

An Open Letter the Leaders of India

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And

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The 'Open Season' of violence against Christians in India

From Dr. Joseph D'souza,
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Dear leaders of the Indian Nation:

You must have been busy in the elections in Uttar Pradesh, but surely you would have seen television images of large mobs brutalising Christian pastors in various parts of the country this last fortnight. I wonder if you noticed the glee with which people in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, smashed their fists into the stomach of a helpless Tamil pastor on May 8. Others in the same mob proudly told the camera they were from Hindutva groups even as they rained blows at the head of the second pastor. Did you notice Pastor Walter Masih in his small house in Jaipur, Rajasthan, being hit repeatedly by lathi-bearing youth as his wide-eyed daughter covered behind a door on April 29? The child is still traumatised. As, indeed, is the Christian community in India.

These images should have seared the conscience of the nation, but they have invited nothing more than a smug silence from all governments -- the Congress chief minister in Maharashtra to the BJP chief minister in Rajasthan. In Madhya Pradesh, the women raped for being Christians on May 28, 2006, have wept in silence, even the police and TV refusing to listen to them.

There is little doubt now that Hindutva extremists are running a series of planned attacks against the Christian community for over a year now.

The intensity of these attacks is increasing.

Their own leaders have encouraged them to further violence by word, statement and support. Sadly, there has been no voice in authority which would discourage them; much less to caution them of punishment under the law of the land.

The deafening silence of the UPA Government in New Delhi when anti-conversion laws were passed in Gujarat and Rajasthan, and more recently by the Congress run Government in Himachal Pradesh, has in fact served as a tonic to the killer gangs and their hate-mongering leaders.

These anti-conversion laws demonise the Christian community as much as Muslims are elsewhere identified as 'anti-national' in the Hindutva propaganda. The present violence against Christian community in general, and pastors and priests in particular, takes us back to the dark days of 1998-2000 of the mass violence against Gujarat Christians and the brutal Orissa murder of Graham Stuart Staines and his young sons Philip and Timothy.

There is not a day but my colleagues in the All India Christian Council report anti-Christian violence from Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Karnataka and sadly, also from Andhra, Maharashtra and Himachal, the last three in control of the Congress. The most heinous of them all

is sexual violence against Christian women, particularly in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

We fear this overwhelming cloud of hate and violence has in it the seeds of a much tragedy in the future. I hope and pray it will not lead to a massacre of my community possibly in some distant village area or in a Christian compound.

It is not enough for the Central Government to say that law and order is a State subject, while remaining a mute spectator of the violence against the micro minority Christian community. In all this violence, the community has never retaliated or taken recourse to any form of violence. There never has been a communal riot involving Christians anywhere in the country.

Chief Ministers of the concerned states, whatever be their political identity, cannot absolve themselves of responsibility in this tragic environment of hate and violence. The blame for the state of affairs lies squarely also on the Union Home Ministry in New Delhi which time and again has received complaints from bodies like the All India Christian Council and the All India Catholic Union.

What has the Union Home Ministry done about the violence against tribal Christians in Madhya Pradesh, in Chhattisgarh, in Rajasthan, and in Gujarat in the last six months? What has the Home Ministry done about the recent attack on Pastor Masih in Rajasthan or the workers in Kolhapur? What is it doing about the consistent attacks against the tribal Christians in Orissa?

The fault indeed squarely lies with the Central Government which was voted to power by Dalits, minorities and the majority poor who hoped that the new UPA Government would at least insist upon the rule of the law and protect the minorities and Dalits. The lack of protection is all the more painful as the vast majority of Christian workers and communities in north India are Dalits, tribals or from the most backward castes. These are the communities which are bearing the brunt of the attacks.

It is not too late. We feel the situation can be retrieved, the marauding mobs contained, and tragedy averted, if the Union government were to:

1. Repeal the anti-conversion law in Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh just as Chief Minister Karunanidhi revoked the anti-conversion law in Tamil Nadu as these laws legitimise demonising of the Christian community.
2. Issue statutory notices to State Governments, and especially the Governments of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh to give protection to Christian places of worship and Christian priests.
3. Book the perpetrators of hate crimes and violence against the Christians under the Indian Penal Code and deal strictly with them.

We are proud of India's democratic traditions, and the Freedom of Faith it has nurtured since Siddhartha became Gautama Buddha. Independent India has codified the same tradition in its Constitution.

It is not too much that we seek as Citizens of India. Let there be rule of law, and let the Constitution prevail in every state of the Country.

God bless you

Dr Joseph D'souza

P.S. The links below show news clippings of the recent incidents of violence from CNN-IBN television news channel:

<http://www.ibnlive.com/videos/39465/pastor-attack-media-under-scanner.html>
<http://www.ibnlive.com/videos/39994/vhp-activists-beat-up-two-priests.html>