

July 7, 2020

United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo
United States Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo,

We are grateful that the United States Department of State continues to make the promotion of international religious freedom a priority for U.S. foreign policy. As part of its mandate under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the State Department designates as Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) those nations which have “engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom.”¹ We as member organizations of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable are writing now in view of the fact that the State Department has under consideration the recommendations from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's 2020 Annual Report for this current year's designations for CPCs. Historically, India has been excluded from the CPC list, and the fact India is the world's largest democracy and one of the United States' most prominent strategic partners, yet it continues to systematically persecute its religious minorities is of great concern to us. We feel that, especially amidst President Trump's recent passage of the Executive Order on Advancing International Religious Freedom, it is our responsibility to draw attention to India's infringement upon religious freedom lest we oversee India, a country with a remarkable history of liberty and democracy, transform into 'China 2.0' as result of the international community's restraint in directly condemning egregious religious freedom and human rights violations.

In addition to the nine nations that were designated as Countries of Particular Concern last December of 2019, we are now respectfully requesting that the State Department act on USCIRF's recommendation to add the nation of India to the list of Countries of Particular Concern for this year.

Although India is the world's largest democracy and professes to be a secular nation with freedom for all religions, its ongoing abuses of the religious beliefs and practices of its religious minorities have made it necessary for USCIRF to place India on its Tier-2 Watch List since 2009. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP administration, state-sanctioned persecution and discrimination has sharply escalated for millions of Indian citizens who are Muslims and Christians, as well as other minority faiths. Evidence of systemic persecution abounds and has been well-documented in both USCIRF's 2020 Annual Report and the State Department's 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom, which was released last month.

Furthermore, that persecution is entrenched in both the culture and the legislatures of the various states across the nation. Eight states in India have enacted anti-conversion legislation, and in seven

¹ U.S. Department of State, *Frequently Asked Questions: IRF Report and Countries of Particular Concern*, available at: <https://www.state.gov/frequently-asked-questions-irf-report-and-countries-of-particular-concern/>

of these states such laws are enforced. With proposals to introduce similar laws in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, these draconian laws disproportionately target individuals engaged in various Christian ministries, including evangelism. Regrettably, the Supreme Court of India has upheld such discriminatory laws despite the fact that “the decision has come under some academic criticism for not recognizing ‘propagation’ [included in the Constitution’s Article 25 on freedom of religion] as including freedom to convert and failing to ‘discuss the definitions of inducement and allurement, which was the primary bone of contention.’”² Additionally, the penal code of India contains an entire chapter including “offences relating to religion”— referred to by the international religious freedom community as blasphemy laws— which criminalize “deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs.”³

Among other developments in India, which suggest a continuous legal expansion of institutionalized religious persecution, is most notably the ratification and implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The CAA provides non-Muslim residents in India— Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Christian, Jain, and Parsi minorities— a swifter process towards citizenship but inherently excludes Muslims. Additionally, the blanket enforcement of cow slaughter laws, despite the fact that beef remains one of the most basic staple foods for many families in poverty, targets individuals and religious minorities that engage in beef consumption or leather-making. In some instances, Hindu radicals have been emboldened by such discriminatory laws and have engaged in mob violence against and lynching of Indian religious minorities.

Throughout 2019, nongovernmental organizations made multiple “reports of religiously motivated killings, assaults, riots, discrimination, vandalism, and actions restricting the right of individuals to practice and speak about their religious beliefs,” and the government made little to no effort to intervene and deescalate conflicts.⁴ Such acts of violence, which were both instigated and exacerbated as a result of the introduction of the CAA, the continuation of cow slaughter laws and anti-conversion laws, led to “72 incidents of mob violence” and “181 alleged hate crime incidents” as of June 2019, and 527 incidents of persecution towards Indian Christians throughout the entire year.⁵

It is also notable that numerous activists and journalists who are standing up for freedom of religion and human rights are being targeted, intimidated and arrested under draconian sedition laws and the recently amended Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). These arrests are taking place in spite of widespread Covid-19 lockdown.

Although some would argue that India does not belong in the same category with the draconian persecution practices of China and North Korea, we reject that position. By law, the CPC

² The Law Library of Congress, *State Anti-conversion Laws in India*, last updated October 2018, available at: <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/anti-conversion-laws/india-anti-conversion-laws.pdf> [accessed 24 June 2020].

³ *The Indian Penal Code, 1860 (Act No. 45 of 1860*, available at:

<https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/4219/1/THE-INDIAN-PENAL-CODE-1860.pdf>

⁴ United States Department of State, *2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: India*, 10 June 2020, available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/india/> [accessed 24 June 2020].

⁵ *ibid.*

designations were not to be evaluated in comparison with the practices of other nations. Rather, those designations are to be determined by objective standards with regard to “countries where the government engages in or tolerates ‘particularly severe’ violations of religious freedom.”⁶ Furthermore, the trajectory of systematic persecution observed in India—not only throughout 2019—but since the time that Prime Minister Modi entered office, shows no signs of abating. The Modi administration has continued to promote a Hindu nationalist agenda (formally known as Hindutva by the Hindu right-wing nationalists) that runs roughshod over the rights of non-Hindu citizens and tears at the fabric of India’s rich, pluralistic society.

We fully recognize the fact that the United States and India have enjoyed a cordial and diplomatic partnership which has been strengthened in recent years. That partnership has been mutually beneficial to both nations on a number of levels. Yet that should not be viewed as a reason to overlook the accelerating persecution of millions of India's religious minorities, promulgated by both state and non-state actors, for the sake of maintaining an amicable bi-lateral relationship. Rather, it should be an incentive to engage with India in discussions of religious freedom as a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for sustained bilateral collaboration.

Therefore, we urge the Department of State to accept USCIRF’s recommendation to designate India as a Country of Particular Concern this year.

Respectfully signed,

Organizations

All Pro Pastors International

American Gurdwara Parbandak Committee

American Sikh Council

Baptist World Alliance

Center for Pluralism

Christian Freedom International

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Civil and Human Rights Council - The World Sikh Parliament

Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience

Faith & Liberty DC

Federation of Indian American Christians Organization

Global Strategic Alliance

Greentree Global

Hindus for Human Rights

IAMC Boston

Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC)

Institute on Religion and Democracy

International Alliance for Religious Freedom in North Korea

International Alliance for Religious Freedom, Seoul, Korea

International Christian Concern

International Organization to Preserve Human Rights

International Society for Peace and Justice

Jubilee Campaign USA

Justice for All: Save India Project

Minh Van Foundation

Mission Africa International

National Security Institute, CNU, Korea

Religions for Peace USA

Save the Persecuted Christians

Sikh Coordination Committee East Coast

Sikh Council for Interfaith Relations

Sir Syed Education Society of North America

Sunshine Ministries

The Dietrich Bonhoeffer Institute

The International Multi-Faith Coalition (IMFC)

The Synod of Pentecostal Churches

UNITED SIKHS

Voices for Freedom

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President
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John Prabhudoss
Chairman
Federation of Indian American Christians Organization

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Sunita Viswanath
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John K. Hutcheson
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- cc:
1. Ambassador Sam Brownback
 2. Assistant Secretary Bob Destro
 3. Senior Advisor Thomas L. Vajda
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