

Suffering of Orissa's Christians Presented to National Human Rights Commission of India

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For more

President For immediate release HYDERABAD – Dec. 31, 2007 – Today a Christian delegation met with Justice Shri S. Rajendra Babu, chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in New Delhi. The delegation requested action to stop violence against Christians in Orissa and help victims recover. The chairman promised to send a fact finding team immediately. At the same time, two fact finding teams which include aicc leaders continue to be turned away by Orissa police. The delegation led by Archbishop Vincent Cancesao included: Dr. Udit Raj, National Chairman of the All India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations; Fr. Dominic Emmanuel, spokesperson of the Catholic Archbishop of Delhi; Rt. Rev. Karam Masih, former Bishop of the Church of North India (CNI); Ms. Lansinglu Rongmei, Christian Legal Association (CLA); and Mr. Madhu Chandra, Regional Secretary of the All India Christian Council (aicc). They delivered a memorandum with fourteen recommended actions to deal with anti-Christian violence in Kandhamal district and other parts of rural Orissa which erupted on December 24, 2007.

“Our leaders in Orissa and media reports both indicate that attacks on Christians were not spontaneous but preplanned by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other Hindutva groups. Also, the state government misled the people of India by making repeated statements that the situation was under control. It is tragic. Orissa burned while politicians talked,” said Dr. Joseph D’souza, aicc President. “It seems that most attacks have ceased and now it’s time for all parties and all authorities to help the innocent victims,” said D’souza. Dr. Udit Raj, National Chairman of the All India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations and a Buddhist, said, “Hindutva leaders say the violence is a response to conversions by Christian missionaries. But this is a lie. Christian missionaries are targeted by Hindutva and upper caste forces because Christians truly provide education and social upliftment services to Dalits and tribals in rural Orissa.” Massive violence against Christians began on Dec. 24th, Christmas Eve. As of Dec. 30, 2007, the aicc had collected reports of 65 churches burned down, 600 Christian homes destroyed, hundreds of Christians forced to flee into forests to save their lives, and thousands homeless. Despite promises by state and central government leaders during meetings with aicc leaders, the violence continued for at least six days.“According to some reports, the Orissa government has promised to give 1 lakh compensation to the families of people who died. If true, we welcome this first step. However, Christian leaders have been united in asking authorities for at least 5 lakhs per victim and we hope this request is honored,” said Sam Paul, aicc Secretary, Public Affairs. An aicc fact finding team headed by John Dayal, aicc Secretary-General and Member of the National Integration Council, tried to reach the hardest hit areas over the weekend. On the evening of Dec. 29, 2007, Inspector General of Police Pradeep Kapoor turned away the team while they were passing through the town of Phulbani. Efforts by another Christian delegation to visit Baminigaon on Dec. 30, 2007, called the epicentre of the trouble, were unsuccessful as well due to police curfews. John Dayal, aicc Secretary-General and member of the National Integration Council, said, “First-hand accounts of the violence in the Kandhamal district are needed because rumors, absence of authentic media reports, and often inaccurate government accounts of the casualties have left people confused. Our fact finding is important part of building long term peace and harmony and to ensure proper relief, compensation, and rehabilitation.” Timeline of past events:

- On Dec. 31, 2007 a delegation including an aicc leader met Justice Shri S. Rajendra Babu, chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, in New Delhi.
- On Dec. 30, 2007 candle-light vigils and protest marches were held by Christians in many cities including Delhi (est. attendance 4,000) and Hyderabad.
- On Dec. 30, 2007 the aicc Jharkhand chapter delivered a memo to the state Chief Minister and Governor to request action.
- On Dec. 29, 2007 a delegation including aicc leaders met the Vice President of India, Mohammad Hamid Ansari, in New Delhi and appealed for action by the Central Government.
- On Dec. 29, 2007 a six-person fact-finding team headed by aicc Secretary-General John Dayal is turned back by Orissa police.
- On Dec. 28, 2007 John Dayal reaches Bhubaneswar and holds press conference along with aicc Orissa chapter President Rev. P.R. Parichha and other Christian leaders.
- On Dec. 28, 2007 the Governor of Chennai received a memorandum from the aicc Tamil Nadu chapter demanding action.
- On Dec. 27, 2007 large rallies of Christians and non-Christian civil society leaders were held in numerous cities across India including about 1,000 people in New Delhi.
- On Dec. 27, 2007 a delegation including aicc leaders met the chairman of the National Commission for Minorities, Mohamed Shafi Qureshi, in New Delhi.
- On Dec. 27, 2007 a delegation including aicc leaders met the Minister of Home Affairs, Shivraj V. Patil, in New Delhi.
- On Dec. 27, 2007 an aicc-led delegation met the Orissa Chief Minister, Neevan Patnaik.
- On Dec. 25, 2007 Sam Paul, aicc Secretary, Public Affairs appeals to the President of India in writing.
- On Dec. 24, 2007 John Dayal, aicc Secretary-General appeals to the Prime Minister of India and other officials in writing. The violence allegedly began when Christians in a village 150 kms from Phulbani, the headquarters of Kandhamal district, began to celebrate Christmas Eve. Local Hindu fundamentalists opposed the event and a fight

ensued. Also, a Hindutva leader, Swami Saraswati, was attacked by unknown assailants -- allegedly Christians -- near Daringbadi while he was travelling. The next day the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) called for a strike and its members began attacking Christians across the state. The All India Christian Council (www.aiccindia.org), birthed in 1998, exists to protect and serve the Christian community, minorities, and the oppressed castes. The aicc is a coalition of thousands of Indian denominations, organizations, and lay leaders.

Memorandum to Chairman of National Human Rights Commission of India can be viewed here:

<http://www.indianchristians.in/news/content/view/1798/45/>