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India: Incidents Against Christians in 2018, with Focus on Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu

Joint written statement submitted by World Evangelical Alliance and the Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India to the Human Rights Council's fortieth session (25 February – 22 March 2019) under Agenda item 4: Human rights situations that require the Council's attention.

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) was founded in 1846 in London. Today, the WEA is a network of churches in 129 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a world-wide identity, voice, and platform to more than 600 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

The Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFIRLC) endeavors to facilitate reconciliation, to promote religious liberty and fundamental freedoms, and to seek justice for those who are abused and oppressed in India. Founded in 1951, the Evangelical Fellowship of India is a member of the WEA. EFI is the national representative voice for the Evangelical Church in India representing more than 45000 Churches across India.

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1. Religious minorities in India continue to be targeted by means physical violence, anti-conversion legislation, and media narratives of nationalistic and majoritarian ideology.
2. The Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFIRLC) has documented 325 incidents against Christians in 2018, a minor decrease compared to 351 in 2017.¹ However, the states of Uttar Pradesh and of Tamil Nadu ranked highest – respectively 132 and 40 cases –, and saw an increase of such incidents in comparison to previous year. Most incidents were cases of (1) disruption of Church or worship service, (2) physical violence against Christians, and (3) detention of church members and of pastors as a form of harassment. The states of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu had the most cases of incidents.
3. The Evangelical Fellowship of India is a member of the World Evangelical Alliance.

Christmas 2018 Incidents

4. 38 incidents against Christians were reported and verified during the 2018 Christmas season. Both the frequency of the attacks and their intensity has increased when compared to previous years. In almost all cases reported during the Christmas season, police came under pressure from Hindu extremists, revealing the strategy of Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) groups to harass Christians with legal problems. The EFIRLC documented many instances where the police, instead of protecting and safeguarding the religious freedom of Indian citizens, are actually stopping them from participating in worship.²

The Spread of Misinformation as a Driver for Violence

5. False accusations against Christians and misinformation campaigns in traditional, online and social media have been a major driver behind the incidents, and have accompanied the targeting of churches.
6. For example, in July 2018, false media reports of large-scale, fraudulent conversions of Hindus by pastor Durga Prasad Yadav in Jaunpur District in Uttar Pradesh went viral on social media and messaging platforms. These accusations were followed by false police charges, then followed by multiple area reports of disrupted worship meetings, pastors and evangelists arrested and Christian leaders fleeing their homes to avoid arrest.³
7. On 11 September, in Jaunpur district in Uttar Pradesh, following a long systematic media disinformation campaign against Christians and their worship services in the area, the police and members of right-wing Hindu organizations raided several Churches in the district interrogating

¹ EFIRLC complete incidents report to be published by end of February 2019.

² *Christians Hospitalized after Terrifying Christmas Attacks in India; Violence afflicts Church that had experienced little opposition.* 32 December 2018, <https://morningstarnews.org/2018/12/christians-hospitalized-after-terrifying-christmas-attacks-in-india/>

³ *Hindu Extremists Accelerate Clampdown on Christians in Uttar Pradesh, India,* 17 September 2018 <https://morningstarnews.org/2018/09/hindu-extremists-accelerate-clampdown-on-christians-in-uttar-pradesh-india/>

the pastors and leaders. Zee TV and Dainik Jagran Newspaper alleged conversion of entire villages of Hindus through fraudulent and coercive means.⁴

The Situation in Uttar Pradesh

8. Uttar Pradesh witnessed a sharp rise in incidents of violence and targeted hate against the Christian minority in 2018. The most populous state in India, it is home to almost 17% of the total population in the nation, out of which 0.18% are Christians or approximately 360,000 people.⁵
9. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who along with being a Chief Minister is also the high priest of the Gorakhnath temple situated in Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, the communal elements have found protection and courage to attack peaceful Churches and worship services on made up accusations and allegations. The district of Jaunpur which is located in the eastern region of Uttar Pradesh continues to be a hotspot where incidents against Christians keep happening with alarming regularity.
10. In 2018, members of a Hindu youth militia called Hindu Yuva Vahini (HYV), founded by chief minister Adityanath, have attacked churches and pastors. They also lynched Muslims who consumed beef.⁶
11. These right-wing groups and the police alike have targeted Christians with the allegation of conversion by force, fraud or allurements. EFIRLC's documentation of incidents shows that Christians and pastors have been frequently arrested or detained on the pretext of investigation. Many arrests have been made in the evening or late at night as a way to harass the Christians who are already under much pressure because of opposition from Hindu right-wing groups.
12. In November 2018, the police opened an investigation into an alleged case of forced conversions to Christianity in three villages of the state of Uttar Pradesh, following the publication by a local newspaper of an article claiming 30 Hindu families were converted with money and medicine.⁷ On Sunday, 2 December 2018, a mob of 150 Hindu radicals broke into a private hall being used to conduct a Christian worship service in the KDA Colony of Kanpur.⁸ On 26 December, newspaper Amar Ujjala reported that police were exhausted on Christmas Day from taking several calls alleging "forceful conversion," and that they had to comply by raiding several Christmas programs.⁹
13. Prior to the Christmas incidents, the EFI had appealed to the Government of Uttar Pradesh to ensure that Churches are given adequate security during the Christmas season.¹⁰

