

AN APPEAL FOR SUPPORT OF HOUSE RESOLUTION 417

INTRODUCED ON NOV. 18, 2013

BY REP. JOE PITTS, R-PA & REP. KEITH ELLISON, D-MI

Introduction Letter

“H. Res. 417 is key opportunity to support the lives and liberties of Indian minorities through conversation about human rights”

Text of House Resolution 417

“Praising India’s rich religious diversity and commitment to tolerance and equality, and reaffirming the need to protect the rights and freedoms of religious minorities”

April 14, 2014: OFMI News

“Leaders of First Sikh-American Gurdwara ask Congressman McNerney to back Resolution for Human Rights in India (HR 417)”

April 1, 2014: Letter to Representatives from Rep. John Conyers, Jr.

“Cosponsor Bipartisan Resolution Supporting the Rights of Indian Religious Minorities and Honoring Indian Pluralism”

Feb. 25, 2014: Letter to Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Rep. Ed Royce
Appeal from 16-member Christian coalition to support H. Res. 417

Feb. 12, 2014: Christian Post

“Christian Persecution, Sexual Assaults and Mob Attacks Going Unpunished in India, ADF Testifies Before House”

Feb. 10, 2014: INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

“Religious Minorities Urge U.S. to Discuss Persecution in Talks with India”

Feb. 5, 2014: WORLD Magazine

“Christians, Sikhs lobby U.S. Congress to defend India’s persecuted”

Jan. 19, 2014: INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

“Christians and Sikhs in U.S. Band Together Against Persecution in India”

Introduction Letter:

H. Res. 417 is key opportunity to support the lives and liberties of Indian minorities through conversation about human rights

Dear Recipient:

We are asking you to extend your support for immediate passage of House Resolution 417: “Praising India’s rich religious diversity and commitment to tolerance and equality, and reaffirming the need to protect the rights and freedoms of religious minorities.” Support is best offered by visiting or calling your congressional representative.

This resolution was introduced on Nov. 18, 2013 by Rep. Joe Pitts (R-PA) and Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN). H. Res. 417 has solid bi-partisan support, with 25 Democrats and 24 Republicans (as of April 29, 2014) having signed on as co-sponsors. As the contents of this package demonstrate, this resolution is backed by a coalition of Sikh, Muslim, and Christian communities who understand its historic potential to positively impact the lives and liberties of Indian minorities.

House Resolution 417 suggests the U.S. make human rights and religious freedom the cornerstone of conversation with India. It places the U.S. on record as recognizing several acts of ethnic cleansing of minorities since 1992, suggests dialogue with India focus on human rights issues, and recommends India increase training on human rights for its police and judiciary. This is a response to reports by the U.S. State Department, such as that made in 2011 by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, which found:

The failure to provide justice to religious minorities is not a new development. In 1984, thousands were killed in anti-Sikh riots that erupted in Delhi... Numerous NGOs, including the Indian American Muslim Council and the All India Christian Council and religious communities believe that the masterminds of violence are often vindicated and set free, or if convicted, released with minor monetary fines, and that police are influenced by religious bias and state politics. The failure to provide swift and adequate justice to religious minorities perpetuates a climate of impunity, which allows the harassment of and violence against religious minorities to continue unabated.

As documented in the resolution, minorities who have been victims of genocide in India and who have not received justice include those in the 1992 Babri Mosque riots, the 2002 Gujarat riots, and the 2008 Odisha riots. The earliest targets of these genocides were Sikhs, who saw first-hand how India has responded with impunity after thousands were massacred in the streets of Delhi in the 1984 Sikh Genocide. Consequently, H. Res. 417 would:

- *Make calls for religious freedom and related human rights central to dialogue with India;*
- *Recognize the suffering of all Indians who are victims of religious violence and recognize appeals from Christian, Muslim, and Sikh communities reporting an increase in religiously-motivated violence;*
- *Urge India to increase training on human rights and religious freedom standards and practices for police and the judiciary, particularly in states with a history or likelihood of communal violence;*
- *Urge repeal of anti-conversion laws which violate the rights of non-Hindus, empowerment of the National Commission on Minorities with enforcement powers, and increased training in human rights and religious freedom for police and the judiciary;*
- *Urge all political parties and religious organizations to publicly oppose the exploitation of religious differences and denounce harassment and violence against religious minorities.*

