

MEMORANDUM TO MR. RAJNATH SINGH, HOME MINISTER OF INDIA BY THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

New Delhi, 5th February 2015

Mr. Rajnath Singh

Union Minister for Home Affairs

Government of India

Re: Violence against the Christian community, their churches, institutions, and religious men and woman – police inaction and impunity. Demand for Special Investigating team under Delhi High Court supervision to probe desecration and vandalism in five Delhi churches in two months

Dear Sir,

New Delhi, the National Capital, has seen vandalism and desecration of five Catholic churches in just a little over two months. Barring one case, there has been no progress in police investigations.

You will recall we had submitted Memorandums to the Prime Minister and to your office requesting firm and swift action to curb targetted and communal violence against our community in several states since the government took office in May 2014. There has been no action. In fact, the silence of the government leadership and the impunity and inaction by the police and the administration has encouraged non-state actors in their activities against religious minorities.

We specially call your attention to the incidents in Delhi because they take place in sight of the seat of power of the government of India:

1. St Sebastian Church, Dilshad Garden [1 December 2014]: The entire interior burnt. Police action was promised. No information on the progress made by Delhi police.
2. Syro Malabar Catholic Church, Jasola [3 December 2014] Window smashed by rock during Holy Mass services, glass pieces on altar: Police silent
3. Church of Resurrection, Rohini, [3 January 2015] Crib with statues burnt to ashes. Effort to pass it off as short circuit
4. Our Lady of Grace, Vikaspuri, [14 January, 2015] Grotto attacked. CCTV captures images of vandals. Police arrest three men, claim they did it as a drunken prank.
5. St. Alphonsa's Church, Vasant Kunj [2 February 2015 Church broken into, Sacred Host [holy communion] desecrated. Despite detailed complaint, police trying to minimize crime as "theft" and "breaking into residential house"

It is quite clear that the Delhi police has failed to give these crimes the attention they deserve, and is trying to trivialize them.

Elsewhere in the country, the targeted and communal violence continues with its vicious hate campaign, physical violence, police complicity, and State impunity in the persecution of the Christian community in many states of India.

Human Rights and Civil Society groups have documented the death of two persons in 2014, killed for their Christian faith. The Persecution data lists 149 cases. An analysis of the data shows Chhattisgarh topping the list with 28 incidents of crime, followed closely by neighbouring Madhya Pradesh with 26, Uttar Pradesh with 18 and Telengana, a newly carved out of Andhra Pradesh, with 15 incidents. Much of the violence has taken place after the new government of the National Democratic alliance headed by the Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, came into power on 26 May, 2014. The violence first peaked between August and October with 56 cases, before zooming up to 25 cases during the Christmas season. The violence has continued well into the New Year 2015, with more Catholic churches in the city targeted as incidents continue in other states. Much of the violence, 54 percent, is of threats, intimidation, coercion, often with the police looking on. Physical violence constituted a quarter of all cases, 24 per cent], and violence against Christian women, a trend that is increasingly being seen since the carnage in Kandhamal, Odisha, in 2007 and 2008, was 11 per cent. Breaking of statues and the Cross and other acts of desecration were recorded in about 8 per cent of the cases, but many more were also consequent to other forms of violence against institutions. A disturbing trend was violence against Christians in West Bengal, where though one case was formally reported, there have been increasing incidents of hate speech and intimidation.

The two cases of death in communal anti Christian violence were reported from Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

Nimmaka Laxmaya, 50, of Vandidi village , Rayagada, (Orissa) was waylaid and bludgeoned to death in a planned attack on the afternoon of 25th May 2014 in a neighbouring village called Dherubada in Orissa. He was from a neighbouring village called Vandidi. He had attended a prayer meeting and the baptism ceremony of his nine year old son, and was going home when killers caught up with him, strangled him and then smashed his head with a big stone.

The second death was from Andhra Pradesh on 10th January, 2014 Where State police arrested seven of the eight members of the Hindu Vahini group accused of attacking pastor Orucanti Sanjeevi on Jan. 10 at his home in Vikarabad, 64 kilometers (39 miles) from the state capital of Hyderabad. Pastor Sanjeevi, 48, succumbed to his injuries on Jan. 13. "The key member of this module is Gandikota Srinu, alias RK, a full-time member of the Hindu Vahini, and these same people attempted to kill another pastor in Narketpally," the police said. The Sangh group had stormed his house, and stabbed him.

Police inaction and its failure to arrest the guilty in most cases , its propensity to try to minimise the crime, and in rural areas specially, its open partisanship has almost become the norm. Police ineptitude in forensic investigations has been seen even in New Delhi where four of the five cases in the months of

December 2014 and January 2015 have seen no progress in the investigations. In the one case where there were arrested, the Church and the community have cast doubts on the police version of the motives of the suspects whose images were recorded in the Close Circuit TV cameras installed in the church.

The President of India, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, noted the rise of communalism and the targetting of religious minorities in his address to the Nation on 25th January 2015, the eve of Republic Day. President Mukherjee said "In an international environment where so many countries are sinking into the morass of theocratic violence ... We have always reposed our trust in faith-equality where every faith is equal before the law and every culture blends into another to create a positive dynamic. The violence of the tongue cuts and wounds people's hearts. The Indian Constitution is the holy book of democracy. It is a lodestar for the socio-economic transformation of an India whose civilisation has celebrated pluralism, advocated tolerance and promoted goodwill between diverse communities. These values, however, need to be preserved with utmost care and vigilance."

Mr. Mukherjee touched a point that has worried many among even those who voted for Mr. Modi hoping he would bring about a change from the corruption and economic coma in which the country had found itself in the last few years.

The Union and State governments have been dismissive of the Christian complaints of targeted violence and persecution, both by political non-State actors and other elements.

We demand that the government take urgent and effective measures to restore the Rule of Law, curb the targeted and communal violence. The guilty must be traced, and action under the law should be taken. Police officers must be held accountable for communal crimes in their jurisdiction.

In Delhi, we demand a Special Investigating team be set up to investigate the five acts of violence against the catholic Churches, monitored by the High Court of Delhi

Thank you

Members of the Christian community of the National Capital