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## Human Rights Council

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### Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

## **Written statement\* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2020]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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# Requesting that the United Nations holds India accountable for the ongoing and increasing targeting and persecution of Christians in India

## 1. Introduction

India is home to over 1.35 billion people, and is a majority Hindu nation, with over 80% of the population practicing Hinduism. Practitioners of Islam are the second largest religious group at 13%. In contrast, Christianity is practiced by only 2.3%. Although India's Constitution assures religious freedom and India is also a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees human rights, including the freedom of religion and belief, India is experiencing an escalation of religiously motivated hostility and violence that targets Christians and other religious minorities. This hostility can be seen at both the civil and governmental levels, and is a growing threat. In fact, in a recent report, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) stated: "In 2019, religious freedom conditions in India experienced a drastic turn downward, with religious minorities under increasing assault"<sup>1</sup>. The USCIRF report also recommended that India be categorized as a country of particular concern (CPC)<sup>2</sup>. To date, India has made no indication that it is willing to act in order to protect all of its citizens and put a stop to the atrocities that Christians are facing.

## 2. Background

In its 2020 report, a human rights group listed India as the 10th worst place in the world for Christians to live<sup>3</sup>. This ranking is primarily a result of Hindu nationalism, "which advocates for the belief that India belongs to Hindus and people of other faiths should find somewhere else to live, work, and worship"<sup>4</sup>. In addition, "[s]everal states in India have adopted anti-conversion laws, and the ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), [which came to power in 2014,] has made it clear that it wants to impose these laws nationwide"<sup>5</sup>. Within the party "has come a growing faction of hardliners who want to turn into a strictly Hindu nation, viewing Christians and other religious minorities as foreigners in their own land"<sup>6</sup>.

Reports and incidents indicate that this sentiment is not found simply on the civil level, but is also held by government officials, causing them to turn a blind eye to religiously motivated violence against Christians and even to target Christians for arrest. As a result, "converts to Christianity from Hindu backgrounds or tribal religions are often extremely persecuted by their family members and communities"<sup>7</sup>. One report, issued by the Delhi-based Evangelical Fellowship of India, documented approximately 135 cases of persecution against Christians in the first half of 2020 alone<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, the BJP has indicated that it plans to introduce

<sup>1</sup> India: USCIRF-Recommended for Countries of Particular Concern (CPC), USCIRF, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/India.pdf> (last visited 3 June 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> India, Open Doors, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/india/> (last visited 2 June 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> Peerzada Ummer, India Church Attack Underscores Tide of Anti-Christian Persecution, Licas News (13 March 2020), <https://www.licas.news/2020/03/13/india-church-attack-underscores-tide-of-anti-christian-persecution/>.

<sup>7</sup> Id.

<sup>8</sup> Hate and Targeted Violence Against Christians in India, Half-Yearly Report 2020, Evangelical Fellowship of India, (10 July 2020), available at <https://efionline.org/2020/07/10/efi-rlc-half-yearly-report-2020/?fbclid=IwAR2Jdk76DQsN-nFxx7bZNGidQFGAvbhYkO0P0sbJEK1O4tfdLmbQRDg5T9k>.

a bill to prevent religious conversions<sup>9</sup>, making any religious conversion illegal. According to reports, preparations for this bill are already underway.

### 3. Religiously motivated violence against Christians

In its 2020 report, USCIRF stated that “[t]he national government allowed violence against minorities and their house of worship to continue with impunity, and also engaged in and tolerated hate speech and incitement to violence”<sup>10</sup>. It is clear that this kind of activity has carried on from 2019 into 2020.

For example, on 21 June 2020, Christian Pastor Rao was attacked while praying for a sick person in Kolonguda village<sup>11</sup>. Around 9:30 am, Pastor Rao arrived at the sick person’s house to pray with them. Shortly thereafter, a mob of 150 individuals surrounded the house claiming that “India is a Hindu nation, and there is no place for Christians”<sup>12</sup>. The mob then proceeded to break into the house and drag the Pastor into the streets where they beat him<sup>13</sup>. Pastor Rao, who survived the attack, described the incident:

“They dragged me into the street and pushed me to the ground. There, they started to trample on me. They tore my clothes, kicked me all over my body, and punched my left eye. I have sustained a serious eye injury as a result of a blood clot.”<sup>14</sup>

In July 2020, Hindu village leaders in the Latehar District met to determine what should be done to Christian villagers who refused to renounce their faith<sup>15</sup>. At this meeting, the leaders determined that if Christians refused to renounce their faith and convert to Hinduism, they would be forced out of the villages<sup>16</sup>. When six Christian families in the village did just that, they were brutally attacked and beaten by a radical mob of Hindus<sup>17</sup>. After this attack, instead of protecting and assisting the families, the police also ordered the six Christian families to either renounce their faith or flee the town, giving them one month to comply. Joginder Bhuya, one of the victims, described the attack saying: “They tied our hands and legs with rope . . . . All the men’s hands and legs were tied with the rope. That way they might have thought that we cannot defend ourselves. They also misbehaved with our women and kicked them all over their body. They punched us on our faces and back. It was a very pathetic and helpless situation for us”<sup>18</sup>.