House Resolution 417 is endorsed by the following groups —



113TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 417

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 18, 2013

Mr. Pitts (for himself, Mr. Ellison, Mr. Chabot, Mr. Conyers, Mr. Sensenbrenner, Mr. McGovern, Mr. Wolf, Mr. Sires, Mr. Meadows, Mr. Moran, Mr. Huelskamp, Mr. Lewis, Ms. McCollum, Mr. Grijalva, and Mr. Polis) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and in addition to the Committee on the Judiciary, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

RESOLUTION

Praising India's rich religious diversity and commitment to tolerance and equality, and reaffirming the need to protect the rights and freedoms of religious minorities.

Whereas India is the world's largest democracy, with a constitution that protects the fundamental rights of all citizens, including the right of each citizen to profess, propagate, and practice his or her own religion;

Whereas India is the birthplace of several of the world's great religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism;

Whereas India and the United States enjoy a strong historic relationship and believe deeply in the causes of liberty, justice, and equality under the law;

Whereas India and the United States have rich multiethnic societies and share a commitment to the values of tolerance, pluralism, and religious diversity;

Whereas the population of India includes a Hindu majority, the third largest Muslim population in the world, a Christian population of more than 25,000,000, a Sikh population of more than 19,000,000, and dozens of other faiths;

Whereas contrary to the tolerant and pluralistic traditions of the Hindu faith, strands of the Hindu nationalist movement have advanced a divisive and violent agenda that has harmed the social fabric of India;

Whereas on December 6, 1992, a large mob destroyed the historic 16th-century Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, which was located on a site claimed to be the birthplace of the Hindu god Rama;

Whereas according to the Congressional Research Service, ensuing communal riots left many hundreds dead in cities across India and Mumbai was especially hard hit as the site of coordinated 1993 terrorist bombings believed to have been a retaliatory strike by Muslims;

Whereas on February 27, 2002, in the city of Godhra in the western state of Gujarat, India, 58 Hindus were burnt alive in a train coach fire, and communal violence erupted in several Gujarati cities;

Whereas in the International Religious Freedom Report of 2003, the United States Department of State found that In Gujarat the worst religious violence directed against Muslims by Hindus took place in February and March 2002, leaving an estimated 2,000 dead and 100,000 displaced into refugee camps ... Christians were also victims in Gujarat, and many churches were destroyed;

Whereas the Indian magazine Tehelka reported that many of the people who participated in the violence said it was possible only because of the connivance of the state police and Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi;

Whereas the United States Government denied Minister Modi a visa to the United States in 2005 on the grounds of egregious religious freedom violations under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the first and only time such a denial has been issued;

Whereas 10 years after the violence took place, Human Rights Watch reported on February 24, 2012, that Modi has acted against whistleblowers while making no effort to prosecute those responsible for the anti-Muslim violence ... Where justice has been delivered in Gujarat, it has been in spite of the state government, not because of it.;

Whereas 10 years after the violence took place, Amnesty International reported on February 29, 2012, that at least 21,000 survivors and relatives of the victims remained in 19 transit relief camps;

Whereas violence broke out between Christians and Hindus in the eastern state of Odisha in December 2007, with significant rioting and looting of shops and churches and more than 1,000 people displaced from their homes;

Whereas the August 2008 murder of a prominent Hindu leader of Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Odisha sparked a violent campaign against Christians, although Maoist extremists claimed responsibility for the assassination;

Whereas the United States Department of State reported that 40 people were killed, 134 were injured, churches and homes were destroyed, and more than 10,000 people fled the state;

Whereas the Associated Press reported at the time that the violence provided a window into India's hidden fragility, its sometimes dangerous political climate, and the fierce historical divisions buried in its vast diversity;

Whereas according to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), there was no immediate police or state government reaction to the Odisha violence, and religious leaders and aid agencies were denied access to provide care for the victims;

Whereas the National Solidarity Forum, an independent Indian tribunal of former judges, journalists, and political analysts, concluded in 2010 that institutional bias on the part of the Odisha state government, its police, and judicial system, led to a lack of justice and accountability;

Whereas the All India Christian Council, an Indian nongovernmental organization, reported in 2012 that state police documented an estimated 3,500 complaints related to the 2007 to 2008 Odisha violence, but only 827 cases were registered with local or state court structures;

