



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
29 September 2022

English only

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-first session

12 September–7 October 2022

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, 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.

[19 August 2022]

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



# **Requesting that the United Nations Protect India's Minorities from Violence**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

India has been ranked as the tenth worst country for Christians.[1] Christians and other minorities continue to face serious persecution despite calls by the civil society at almost every Human Rights Council (HRC) session to urge the government of India to protect them. Hindu extremists, often with the authorities' acquiescence and sometimes active support, violently attack Christians, who primarily belong to lower castes and the tribal communities. Much of the violence occurs under the pretext of preventing "fraudulent" or "forcible" religious conversions, which are prohibited by laws enacted by now eleven states in India. In reality, those laws are designed to stop low caste Hindus from converting to other religions. Police often arrest pastors and Christian converts under false charges of forced conversions. As such, both state and non-state actors are equally contributing to the persecution of Christians. This dire situation demands the immediate attention of the international community.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

Most Christians in India traditionally belong to the low caste communities. The Hindu caste system involves four castes called Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (farmers and merchants), and Shudras (laborers).[2] The fifth group of people, untouchables (called Dalits today), who are indigenous to the land were kept outside the caste system[3] and were forced to perform the most menial and humiliating jobs.[4] Some other indigenous people (Adivasis) were pushed into forests and dwell there to this day.[5] Historically, the majority of Christians in the Indian subcontinent are converts from the fourth caste Shudra and the untouchables.[6] The trend of conversions from lower castes continues to this day. And, while India has outlawed caste-based discrimination, it is still very much prevalent in the society.

Much of the modern-day persecution of Christians occurs through the misuse of anti-conversion laws and at the hands of the Hindu majority. Christians (including modern-day converts from Dalit and Adivasi communities) are a particular target of the fundamentalist Hindus because Christianity undermines India's millennia old caste system. Those belonging to the upper castes fear that becoming Christian will free lower castes from their social and political low status.[7]

Violence against Christians is primarily perpetrated by members of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) paramilitary wing called Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), who adhere to the Hindu nationalist ideology called Hindutva. The Hindutva extremists "aim to cleanse the country of Christian presence and influence."[8] Law enforcement officials and right-wing Hindu politicians are usually complicit in such actions[9] and persecution is particularly egregious in rural areas.

## **3. VIOLATIONS**

In 2021, at least 761 instances of violence against Christians (including converts from Dalit and Adivasi communities) were recorded.[10] In the first five months of 2022 alone, there were 207 reported instances of violence against Christians in several states in India.[11] Below are some recent examples of violence against Christians.

On July 30, 2022, six Christian women were arrested over allegations of forced conversions in Uttar Pradesh.[12] A mob of about fifteen Hindu extremists barged into a birthday celebration and accused Christians of forced conversions, harassed them, and stole the Bibles.[13] Instead of arresting the Hindu attackers, the police arrested the Christian women and charged them under Uttar Pradesh's anti-conversion law.[14]

Also in Uttar Pradesh earlier in the same month, multiple pastors, including Pastor Santosh Kanoojiya, were arrested under charges of forced conversions.[15] When Pastor Kanoojiya was released on bail, he still had to shut down his church due to the active legal case. He stated that ““there have been constant efforts from the radical Hindu nationalist[s] to close down the Church that I take care of. They did what they want, and it was possible because of the BJP ruling the state.””[16]

A young Christian convert’s story was reported on July 5, 2022.[17] Mehr, her mother, and sister were attacked and brutally assaulted by their Hindu neighbors. Mehr, a young Hindu woman, accepted Jesus Christ after she was healed from her chronic illness at a Christian prayer meeting. After her conversion, her entire family became Christian.[18] But the Hindu neighbors attacked them one day after they were coming home from a prayer meeting. Mehr, her mother, and sister were hospitalized with severe injuries. Even though a complaint was filed with the local police, no one was arrested.[19]

In May 2022, at least thirty Christians were arrested in Uttar Pradesh over charges of forced conversions.[20] On May 31, 2022, a mob of radical Hindus attacked a pastor’s house, beat him, and then handed him over to the police. Instead of arresting the mob, the police charged the pastor with section 295-A of the Indian Penal Code, which punishes deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage the religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs.[21] On May 29, 2022, another Hindu mob interrupted a Sunday service, recorded videos, harassed the Christian worshipers, and desecrated Bibles.[22] Even in this case, the police arrested the pastor instead of taking action against the attackers.[23]

In April 2022, extremist groups in Karnataka filed complaints after a Bible was discovered in the prison cell of a non-Christian inmate.[24] This incident occurred after seven evangelical Christians visited the prison where they distributed copies of the Bible to inmates.[25] Now, extremist groups are urging for a state-wide ban on Christian missionaries and prison chaplains as they assert chaplains strive to convert prisoners to Christianity.[26] While it is commonplace for other religious texts to be distributed amongst prisoners, these groups have singled out the Bible for opposition.[27]

Similarly, there has been uproar over the use of the Bible in Christian secondary schools in India.[28] A Christian high school in Karnataka has received complaints “after someone reported that the registration form for the 11th grade includes a paragraph asking non-Christian families for their consent to allow their children to take Bible classes.”[29] While the school does not force students to read the Bible, Hindu nationalists, nonetheless, claim that the school is forcibly attempting to convert its non-Christian students.[30] As a result, authorities in Karnataka will reportedly be conducting investigations into all Christian schools within the state.[31]

On April 14, 2022, Evangelical Christians were celebrating Maundy Thursday at their church in Uttar Pradesh.[32] A mob of Hindu extremists surrounded the building and locked the doors of the church with patrons inside. About thirty-six Christian churchgoers were subsequently arrested and jailed for the violation of the state’s anti-conversion laws by allegedly converting 90 people to Christianity in a span of 40 days.

#### **4. REQUEST**

Above are only a few examples of persecution against Christians from recent months. Hindu nationalists do not want lower caste Hindus, Dalits, and the tribal people to convert to Christianity, and they are relentlessly targeting innocent citizens who are simply trying to exercise their right to peacefully practice their religion. This Council must urge the Indian government to stop encouraging this violence, abolish the anti-conversion laws, and punish the perpetrators who violently attack innocent citizens.

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