshan TV Channels Ltd. (Sudarshan News). He is the editor-in-chief of Sudarshan News Channel and is infamous for his hate-filled and often anti-minority debate shows, including "*Bindas Bol*," "*Chalte-Chalte*," and "*Jan Sansad*," which are known for promoting divisive rhetoric and inflammatory speeches and reports. Apart from spreading hatred through his news channel, he also attends far right Hindutva events and sometimes even organises them to make inciteful speeches.

On May 19, 2023, CJP was also filed a complaint to Superintendence of Police, Ahmednagar against the serial hate offender, Suresh Chavhanke for delivering hate-spewing speech at an event organized by the Rashtriya Sri Ram Sangh (SRS) in Shrirampur (Ahmednagar District), Maharashtra. Chavhanke, at the birth anniversary of Sambhaji Maharaj, fabricated facts and history, and then perpetuated the lie by means shouting anti-Muslim slurs, and referring Aurangzeb for “every broken tile in a temple”. This is not the first time Suresh Chavhanke has crossed a line while addressing an aggressive crowd; he has a recurring pattern of delivering hate speeches and promoting divisive propaganda. His remarks often provoke tension and controversy, raising concerns about their impact on social cohesion and communal harmony.

Criminal Cases linked with Suresh Chavhanke

It is crucial to highlight that multiple serious cases have been filed against the serial hate offender Suresh Chavhanke, including allegations of rape, attempted murder, fraud, and anti-minority Islamophobic rhetoric. In 2016, a former employee of Sudarshan News accused him of sexual

exploitation, alleging that he raped her and attempted unnatural acts under false promises of marriage. Chavhanke has also been repeatedly accused of inciting communal hatred through inflammatory speeches

In year 2016, a former employee of the Sudarshan News was filed an FIR in the Women’s Police Station in Noida alleging that Chavhanke has raped her and attempted to have unnatural sex with her on October 20, 2013. She also accused Narain Sai son of self-proclaimed godman Asaram Bapur for attempting to rape her in September 2013. The victim alleged that Chavhanke had sexually exploited her since 2013 under the promise of marriage and had taken cash and jewellery worth Rs. 27 lakhs from her. The police booked Chavhanke under a total of 11 sections of the IPC, including charges of rape, attempted unnatural offenses, attempted murder, forced miscarriage, criminal intimidation, cheating, and outraging the modesty of a woman.

Arrested in year 2017 for inciting communal hatred

On April 12, 2017, Serial hate offender, Suresh Chavhanke was arrested by the Uttar Pradesh Police for inciting communal hatred. He was arrested by the Lucknow Police from Amausi Airport on Wednesday. The head of the Sudarshan channel was charged under Sections 153A(1), 295A, and 505(1)(b) of the Indian Penal Code, as well as Section 16 of the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1955.

On May 9, 2023, a complaint (FIR) was registered by the Jilhapeth Police Station against repeat hate offenders Suresh Chavhanke and Prashant Juvekar for delivering hate speech in Jalgaon on Christmas Day, December 25, 2022, at an event organized by the notorious Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HJS). During this event, Chavhanke made provocative comments about Christmas, stating, *“Christmas of the 2% is being imposed on the 98%,”* and criticized Christians, claiming, *“Christianity has ruined our intellect.”* A nine-minute video of the speech, muted at several points, included stigmatizing remarks about Muslims, using terms like “Land Jihad” and “Love Jihad.” Chavhanke also levelled baseless allegations against madrassas and made unfounded claims about forced religious conversions in Jalgaon.

On June 23, 2023, again an FIR was filed against Suresh Chavhanke for delivering a “communal speech” in Sangamner on June 6, which had resulted in unrest in the region and the arrest of 17 people, as reported by the Indian Express. The FIR, filed at the Sangamner city police station in Ahmednagar based on a complaint by a police officer, stated that at least two people were injured and five vehicles were vandalized in the violence that followed a rally organized by the Sakal Hindu Samaj, where Chavhanke was a key speaker. Alongside Chavhanke, two other speakers associated with the Bajrang Dal were also booked in the FIR.