Whereas USCIRF found that the investigative and court structures the Government of India created in response to the communal violence in Gujarat and Odisha failed to end intimidation, harassment, and violence against religious minorities;

Whereas according to a 2012 report by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion Public Life, India falls into a high category for government restrictions on religion and a very high category for religious social hostilities;

Whereas nongovernmental organizations and Christian, Muslim, and Sikh communities reported an increase in religiously motivated harassment and violence over the last 2 years, and expect it to increase in advance of the 2014 general elections;

Whereas on August 27, 2013, communal violence erupted in Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, with more than 60 Muslims and Hindus killed, 50,000 people displaced, and thousands remaining in relief camps 2 months later;

Whereas on September 18, 2013, a local court in Muzaffarnagar issued arrest warrants against 16 politicians and community leaders, including Bahujan Samaj Party parliamentarian Qadir Rana and Bharatiya Janata Party Legislative Assembly members Sangeet Som and Bhartendu Singh for inciting the violence;

Whereas several states have Freedom-of-Religion Laws, commonly referred to as anticonversion laws, that purport to ban forced conversions but actually are used to prevent certain religious groups from peacefully persuading others to change their religion; and

Whereas USCIRF found in its 2013 Annual Report that states with these laws have higher incidents of intimidation, harassment and violence against religious minorities, particularly Christians, than states that do not.: Now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the House of Representatives—

- (1) recognizes the suffering of all Indian citizens who have been victims of religious violence, including the victims of all faiths from the 1992 Babri Mosque riots, the 2002 Gujarat riots, the 2008 Odisha riots, and violence that is ongoing today;
- (2) calls for religious freedom and related human rights to be included in the United States–India Strategic Dialogue, and for these issues to be raised directly with federal and state Indian Government officials when appropriate;
- (3) shares the opinion of the United States Department of State and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) that the Gujarat government has not adequately pursued justice for the victims of the 2002 violence and remains concerned by reports from journalists and human rights groups about the complicity of local officials in the 2002 violence;
- (4) commends the United States Government for exercising its authority in 2005 under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to deny a United States visa to Narendra Modi on the grounds of religious freedom violations, and encourages it to review the applications of any individuals implicated in religious freedom violations under the same standard;
- (5) commends the role of India’s National Human Rights Commission and the Indian Supreme Court, which has led to some convictions in Gujarat riot cases and the arrest of a few high-level leaders in the Gujarati administration;
- (6) urges India to increase training on human rights and religious freedom standards and practices for police and the judiciary, particularly in states with a history or likelihood of communal violence;
- (7) calls on Gujarat and other Indian states with anti-conversion laws to repeal such legislation and ensure freedom to practice, propagate, and profess ones’ religion as enshrined in the Indian constitution;

(8) urges the Government of India to empower the National Commission on Minorities with enforcement mechanisms, such as the ability to conduct trials and hear appeals;

(9) encourages the establishment of an impartial body of interfaith religious leaders, human rights advocates, legal experts, and government officials to discuss and recommend actions to promote religious tolerance and understanding; and

(10) urges all political parties and religious organizations to publicly oppose the exploitation of religious differences and denounce harassment and violence against religious minorities, especially in the run-up to India's general elections in 2014.

OFMI News:

“Leaders of First Sikh-American Gurdwara ask Congressman McNerney to back Resolution for Human Rights in India (HR 417)”

STOCKTON: April 14, 2014 — Representatives of Stockton Gurdwara, the first Sikh settlement in the United States, met with U.S. Congressman Jerry McNerney (D-Stockton) on Sunday during the annual Vaisakhi festival to urge him to co-sponsor House Resolution 417, which makes human rights and religious freedom issues a central focus of dialogue with India.

Stockton Gurdwara Vice-President Racinder Singh Uppal, Vice-President of the Gurdwara, City of Lathrop Mayor Sonny Dhaliwal, Mayor of Lathrop, Bhim Rao Ambedkar Sikh Foundation (BRASF) Director Dr. Amrik Singh, and American Punjabi Chamber of Commerce (APCOC) CEO Balwinder Singh and Director Mike Boparai were joined in their request for support of the resolution by several other gurdwara committee members who are constituents of Congressman McNerney.

