Aicc Relief Efforts in Orissa

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The All India Christian Council continues its advocacy efforts on a state, national, and international level for the Dalit and Tribal victims of anti-Christian violence which began on Aug. 23, 2008. We want to make a practical difference on the ground for the victims in addition to separate efforts to address root causes of the attacks in legal and democratic ways.

1. From Oct. 13-18th, aicc Orissa state leaders completed PHASE 1 of relief. This was a gift of clothing (sari & blouse for women, shirt and lungi (pants) for men) and bedding (sheet and blanket). We gave this to 639 families (3,195 people) who had fled from 67 villages, mostly from Kandhamal District. The items were distributed at two government relief camps in Gajapati District (Ramagiri and Rayagada), and a private relief camp located on the state border in Poliga, Andhra Pradesh. In three other towns, Berhampur, Galabandha, and Chatrapur, small groups of victims received clothing, bedding, and a small set of toiletries (hair oil, bath soap, laundry soap, shampoo). In the next few days, more families will receive bedding and toiletries at several private relief camps in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack cities. The efforts are being done with the approval of six local Christian denominations to ensure that victims are truly needy and genuine.

The PHASE 2 of relief will include a large metal trunk (box) and other household items. The preparations are already happening. Both PHASES will also include non-Christian victims when possible.

2. Over the last few weeks, we have provided complete care for 16 families (60+ people) who are sheltered at a private relief camp in the northern city of Balasore, Orissa. Most of the occupants are pastors and their families who fled Kandhamal. The camp is run by Operation Mobilisation.

3. In the pursuit of justice, we are collecting First Information Reports (FIR) from victims which will be processed by a legal team in Bhubaneswar led by Roman Catholic advocates. Then cases will be filed with appropriate police. Many victims were too afraid to tell local police about crimes or had to flee for their lives. Now they must document the destruction of the property, beatings, sexual assault, and other crimes if there is any hope of justice in the courts in coming months and appropriate compensation from the government.

4. We are collecting signatures from victims and preparing an appeal to the District Collector of Kandhamal to allow government-paid chaplains in all the relief camps. Since families will not be able to move home for some time and people are scattered throughout the region so their pastor cannot find them, we’re asking for one chaplain for every 40 people to provide counseling and conduct services.

The aicc Orissa state leaders continue to ask church and community leaders across Orissa about the most important needs of victims. We have many other relief and rehabilitation intiatives in the planning stages and will announce them in coming days. We deeply appreciate the concern and involvement of many people which makes these efforts possible.