On 21 July 2020, eight Christians were attacked by a group of radical Hindu nationalists in Odisha, India<sup>19</sup>. The mob attacked the home of 75-year-old Chachiri Muduli, who, at the time, was housing and protecting seven other Christians whose houses had been previously

<sup>9</sup> Modi Government Likely to Bring Bill to Prevent Religious Conversion in Next Parliament Session, ZeeNews (10 August 2019), <https://zeenews.india.com/india/modi-government-likely-to-bring-bill-to-prevent-religious-conversion-in-next-parliament-session-2226198.html>.

<sup>10</sup> India: USCIRF-Recommended for Countries of Particular Concern (CPC), USCIRF, <https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/India.pdf> (last visited 3 June 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Incidents of Christian Persecution Spike as India Emerges from Lockdown, International Christian Concern (26 June 2020), <https://www.persecution.org/2020/06/26/incidents-christian-persecution-spike-india-emerges-lockdown/>.

<sup>12</sup> Id.

<sup>13</sup> Id.

<sup>14</sup> Id.

<sup>15</sup> Christian Families in India Given Ultimatum: Deny Jesus or Flee, The Christian Post, (28 July 2020), available at <https://www.christianpost.com/news/6-christian-families-in-india-given-ultimatum-deny-jesus-or-flee.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Id.

<sup>17</sup> Id.

<sup>18</sup> Id.

<sup>19</sup> Eight Christians Assaulted by Radical Nationalists in India’s Odisha State, International Christian Concern (29 June 2020), <https://www.persecution.org/2020/07/29/eight-christians-assaulted-radical-nationalists-indias-odisha-state/>.

destroyed by these same radicals<sup>20</sup>. As a result of the attack, all eight Christians were sent to the hospital with severe injuries<sup>21</sup>.

On 27 July 2020, Protestant Pastor Balwinder “Bagicha” Bhatti was found dead in the streets after he was ambushed by Hindu extremists wielding sharp weapons<sup>22</sup>. Then, in August of 2020, a group of Hindu radicals attacked Pentecostal Pastor Rajesh Gupta and his family in Faridabad<sup>23</sup>. The attackers also used sharp weapons and attacked the pastor and his family while they were reciting prayers at their house. As a result, the pastor’s wife had to be treated for a fractured leg and hand<sup>24</sup>. In response to these attacks, Sajan K. George, President of the Global Council of Indian Christians stated: “In addition to the coronavirus pandemic and its socioeconomic repercussions, the Christian faithful live in fear of being attacked for spread [sic] the word of Christ.”<sup>25</sup>

On 11 August 2020, radical Hindu nationalists attacked four Christian women who had gathered to pray in one of their homes<sup>26</sup>. As a result of the attack, the four women were hospitalized, with one reportedly in serious condition<sup>27</sup>.

These are just a few examples of the violence and hostility Christians are facing in India today.

#### **4. Request**

Clearly, these hostile acts targeting Indian Christians are violating their right to freely practice their faith. In order to address the harassment and the obvious attempt to root out Christianity from Indian culture, India must act now. This is only the beginning, if meaningful action is not taken now, the problem in India will worsen.

It is imperative that the United Nations take swift action by calling on the government of India to ensure that the targeting of Christians in India is stopped. Government action must be taken to ensure that all of India’s citizens are allowed to peacefully live out their religious beliefs without fear of civil or government action against them. No one should have to live under the fear of being abused, targeted, or even killed simply because of their faith.

As such, we respectfully request that this Council work with the government of India in order to enact change and protect the religious freedom of all people within India.

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<sup>20</sup> Id.

<sup>21</sup> Id.

<sup>22</sup> Faridabad, Hindu Radicals Attack Pentecostal Pastor and Family, AsiaNews.it, (13 August 2020), available at <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Faridabad,-Hindu-radicals-attack-Pentecostal-pastor-and-family--50780.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Id.

<sup>24</sup> Id.

<sup>25</sup> Id.

<sup>26</sup> Four Christian Women Hospitalized After Brutal Attack in Northern India, International Christian Concern (17 August 2020), <https://www.persecution.org/2020/08/17/four-christian-women-hospitalized-brutal-attack-northern-india/>.

<sup>27</sup> Id.