Uppal presided over the meeting, introducing the Sikh community’s agenda of passing H. Res. 417 and the need for the congressman’s support. Bhajan Singh, Founding Director of Organization for Minorities of India (OFMI), subsequently reviewed with McNerney a report detailing reasons to support the resolution and press reports demonstrating international support, including from the American Center for Law and Justice. As an outcome of the meeting, Congressman McNerney promised to look into the issue and get back to the gurdwara soon.

After the meeting, Mike Boparai of APCOC remarked: “Not only did we urge the congressman to sign on to this landmark resolution, but we also expressed our disappointment that his staff did not inform Stockton Gurdwara about its introduction. We have hopes that when Congressman McNerney sees something good for the Sikh community, he will bring it to our attention.”

In concluding remarks to Congressman McNerney, gurdwara leadership reports they reminded him that, as the elected leaders of the Stockton Sikh community, they are the ones who most accurately represent the interests and desires of local Sikhs.

An OFMI delegation visited Rep. McNerney’s district office in Stockton on January 13 to present him with 490 signatures from Sikh constituents requesting he co-sponsor H. Res. 417. On January 14, an OFMI advisor met with McNerney’s Foreign Affairs Aide in his Washington, D.C. office. Three California congressional representatives have co-sponsored the resolution: Tony Cárdenas (D-San Fernando), Tom McClintock (R-Roseville), and Barbara Lee (D-Oakland). McClintock and Lee both signed on after visits from OFMI.

“This resolution proposes guidelines for conversation with India that are acceptable to all civilized nations,” said Arvin Valmuci, OFMI’s communications coordinator. “The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent body of the State Department,

has placed India on its 'Watch List' annually since 2009. In 2005, the State Department denied Narendra Modi, a leading candidate for Prime Minister, a U.S. visa because of his culpability in an anti-Muslim genocide in 2002. These are some of the issues House Resolution 417 addresses in its suggestion to the executive branch that human rights and religious freedom issues are the most important issues to talk about with India.”

House Resolution has solid bi-partisan support with 25 Democrats and 24 Republicans as co-sponsors. It has been endorsed by Christian, Muslim, and Sikh communities throughout the United States. Last month, the American Center for Law and Justice endorsed the resolution in an editorial by its executive director, Jordan Sekulow, who wrote: “Congress should express its support for India as a nation that values tolerance and religious freedom by voting on House Resolution 417.”

Cosponsor Bipartisan Resolution Supporting the Rights of Indian Religious Minorities and Honoring Indian Pluralism

From: The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.
Sent By: justin.zorn@mail.house.gov
Bill: H.Res. 417
Date: 4/1/2014

Cosponsor Bipartisan Resolution Supporting the Rights of Indian Religious Minorities and Honoring India's Religious Diversity

Dear Colleague:

We write to encourage you to support a strongly bipartisan resolution regarding the rights of religious minorities in India, the world's largest democracy. The resolution (H. Res. 417) highlights India's rich diversity and democratic heritage but also expresses concern over incidents of religious and ethnic violence in India's recent history.

While the Indian Constitution explicitly upholds the rights of all citizens, episodes of targeted violence have instilled fear in the hearts of millions of Muslims, Christians, and other minority faith communities. The resolution notes the rise of a strident nationalist movement that one House Foreign Affairs Committee witness described as "the worst anti-Christian pogrom of the 21st century" [1][2]. In 2008, Hindu nationalists massacred more than a hundred Christians and left 50,000 homeless after burning down homes and churches in the Indian state of Odisha. Other incidents of communal violence occurred in Gujarat in 2002[3], when more than 1,000 people were killed, mostly Muslims, and in Muzaffarnagar in 2013[4] [5].

Several states in India have passed laws restricting an individual's freedom to determine his or her religious affiliation. This subversion of a fundamental pillar of liberal democracy bodes ill for the future unless religious freedom is restored. At stake is not only the future of secularism in India, but also the stability of the South Asian region.

The bipartisan resolution, H. Res. 417, calls for issues related to civil liberties to be included within the U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue, and urges India to increase training on human rights and religious freedom standards and practices.

We believe this resolution will reaffirm both India's and the United States' commitment to religious tolerance and the values that form the foundation of our strong relationship with India. To cosponsor, please contact Stephen Lassiter (Stephen.Lassiter@mail.house.gov) in Congressman Keith Ellison's office.

