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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement submitted by World Evangelical Alliance, 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.

[24 January 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



India: Religious Minorities Face Discrimination and Violence

Violence Against Christians in 2024

Violence against Christians, and other religious minorities, has continued to increase year by year. Christians comprise 2.3% of the population of India.

The United Christian Forum, which operates a toll-free helpline for Christian citizens facing persecution, recorded 745 incidents up to the end of November. This is more than two incidents reported every day against Christians in India. United Christian Forum is an ecumenical body. It states, “Uttar Pradesh, India’s most populous state in the north, emerged as the worst province for Christians. The state recorded 182 incidents of violence against Christians, followed by Chhattisgarh in central India with 139.” (1)

The Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) received reports of over 720 incidents targeting Christians with violence, intimidation or harassment, in 2024. According to the EFI, many of such incidents remain unreported.

In its reports on the Persecution of Christians during 2020 (2) through January 2021 (3), the EFI documented in total 356 incidents. This means that in five years, the number of reported violent incidents has doubled.

During the annual Christmas celebrations in late December, there were 14 reports of pastors and church services being attacked in Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka.

In some instances, Christian services and Christian leaders are attacked and humiliated. Christians in Balasore were tied to trees and forced to perform non-Christian religious rituals (4)

Christian pastors have also faced false allegations of forced conversions. Some of these allegations are based on the distribution of Christmas presents during church services celebrating this festival. Christmas presents are a normal Christian religious practice at this time of year.

Anti-Conversion Laws

The unconstitutional Freedom of Religion Acts, known as the anti-conversion laws, are allegedly aimed to prohibit conversions by force, fraud or inducement, but in practice civilians and law enforcement officers often misuse them to restrict the religious freedom of individuals from minority religions, especially Christians and Muslims. These laws have become instrumental for the increase in arbitrary accusations and other forms of intolerance towards them as seen by the arrests of pastors during Christmas celebrations.

Law enforcement officers often arrest or charge minority faith adherents for conducting constitutionally protected religious ceremonies. Across the country, hundreds of individuals languish for years behind criminal charges under anti-conversion laws, and their cases are dismissed only years later due to absence of evidence of any use of ‘force’ or ‘inducement’. The damage to the individuals charged, their families and communities are, however, permanent, and social disharmony between religious groups has only grown under these false claims.

In 2024, anti-conversion laws are in force in 10 out of 29 states: Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand. The laws in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh are especially troublesome as they infringe on personal freedoms even more than the laws in other states.

Over 110 Christian clergy members are currently in jail, with some denied bail. (5) The recent amendments to the Uttar Pradesh law, prescribing severe punishments for forcible conversions, are the most draconian in independent India. Over the years, more than 1,000 individuals professing the Christian faith have been incarcerated under these laws.

In Arunachal Pradesh, the revival and proposed implementation of the dormant Freedom of Religion Act, 1978 threatens to impose further restrictions on religious freedoms without safeguards for minority communities.

It appears that the anti-conversion laws are only available to protect the Hindu majority, not religious minorities. In addition to the incidents of Christians being chained to trees and forced to perform non-Christian religious rituals, there are several reports of Christians being forced to convert to Hinduism to be allowed to bury their dead.⁽⁶⁾ The Hindu vigilantes perpetrating this violence are not prosecuted.

Violence in Manipur

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) is deeply concerned about ongoing violence in the Manipur region in the last 20 months. Both Kuki and Meitei communities have suffered immense losses. Over 250 lives have been lost, thousands of families have been displaced, and over 360 churches have been destroyed since May 2023. Rather than addressing the violence, the Indian government cuts off internet so that there is a media blackout, and restricts travel to the region.

Recommendations to the Government of India

In this context, the World Evangelical Alliance makes the following recommendations to the Government of India:

- Comply with India's human rights commitments under the international law and take action on recommendations and concerns expressed in the 2009 Report by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief following her mission to India in 2008 (7); namely, guarantee the peaceful exercise of constitutionally protected rights – including the right to assembly and the right to profess and practice the religion of one's choosing – which is threatened by state anti-conversion laws and would be threatened by a national anti-conversion law;
- Instruct states where anti-conversion laws exist and encourage local governments to repeal such laws, and to prevent and punish false accusations;
- Enact a comprehensive national legislation against targeted and communal violence;
- Advise the state governments, especially Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh to deal with the 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;
- 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 thwarting due process of law;
- Address the ongoing violence in Manipur and take action to bring about healing and reconciliation.

Recommendations to the International Community

- The WEA asks the members of the Human Rights Council to take note of the deteriorating situation with the freedom of religion or belief in India, and to address with India the country's situation of freedom of religion or belief and protection of minorities.
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- (1) Christian Persecution on the Rise in India: Report. Available at the following link: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/christian-persecution-on-the-rise-in-india-report/107380>
- (2) The 2020 EFI report is available at the following link: <https://efionline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/RLC-Report-2021.pdf>
- (3) The Persecution Watch by EFIRLC, 15-31 January 2021. Available at the following link: <https://files.constantcontact.com/cf0c2406701/ec8d07a0-ca8f-4467-afd2-f2d109104315.pdf>
- (4) “Tribal women tied to tree, beaten up on suspicion of religious conversion in Odisha village; cops book victims,” The New Indian Express, 29 December 2024. Available at the following link: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2024/Dec/29/tribal-women-tied-to-tree-beaten-up-on-suspicion-of-religious-conversion-in-odisha-village-cops-book-victims>
- (5) Christian Leaders Appeal to President and Prime Minister Following Christmas Violence. A report about this letter is available at the following link: <https://www.groundxero.in/2025/01/02/christian-leaders-appeal-to-president-and-prime-minister-following-christmas-violence/>
- (6) Parth Mn, “WhatsApp vigilantes in India are converting Christians by force,” rest of world, 15 October 2024. Available at the following link: <https://restofworld.org/2024/whatsapp-intimidation-forced-conversion-targets-christians-india/>
- (7) Report by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, 26 January 2009, pp. 16-17. Available at the following link: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/10/8/add.3>