On July 30, 2023, in Rajasthan, a FIR was also registered against the serial hate offender, Suresh Chavhanke for allegedly hurting the sentiments of tribals and Meena community (ST) in the earlier dispute over Amargarh Fort between the Meena community and Hindu groups. On July 22, 2022, Hyderabad police booked Chavhanke for allegedly uploading a morphed video of All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen Chief and MP Asaduddin Owaisi on social media. On April 17, 2024, Chavhanke was subsequently booked again by the Cyber Police Station in Hyderabad for allegedly using Owaisi’s photo on social media without proper context.

| S. No. | Name of the Offender | District | FIR Date | Police state at which FIR | Sections |
|--------|----------------------|----------|----------|---------------------------|----------|
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|----|------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| | | | | was filed | |
| 1. | Suresh Chavhanke | Jalgaon, Maharashtra Date: December 25, 2022 | May 09, 2023 | Jilhapeth Police station | FIR under IPC section 295, 504; under IT Act section 67; provisions of SC/ ST Act |
| 2. | Suresh Chavhanke | Chhatarpur-Sambhajnagar (formerly 'Aurangabad', Maharashtra) Date: March 19, 2023 | March 20, 2023 | Kranti Chowk Police Station | FIR under IPC section 153A |
| 3. | Suresh Chavhanke | Ahmednagar, Maharashtra Date: June 6, 2023 | June 23, 2023 | Sangamner City Police Station | FIR under IPC section 153(A), 34 and 506(ii) |
| 4. | Suresh Chavhanke | Delhi Date: December 19, 2021 | May 04, 2022 | South East Delhi | FIR under IPC section 153A, 295A, 298 and 34 |
| 5. | Suresh Chavhanke | Jaipur, Rajasthan Date: | July 30, 2021 | Transport Nagar Police Station | FIR under IPC section 295, 504 along with relevant section of SC/St Act and IT Act |
| 6. | Suresh Chavhanke | Lucknow, District, Uttar Pradesh | Arrested on April, 12, 2017 | Lucknow Police | FIR under IPC Sections 153 A(1), 295A and 505(1)B and also under section 16 of the Cable Television Network (Regulation) Act, 1955. |
| 7. | Suresh Chavhanke | Gautam Buddha Nagar District, Uttar Pradesh | November 2, 2016 | Noida Sector 39 | FIR under Sections 406, 420, 376 (rape), 313, 504, 506, 307, 294, 511, 354 and 509, of IPC. |
| 8. | Suresh Chavhanke | Hyderabad, Telangana | July 22, 2022 | Hyderabad Cyber Police Station | FIR under Sections 499, 504, 153-A, 506 of IPC and 67 of IT Act. |
| 9. | Suresh Chavhanke | Hyderabad, Telangana | April 17, 2024 | Cyber police Station | FIR under IPC Sections 469 and 505(2) |

Importantly, on October 19, 2024, the Delhi High Court summoned serial hate offender Suresh Chavhanke, Managing Director of Sudarshan News, along with six others, in a defamation case brought by Mohd Tufail Khan. Khan, who runs the Jamia Arabia Nizami Welfare Educational Society, accusation of being involved in anti-national activities. Khan alleges that false and defamatory accusations against him were broadcast by Sudarshan TV on April 12, 2023, during a segment titled *"Madrasa ke naam par bachho se bheek manga rabe hai."* He further informed the court that Suresh Chavhanke, CMD of Sudarshan News, along with another official, Maya Chavhanke, defamed him by organizing a separate TV show aired on their channel, titled *"Logo ko dafanane wali jagah par banaya Dargah."*

However, we are deeply concerned about the increasingly unsafe atmosphere for the minority, especially Muslim community in Maharashtra, created by the systemic and widespread use of hate

speech and inflammatory rhetoric. This hostile environment not only threatens the safety and dignity of individuals but also undermines social cohesion and communal harmony. It is imperative that urgent steps be taken to curtail these harmful actions and hold offenders accountable through prosecution. Such measures are essential to protect the rights of all communities and to foster an atmosphere of respect and tolerance in our diverse society, particularly during this critical electoral period.

Recent Directions of the Supreme Court on preventing/prosecuting hate speakers in Maharashtra.