Sincerely,

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress

[1] Anti-Christian Violence Detailed in Hearing Calling for Filling of Religious Freedom Post
<http://morningstarnews.org/2014/02/global-violence-against-christians-detailed-in-hearing-calling-for-filling-of-religious-freedom-post/>

[2] Transcript of the written testimony by John Allen Jr. at the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee hearing

<http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA16/20140211/101747/HHRG-113-FA16-Wstate-AllenJ-20140211.pdf>

[3] International Religious Freedom Report 2002, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, US Department of State

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2002/14023.htm>

[4] Muzaffarnagar: Tales of death and despair in India's riot-hit town

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-24172537>

[5] Campaign for Prime Minister in India Gets Off to Violent Start

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/18/world/asia/indian-vote-off-to-a-violent-start.html>

February 25, 2014

The Honorable Ed Royce
U.S. House of Representatives
Chairman, House Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Rep. Royce,

We are writing to request your support for House Resolution 417, *“praising India’s rich religious diversity and commitment to tolerance and equality, and reaffirming the need to protect the rights and freedoms of religious minorities”*.

As you know, India will hold national elections in May and Mr. Narendra Modi’s status as a serious contender with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) polarizes India’s national politics along religious and class lines. We are extremely concerned with the potentially serious consequences of his candidacy and the legitimacy it will give to the BJP’s Hindu nationalist policies. These policies will have a potentially debilitating effect on our co-religionists’ ability to practice their religion freely in India. In fact, many of our contacts throughout India are asking for our help during this critical time.

Some of us have been denied visas to re-enter India because of our work investigating the 2007-2008 violence against Christians in Odisha State. We share each other’s concern that our ability to travel to India and support our co-religionists there, or even report any violence against them, will face increased restrictions if Minister Modi and the BJP come to power nationally.

Repeated mass violence against religious communities and impunity for the perpetrators of such violence, including in the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat under Modi’s government, the 2007-2008 orchestrated deadly attacks on Christians by Hindu nationalist groups loyal to the BJP in Odisha State, and continued violence against minorities in various parts of India raises serious questions about how the current elections will affect national unity, human rights and religious freedom. Our communities cannot afford to ignore these issues at this time.

These very serious issues have resulted in widespread concern and criticism of the Modi regime by international human rights organizations. Minister Modi is in fact the first and only individual that has ever been denied entrance into the United States because of religious freedom related human rights violations. To this day, he retains this status because of the extreme nature of the religious persecution taking place there.

Modi’s rise also raises serious concern that the draconian legislation instituted by his administration in Gujarat criminalizing religious conversion can be replicated across the country. The law is one of the worst in the country for it is the only one that criminalizes

change of religion without prior permission of the government. Such legislation has been used throughout the country as a cover by Hindu nationalist groups to forcibly “re-convert” thousands of Christians to Hinduism.

House Resolution 417 introduced by Congressmen Joseph Pitts (R-PA) and Keith Ellison (D-MN) in a bi-partisan and multi-faith effort, urges India to institute better protection for religious minorities, and calls for the inclusion of human rights and religious freedom in the US-India Strategic Dialogue. The resolution further commends the State Department for addressing Narendra Modi’s responsibility for the 2002 anti-Muslim violence through its continued ban on his visa.

Muslims in Gujarat, Christians in Odisha, Sikhs in Punjab and other religious minorities remain marginalized and impoverished as a result of Hindu nationalist violence. This violence and the increasing impunity and social hostility toward religious minorities throughout India have unfortunately coincided with Modi’s rise to prominence in the current elections and therefore cannot be ignored.

While some Members of Congress suggested during a hearing reviewing the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 in July 2013 that economic concerns should take precedence over religious freedom concerns, we believe this would be unwise. In fact, this was the unanimous opinion of the witnesses testifying at the hearing before the House Government Reform Committee. By ignoring the ongoing impunity against religious minorities, which Modi is partially responsible for, Congress is sending a message that religious freedom concerns will not be a priority in our foreign policy with India. Further, this overlooks the ways in which violence against religious minorities is used to gravely impact their economic health by, for example, destroying their property and denying them employment.

We know that you share our concern for religious freedom and therefore we respectfully request that you support H.Res.417 and hold a hearing to review the need for greater US engagement with India regarding religious freedom before it is too late. In the event that Modi is elected, it is important that we are prepared to deal with what many of us fear will be the very dangerous ramifications of a Hindu nationalist party leading India for all of our co-religionists.