⁴ Statement by EFIRLC on 13 November 2018 titled "Uttar Pradesh tops the list of states targeting Christians in India"

⁵ *Uttar Pradesh Religion Census 2011*: <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/state/9-uttar-pradesh.html>

⁶ *Anti-Christian violence in India's Uttar Pradesh 'part of the state machinery'*, 20 July 2018 <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/07/anti-christian-violence-in-indias-uttar-pradesh-part-of-the-state-machinery/>

⁷ *Uttar Pradesh, Christians investigated for 'forced conversions'. But it's a fake news* 11 November 2018 <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Uttar-Pradesh,-Christians-investigated-for-%27forced-conversions%27.-But-it%27s-a-fake-news-45473.html>

⁸ *Worship Service in Uttar Pradesh Disrupted and Threatened by Radical Mob*, 4 December 2018, <https://www.persecution.org/2018/12/04/worship-service-uttar-pradesh-disrupted-threatened-radial-mob/>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Uttar Pradesh tops the list of states targeting Christians in India*, 13 November 2018, <https://christianresponse.org/news/uttar-pradesh-tops-the-list-of-states-targeting-christians-in-india/>

The Situation in Tamil Nadu

14. Hinduism constitutes 87.58% of Tamil Nadu population. Christians constitute 6.12% of the population, which is approximately four and a half million people and representing Catholic, Orthodox and Evangelical congregations. Muslims constitute 5.86%.¹¹
15. In 2018, the state of Tamil Nadu too has seen a rising percentage of cases of incidents against Christians. Hate crimes against Indian Christians took place in 2018 at a rate of almost one verified incident per day. Hindu extremists have attacked Christians in a climate of impunity. The police have repeatedly failed to properly investigate and pursue those involved in these attacks.¹²
16. As an example of such incidents, in October 2018, police officers rushed into a praise service at a house in Tamil Nadu state and began hitting worshippers.¹³ In January 2019, six Christians in India's Tamil Nadu state were assaulted by three individuals who falsely accused the Christians of engaging in forced conversions.¹⁴ In both of these cases, a petition was submitted against the police officers involved in the attacks to the district's superintendent of police, but no action has been taken.

Recommendations

17. In this context, the World Evangelical Alliance, together with the Evangelical Fellowship of India, ask the members of the Human Rights Council to address with India the country's situation of freedom of religion or belief, and make the following recommendations to the Government of India:
 - a. Enact a comprehensive national legislation against targeted and communal violence.
 - b. Enforce rule of law and arrest members of groups promoting sectarian hate, violence and involving in pre-orchestrated programs of leveling false accusations of conversions upon the Christian priests and missionaries in order to feed their political agenda.
 - c. Ensure stringent action under criminal law against all those who channel hate speech with the intention of inciting violence and hatred against the Christian community and other minority groups.
 - d. Advise the state governments, especially Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, to deal with right wing organizations operating in these states whose primary agenda is to create an atmosphere of fear among the Christian community and other religious minorities.
 - e. Prosecute police officials who fail in their constitutionally mandated duty to enforce the law of the land, by being complicit in attacks against religious minorities, and by shielding the attackers or otherwise scuttling due process of law.

¹¹ *Tamil Nadu Religion Census 2011*: <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/state/33-tamil-nadu.html>

¹² *Tamil Nadu continues to lead the way in violent attacks on Christians*, 2 March 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/03/india-tamil-nadu-continues-lead-way-violent-attacks-christians/>

¹³ *Police Attack, Threaten Christians in Tamil Nadu State, India*, 27 October 2018, <https://morningstarnews.org/2018/10/police-attack-threaten-christians-in-tamil-nadu-state-india/>

¹⁴ *Six Christians Assaulted in Tamil Nadu After False Conversion Accusation*, 15 January 2019, International Christian Concern <https://www.persecution.org/2019/01/15/six-christians-assaulted-tamil-nadu-false-conversion-accusation/>

- f. Conduct sensitization programs for the police officials regarding laws on religious freedom as envisaged in the Indian Constitution and on laws related to human rights.
- g. Amend paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 to include Christians and Muslims.
- h. Ensure that an active Commission for Human Rights and Commission for minorities is operational in every state, and that members of each commission are appointed by transparent and non-partisan procedures.
- i. Prevent and pursue through the judicial process, all violent acts against religious and tribal minorities and Dalits.