

India's Anti-Christian Violence Unparalleled Among World Democracies

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 Orissa violence continues unabated and enters seventh week
 Despite Supreme Court ruling, police neglect duties

NEW DELHI – October 4, 2008 – Despite the deployment of thousands of central and state law enforcement troops, the violence in Orissa continues to inflict daily casualties and massive damage to Christian properties.

Rev. Madhu Chandra, All India Christian Council (aicc) Regional Secretary, said, “The death tolls are climbing, but less than a hundred are confirmed. Perhaps this is why the Orissa attacks haven’t gained international attention the worst violation of the freedom of religion in any democracy in recent history. What most people don’t realize is the goal of the attackers is to inspire fear. The attackers believe India is only for Hindus and their stated purpose is to convert people to Hinduism or force them to leave. To accomplish this, they only need to kill one or two people in each village or church. This is clearly terrorism and ethnic cleansing, but few Indian leaders are admitting it.” Most of the victims are Dalits, formerly known as untouchables, from a tribe called Pano.

Dr. Joseph D’Souza, aicc president, said, “The events of the last month, not only the anti-Christian attacks but the negligence of government, would be sad if it happened in a dictatorship or a totalitarian regime. The fact that it’s happening in the world’s largest democracy makes it infinitely sadder.”

Some police, mostly in rural areas, are neglecting their duties. For example, a Roman Catholic nun was raped amidst mob violence on Aug. 25, 2008, in Kanjemandi village between Raikia and Balliguda, Kandhamal District, Orissa. A medical examination of the nun conducted that night at the Balliguda Hospital confirmed rape. Both the victim and a priest, who tried to defend her and was severely beaten, tried to file cases in the Nuagaon police station. Their “First Information Report” (FIR) was rejected. Eventually, the same FIR was accepted at the Balliguda police station. But, in spite of numerous eye witnesses, police didn’t investigate until 38 days after the attack and made four arrests yesterday.

India’s Supreme Court said on Aug. 8, 2008 that any police officer who turns away a person without registering his or her complaint could face contempt of court charges and imprisonment (see “Cops understand only crack of whip, says Supreme Court” by Dhananjay Mahapatra, Times of India, Aug. 9, 2008). Justice B.N. Agarwal and Justice G.S. Singhvi instructed victims to appeal to their local chief judicial magistrate or the chief metropolitan magistrate. Ironically, the decision was scheduled for review on Aug. 25th, the same day as the attack on the nun.

“We demand that the officials in Orissa follow the law. We know multiple cases where Christians have tried to file cases with police after being attacked and the police turned them away. Police say they are overwhelmed and don’t have time to file cases or investigate since they must focus on maintaining order. But surely they realize that, unless crimes are promptly punished, the perpetrators are indirectly encouraged to continue their crimes. Justice is being denied to hundreds of victims,” said Chandra.

There has been no news about a second rape case. A young nun of the Cuttack-Bhubaneswar Roman Catholic diocese working at Jan Vikas Kendra, a social service centre near Nuagaon, was reportedly gang raped by mobs on Aug. 24, 2008.

Similar violence lasted about a week over Christmas 2007. Some are calling it “Christian-Hindu clashes” but media reports and aicc Orissa state leaders confirm that Christians are the overwhelming victims and are not instigating attacks. There are scattered reports of Christians firing guns in self-defense. The current violence is entering its seventh week since it began on Aug. 23, 2008 after the killing of a controversial swami by unknown assailants. Extremist groups blamed Christians for the murder.

The violence spread to at least ten other states and has affected hundreds of churches and thousands of Indian Christians. Within Orissa, the violence spread to almost half of the districts, and then was contained to Kandhamal District. But now attacks are spreading again with incidents reported in Gajapati and Boudh districts in the last few days.

Other examples of recent violence include:

Sept. 26th - G. Udayagiri, Kandhamal District: A young Christian man named Rajesh Digal was on his way home from Chennai. While walking with his Hindu friend, they were attacked. The Hindu man was stabbed but escaped. Rajesh was

buried alive.

Sept. 30th - Rudangia, Kandhamal District: About 60 houses of Christians were burned in the morning, and one Christian lady was shot and killed while seven others were injured.

Oct. 2nd - Sindhipakali, Kandhamal District: At 8 p.m., mobs attacked the village and set Christian houses on fire. They stabbed and killed a father and his teenage son in 9th standard (grade). Both were Dalit Christians.

Across Orissa, aicc leaders have reliable reports of 315 villages damaged, 4,640 Christian houses burnt, 53,000 Christians homeless, 57 people killed including at least 2 pastors, 10 priests/pastors/nuns seriously injured, 18,000 Christians injured, 2 nuns gang-raped, 149 churches destroyed, 13 Christian schools and colleges damaged.

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.## #