Sincerely,

Jordan Sekulow
American Center for Law & Justice

Benjamin Bull
Alliance Defending Freedom

Sen. Rick Santorum
Patriot Voices

Jim Backlin
Christian Coalition of America

Matt Staver
Liberty Counsel Action

Nina Shea
Hudson Institute Ctr for Religious Freedom

William Murray
Religious Freedom Coalition

Thomas Jacobson
Intl Diplomacy & Public Policy Center

Jeff King
International Christian Concern

Lindsay Vessey
Venn Institute

Ann Buwalda
Jubilee Campaign

Brent McBurney
Advocates International

Roshini Wickremesinhe
Asia Evangelical Alliance

Mervyn Thomas
Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Geoff Tunnicliffe
World Evangelical Alliance

Mark Tooley
Institute on Religion & Democracy

Cc:

Ranking Foreign Affairs Committee Member Elliot Engel
Foreign Affairs Subcommittee Chair Steve Chabot
Ranking Foreign Affairs Subcommittee Member Eni Faleomavaega
Foreign Affairs Subcommittee Chair Chris Smith
Ranking Foreign Affairs Subcommittee Member Karen Bass
Judiciary Committee Chair Bob Goodlatte
Ranking Judiciary Committee Member John Conyers
Judiciary Subcommittee Chair Trent Franks
Ranking Judiciary Subcommittee Member Steve Cohen
Speaker John Boehner
House Majority Leader Eric Cantor
House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi

THE CHRISTIAN POST

CP WORLD Tuesday, Apr 29, 2014

Christian Persecution, Sexual Assaults and Mob Attacks Going Unpunished in India, ADF Testifies Before House



(Ruth Malthotra)

India residents gather at a church in rural East India to worship on Palm Sunday.

that Christians in India have suffered about 150 violent attacks on an average in the past few years," argued [ADF attorney Tehmina Arora](#) before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations.

"These attacks include physical and sexual assaults, murder and desecration of places of worship and graveyards."

Arora listed several examples of Christians being violently attacked by Hindu extremist groups, but the full extent of the persecution is revealed when taking into account the lack of police action on such crimes.

"This large scale impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of mob violence across the country has fueled violence against religious minorities in India," the ADF attorney said, and reminded the subcommittee of a particularly violent incident Christians suffered in the Kandhamal district of the eastern state of Orissa (now known as Odisha) in 2008, where between 75 to 123 people were killed, close to 5,000

By [Stoyan Zaimov](#)

February 12, 2014 | 8:02 am

Christians are being persecuted, sexually assaulted and attacked by mobs in India, and the crimes are going unpunished, according to testimony by Alliance Defending Freedom before the U.S. House of Representatives on Tuesday.

"India, in spite of its long tradition for religious tolerance, finds itself in the throes of religious fundamentalism and violence against religious minorities for the past few decades. Reports by faith-based rights agencies show

houses were destroyed and at least 264 churches and prayer halls were desecrated and demolished.

Christians are a strict minority in the Hindu-dominated country, making up around 2.3 percent of the population, according to the CIA Factbook. The rising wave of persecution they have had to suffer through in recent years has been [well documented](#) by watchdog groups.

Persecution watchdog group Open Doors lists India at [number 28](#) among countries where Christians are most persecuted, up three places from its 2013 ranking.

Arora pointed out that besides the violence, Christians are also targeted by government restrictions and unjust legislation. Common legislation used against believers are anti-conversion laws, which are supposed to protect people from forceful religious persuasion, but in reality lead to serious human rights violations against religious minorities.

The law requires "the converting person to give details of his or her conversion to the district magistrate (administrative head), either prior to the conversion 'ceremony' or subsequent to it. The law in Gujarat state requires that the person seeking to convert to another religion must take prior permission from the district magistrate before any conversion 'ceremony' is performed."

The ADF attorney argued that this law impinges on the freedom of conscience of a prospective convert, and their right to privacy.

"The law renders the person incapable of taking the final decision with regard to his or her faith, and instead requires approval of the district authority," Arora said.

"This is violation of the right to freedom of association, the right to privacy and the freedom of conscience. The laws undermine the agency of the convert and make every religious conversion suspect and liable for scrutiny."