As you must know, the issue of rampant hate speech being delivered in Maharashtra and the inaction by law enforcement agencies has been highlighted before the Supreme Court multiple times since 2023. We would like to highlight that on February 3, 2023, the Supreme Court issued directions with respect to an event which was scheduled to be held in Mumbai on February 5, 2023 by the Sakal Hindu Samaj, another extremist fringe Hindutva group. The petitioner, Shaheen Abdullah, had contended that similar to its anti-Muslim speech during 'Hindu Jan Aakrosh Morcha' held in Mumbai on January 29, it can be apprehended that the same will be repeated during the February 5 meeting as well. The apex court had thus sought a video of the entire event to be scrutinised by the court at the next hearing. The court has also taken an undertaking from the government of Maharashtra that if permission for this event is granted “it will be subject to the condition that nobody will make any hate speech and in defiance of law or disturbing the public order.”

The court also outlined directives with respect to taking preventive action in such cases:

“We also direct that the Officer(s), in case, permission is granted and, in case, the occasion arises for invoking the power under Section 151 of Cr.P.C. as aforesaid, it shall be the duty of the Officer(s) concerned to invoke the said power and to act as per the mandate of Section 151 of the Cr.P.C.”

Even in 2024 itself, while on January 17, the Supreme Court bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta had expressed their anguish at the petitioners being forced to approach the Supreme Court multiple times against individuals and organisations even after there being guidelines for tacking and taking action against hate speeches. During the said hearing, the Supreme Court issued an order directing the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police at Yavatmal, Maharashtra and Raipur, Chhattisgarh to take ‘appropriate steps’ to ensure that no incitement to violence or hate speech occurs at the rallies scheduled in the said districts in the coming few days of January. The said order was passed following the concerns raised by the petitioners over delivery of potential hate speeches at rallies planned by Hindu Janajagruti Samiti and Bharatiya Janata Party legislator T Raja Singh in the month of January. The court had outlined directives with respect to taking preventive action in such cases:

“We would require the authorities to be conscious that no incitement to violence and hate speech are permissible. The concerned District Magistrates and Superintendent of Police of Yavatmal, Maharashtra and Raipur, Chhattisgarh will take necessary steps, as may be required. If necessary and deemed appropriate, police/ administration will install

CCTV Cameras having recording facilities, so as to ensure identification of the perpetrators in the event of any violence/hate speech.”

Circulars issued by DGP Maharashtra in February 2023 and May 2023 urging strict action on Hate Speech

In Circular No. DGP 20/ Petition No.940/ 2022/54.2023. issued by Dr Suhas Warke (Spl. Inspector General of Police (L&O) for The Director General of Police M.S., Mumbai), dated February 2, 2023, the Supreme Court order dated January 13, 2023 has been highlighted where the court had asked the police to ensure that as and when any speech which attracts offences such as Sections 153A, 153B and 295A and 505 of the IPC take place, suo moto action is taken if no complaint is forthcoming.

The circular had directed all Unit Commanders to follow the Supreme Court order.

The Circular No. DGP/20/Petition No. 940-2022/54/2023 issued by Dr Suhas Warke (Spl. Inspector General of Police (L&O) for The Director General of Police M.S., Mumbai), dated April 3, 2023, entails “measures to be taken to maintain law and order due to agitations, morchas, speeches etc.”

It gives detailed instructions on what steps are to be taken when any morchas are to be held:

2. All the Unit Commanders should hold a meeting with the concerned organizers before such a morcha and fix the route of the morcha with appropriate terms and condition. A combined meeting of all social groups should be taken to convey clearly to all that they should maintain peace and keep law and order during the morcha. Preventive action against Anti-social elements should be taken. Those elements who help in maintaining peace and harmony should be encouraged. Audio Video recording of the morcha should be done. Police Head Quarters should ensure adequate supply of equipment's, like Lathi, Helmets, etc. to police men deployed for morcha bandobast. If any law-and-order situation arises, offences should be registered immediately and arrest should be made. Intelligence machinery should be activated to collect advance information about morcha, agitation and efforts should be made to pre-empt any communal incidents.

Action taken against hate speakers and offenders

Sir, on April 28, 2023 the Supreme Court had held that all States/UTs, including Maharashtra, are enjoined and bound to take suo moto action to register FIR against hate speeches, without waiting for any formal complaint. In its order, the Supreme Court bench comprising Justices KM Joseph and BV Nagarathna had said the following:

"Respondents (states) shall ensure that immediately, as and when any speech or any action takes place which attracts offences such as Section 153A, 153B, 295A and 506 of IPC etc, without any complaint being filed suo moto action be taken to register cases and proceed against the offenders in accordance with law. Respondents will issue directions to the subordinates so that appropriate action can be taken at the earliest. We further make it clear that such action be taken irrespective of the religion of the maker of the speech, so that the secular character of Bharat as envisaged by the Preamble is preserved."