Arora's [full testimony](#) can be read on the House website.

Source URL : <http://www.christianpost.com/news/christian-persecution-sexual-assaults-and-mob-attacks-going-unpunished-in-india-adf-testifies-before-house-114411/>

[Persecution](#)<http://www.persecution.org/2014/02/10/religious-minorities-urge-u-s-to-discuss-persecution-in-talks-with-india>Export date: Tue Mar 18 3:20:53 2014 / +0000 GMT

Religious Minorities Urge U.S. to Discuss Persecution in Talks with India

ICC Note:

A coalition of Indian Sikhs and Christians have united to lobby the U.S. government into discussing the issue of persecution in its next round of talks with the Indian government. Both Christians and Sikhs are religious minorities in India and have faced various forms of persecution. Anti-Christians sentiment seems to be rising in India as the Hindu nationalist movement continues to gain popularity. Please pray that the U.S. doesn't remain silent on this issue.

2/10/2014 India (sikhsiyasat.net) - According to certain media reports Indian Christians and Sikhs united last month to urge California Congressmen to support a House resolution that would make human rights and justice for religious minorities a priority in U.S.-India talks.

HR 417 is waiting on hearings in the U.S. House Foreign Affairs and Judiciary committees, which must approve it before it can come to the House floor for a vote. The annual talks, which President Barack Obama began in 2009, last took place in June 2013.

“This is a particularly concerning issue at the moment because India is going to elect a new prime minister in May,” said Pieter Singh, executive director of Sikh Information Centre and Advisor to the Organization for Minorities of India.

Singh said both candidates, Rahul Gandhi and Narendra Modi, are linked to past attacks on religious minorities, including Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians. Gandhi is the grandson of Indira Gandhi, who led a military assault on the Golden Temple, a Sikh holy place, in 1984. Modi has been accused of being complicit in the 2002 massacre of Muslims in Gujarat state, according to Agence France Presse. He is a member of the Bharatiya Janata party, a Hindu nationalist political group.

“This is where religious minorities in India are at the moment,” Singh said. “These two men are fighting to rule India and look at their records.” The union of Christians and Sikhs, was a “natural alliance” given their religious motivation to help the oppressed, he said.

In 2009, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) put India on a “watch list” for its inadequate response to anti-Christian violence in Orissa (now Odisha) in 2008, and the Gujarat killings of Muslims in 2002. In 2013, USCIRF’s annual report placed India in Tier 2 status, noting that Christians, Sikhs, and Muslims said intimidation and harassment had increased, especially in states with laws against “forced” conversions.

William Stark, International Christian Concern’s Regional Manager for South Asia, said most persecution in India stems from Hindutva, the ideology that to be Indian is to be Hindu and that other faiths are foreign. Authorities said Hindu extremists were part of the group that stabbed a Christian

pastor to death on his doorstep in early January, Morning Star News reported.

Hindu extremists use anti-forced conversion laws, which makes it illegal to “induce” someone to convert, to arrest Christians because the interpretation of the word “induce” can include the promise of eternal life, Stark said. In 2013, the Catholic Secular Forum counted 4,000 offenses against Christians, including attacks on clergy and churches.

...

[\[Full Story\]](#)

Daily Dispatches

Christians, Sikhs lobby U.S. Congress to defend India's persecuted

PERSECUTION

By JULIA A. SEYMOUR
Posted Feb. 5, 2014, 04:20 p.m.

Indian Christians and Sikhs united last month to urge California Congressmen to support a House resolution that would make human rights and justice for religious minorities a priority in U.S.-India talks.

HR 417 is waiting on hearings in the U.S. House Foreign Affairs and Judiciary committees, which must approve it before it can come to the House floor for a vote. The annual talks, which President Barack Obama began in 2009, last took place in June 2013.

“This is a particularly concerning issue at the moment because India is going to elect a new prime minister in May,” said Pieter Singh, executive director of Sikh Information Centre and Advisor to the Organization for Minorities of India.