The apex court has, thus, again outlined already codified statutory duties of a police officer which makes it mandatory for them to take action under section 151 of CrPC in case there is apprehension of hate speech. Sir, given the well-orchestrated and numerous instances of hate speech and actual hate crimes being committed, the minority community in various parts of India already feels insecure and threatened. Furthermore, this was spoken at a public event and this speech has reached not only the audience at the event but also all those who may have seen these videos on their mobile phones, by the medium of social media. How large and wide the reach of social media can be, we are sure you must be aware. The consequences of such an inflammatory speech could have been worse.

Besides the Supreme Court we are sure that you are aware that the Bombay High Court is also currently hearing a petition on hate speeches by another serial offender, Vikram Pawaskar. In the matter, the court has raised questions on the inaction of the police over the FIRs filed against Pawaskar for delivering violent anti-Muslim hate speeches.

Laws Violated by the Hate Speech

Under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023

The inflammatory and divisive speech delivered by Suresh Chavhaanke amounts to insightful, hate speech which is a punishable offence under the various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS):

Section 196 - Promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony

Section 197 (1) - Whoever, by words either spoken or written or by signs or by visible representations or through electronic communication or otherwise, —

(a) makes or publishes any imputation that any class of persons cannot, by reason of their being members of any religious, racial, language or regional group or caste or community, bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India as by law established or uphold the sovereignty and integrity of India;

Section 352 - Whoever intentionally insults in any manner, and thereby gives provocation to any person, intending or knowing it to be likely that such provocation will cause him to break the public peace, or to commit any other offence, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.

Section 353 - (1) Whoever makes, publishes or circulates any statement, false information, rumour, or report, including through electronic means—

(b) with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, fear or alarm to the public, or to any section of the public whereby any person may be induced to commit an offence against the State or against the public tranquility; or

(c) With intent to incite, or which is likely to incite, any class or community of persons to commit any offence against any other class or community, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.

Violations under the Representation of People Act, 1951

We believe that the content of the speech clearly violates provisions under the Representation of People Act, 1951, particularly Section 123(2) and 123(3):

1. Section 123(2): *Undue influence, that is to say, any direct or indirect interference or attempt to interfere on the part of the candidate or his agent, or of any other person 7 [with the consent of the candidate or his election agent], with the free exercise of any electoral right.*

This section prohibits any efforts to promote enmity or hatred among different groups of citizens based on religion, caste, community, or language for electoral gain. Chavhanke's attempts to portray LGBTQ+ community, Muslim and Christian citizens and practices of Islam, along with implicit threats of harm if communities are "divided," cultivates fear, particularly among minority groups. Such messaging risks inflaming communal tensions and disrupting social harmony, thereby constituting a clear violation of this provision.

1. Section 123 (3A): *The promotion of, or attempt to promote, feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of the citizens of India on grounds of religion, race, caste, community, or language, by a candidate or his agent or any other person with the consent of a candidate or his election agent for the furtherance of the prospects of the election of that candidate or for prejudicially affecting the election of any candidate.]*
8[(3B) *The propagation of the practice or the commission of sati or its glorification by a candidate or his agent or any other person with the consent of the candidate or his election agent for the furtherance of the prospects of the election of that candidate or for prejudicially affecting the election of any candidate.*

This section explicitly bars any candidate or their agents from appealing to religious or communal sentiments to garner votes. The anti-minority and derogatory statements made by Chavhanke, are not only divisive and inflammatory but also an insidious attempt to exploit religious sentiments for electoral benefit.

Violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC)

Given that the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is now in effect, following the announcement of the election schedule, the hate speech also stands in violation of several key guidelines of the MCC. Specifically:

1. **Part I, General Conduct, Clause 1:** This clause clearly stipulates that political parties and candidates must refrain from any activities that may exacerbate existing divisions or foster mutual hatred among communities. Chavhanke's inflammatory remarks made against the LGBTQ+ community and depicting Muslim citizens and narrating the religious slogan "Allah hu Akbar", as adversaries aims to instill fear and mobilize support during the electoral process. Such divisive rhetoric directly contradicts the objectives of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which is designed to promote unity and ensure a fair electoral environment in the state assembly election process.
2. **Part I, General Conduct, Clause 3:** As, there shall be no appeal to caste or communal feelings for securing votes. Mosques, Churches, Temples or other places of worship shall not be used as forum for election propaganda, despite the ban, Suresh Chavhanke uses the term and narrated the religious slogan "Allah hu Akbar" as a threat to Hindu population

for electoral mobilization, as the said speech invoke communal sentiments by promoting a narrative of division versus unity, which, given the political and social context of Maharashtra, could easily foster feelings of alienation and antagonism between different religious and cultural groups.

The current political climate and potential impact

The atmosphere in Maharashtra ahead of the assembly elections is already highly charged, with political parties striving to consolidate their voter bases. The presence and activity of serial hate offenders and right-wing groups raise serious concerns about the fairness and freedom of voter participation. Given the history of Suresh Chavhanke and his track record of promoting divisive agendas, there is a growing apprehension that fake narratives and communal agendas may undermine the electoral process in the state.

Maharashtra has a rich history of religious diversity, and this sort of messaging risks deepening communal divides at a time when political stability and social harmony are paramount. The possibility that such events and speeches could serve as a rallying cry for certain sections of society while alienating others is an issue that cannot be taken lightly. It is the duty of the Election Commission to ensure that the electoral process remains free from communal bias and that all voters, regardless of their religious or communal affiliations, can exercise their franchise in a secure and impartial environment.

Given the history of communal polarisation and violence during election periods, we are deeply concerned that ignoring of such communal events could have serious consequences for public order. Such messaging can quickly escalate tensions, potentially leading to violence and unrest, which would be devastating for both the electoral process and the people of Maharashtra.

Our prayer

In light of these grave concerns, we respectfully request the following actions from the Maharashtra State Election Commission:

- 1. Call for proactive action**

We pray for the Commission to implement suo-motu actions against hate-speech offenders and to actively monitor events in line with Hon'ble Supreme Court's directions, ensuring that such incidents do not disrupt the electoral process.

- 2. Registration of FIR against serial offenders**

We urged the immediate registration of an FIR against Suresh Chavhanke, a known serial offender of hate speech. This action will serve as a deterrent and help prevent further occurrences of such harmful rhetoric.

- 3. Stringent enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct:** We request that the Election Commission ensure the strict enforcement of the MCC, particularly with regard to preventing the use of communal appeals, inflammatory rhetoric, and any activity that may disturb public peace or target religious communities for political gain.

We trust that the Maharashtra State Election Commission will take immediate and decisive action to address this issue, thereby safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process and ensuring that the people of Maharashtra can vote in an environment free from fear and communal discord.

On April 28, 2023, the division bench of Justice KM Joseph and BV Nagarathna in ***Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay v. Union of India [W.P. (C) No. 943 of 2021]***, directed all States/UTs to register Suo moto FIR against Hate Speech irrespective of religion. The court added that when any speech or any action takes place which attracts offences such as Section 153A, 153B and 295A and 505 of the IPC etc., suo moto action will be taken to register cases even if no complaint is forthcoming and proceed against the offenders in accordance with law.

This foregoing highlights a clear violation of the Model Code of Conduct and the Representation of the People Act, as it underscores the need for political parties and candidates to avoid actions that may deepen existing divisions or foster animosity between communities. The false narration of religious slogan “Allah hu Akbar” as a threat for other community, in MCC period and portraying Muslim citizens as enemies and severe attacks and remarks against LGBTQ+ communities, are attempts to incite fear and mobilize support in the electoral process, which the MCC aims to prevent. In light of these violations, we urge you to take cognizance of the enclosed video, register a case against the identified perpetrators as well as the organizers, and arrest them for cognizable offenses under the relevant sections. We also request confirmation on whether police officials videotaped the event as mandated by the Supreme Court. Furthermore, we ask to be kept informed of any developments and actions taken in this case, as this transparency will help rebuild faith in the rule of law and strengthen the police-citizen relationship.

Ma'am/Sir, do note that we are sending this complaint, by email and registered post, on which we urge you to register an FIR if one has not been filed yet.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Nandan Maluste, CJP President

Teesta Setalvad, CJP Secretary