Singh said both candidates, Rahul Gandhi and Narendra Modi, are linked to past attacks on religious minorities, including Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians. Gandhi is the grandson of Indira Gandhi, who led a military assault on the Golden Temple, a Sikh holy place, in 1984. Modi has been accused of being complicit in the 2002 massacre of Muslims in Gujarat state, according to [Agence France Presse](#)

[\[http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/aleqm5ip0in2ehvgcnbjuc84xwrs3ibqpg?docid=cng.b54e0b461a7c27deb53bf402da9d3b62.51\]](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/aleqm5ip0in2ehvgcnbjuc84xwrs3ibqpg?docid=cng.b54e0b461a7c27deb53bf402da9d3b62.51). He is a member of the Bharatiya Janata party, a Hindu nationalist political group.



Associated Press/Photo by Evan Vucci

Sikhs for Justice protest outside the White House.

“This is where religious minorities in India are at the moment,” Singh said. “These two men are fighting to rule India and look at their records.” The union of Christians and Sikhs, was a “natural alliance” given their religious motivation to help the oppressed, he said.

In 2009, the [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom \[http://www.worldmag.com/2009/08/india_scolded\]](http://www.worldmag.com/2009/08/india_scolded) (USCIRF) put India on a “watch list” for its inadequate response to anti-Christian violence in Orissa (now Odisha) in 2008, and the Gujarat killings of Muslims in 2002. In 2013, USCIRF’s [annual report \[http://www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%2520uscirf%2520annual%2520report%2520\(2\).pdf\]](http://www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%2520uscirf%2520annual%2520report%2520(2).pdf) placed India in Tier 2 status, noting that Christians, Sikhs, and Muslims said intimidation and harassment had increased, especially in states with laws against “forced” conversions.

William Stark, International Christian Concern’s Regional Manager for South Asia, said most persecution in India stems from Hindutva, the ideology that to be Indian is to be Hindu and that other faiths are foreign. Authorities said Hindu extremists were part of the group that stabbed a Christian pastor to death on his doorstep in early January, [Morning Star News \[http://morningstarnews.org/2014/01/hindu-extremists-accused-of-killing-pastor-in-andhra-pradesh-india/\]](http://morningstarnews.org/2014/01/hindu-extremists-accused-of-killing-pastor-in-andhra-pradesh-india/) reported.

Hindu extremists use anti-forced conversion laws, which makes it illegal to “induce” someone to convert, to arrest Christians because the interpretation of the word “induce” can include the promise of eternal life, Stark said. In 2013, the Catholic Secular Forum counted 4,000 offenses against Christians, including attacks on clergy and churches.

“Passing HR 417 means valuing peace and the preservation of human life over political gain, and supporting the resolution is one of the key ways Christians can act to relieve the oppressed,” Singh said in a [statement \[http://ofmi.org/2014/01/christians-and-sikhs-unite-in-call-for-us-congress-to-support-religious-freedom-in-india/\]](http://ofmi.org/2014/01/christians-and-sikhs-unite-in-call-for-us-congress-to-support-religious-freedom-in-india/).



Julia A. Seymour

Julia has worked as a writer in the Washington, D.C., area since 2005 and was a fall 2012 participant in a World Journalism Institute mid-career class conducted by WORLD editor in chief Marvin Olasky in Asheville, N.C. Follow Julia on Twitter [@SteakandaBible \[https://twitter.com/SteakandaBible\]](https://twitter.com/SteakandaBible).

[Persecution](#)<http://www.persecution.org/2014/01/19/christians-and-sikhs-in-u-s-band-together-against-persecution-in-india>Export date: Tue Mar 18 3:19:02 2014 / +0000 GMT

Christians and Sikhs in U.S. Band Together Against Persecution in India

ICC Note:

Christians and Sikhs in the U.S. are banding together to call on the U.S. government to discuss the issue of intolerance against religious minorities in their talks with India. Both Christians and Sikhs face much hostility from India's Hindu majority population. With the recent rise of Hindu extremism/nationalism, instances of persecution have predictably spiked as well.

1/19/2014 India ([Sikh Siyasat](#)) - According to a detailed statement sent to the Sikh Siyasat News (SSN) by Organization for Minorities of India (OFMI): [while] opposing oppression of religious minorities in India, Christians are uniting with Sikhs this week, asking five congressional representatives from Northern California to support House Resolution 417, a statement by the United States Congress which calls for religious freedom and related human rights to be included in U.S.-India talks.

“The long and rich relationship between India and the United States should be cherished and cultivated,” said Chris Schwegler, an advisor to Organization for Minorities of India (OFMI). He joined local constituents on Friday to meet with staff for Tom McClintock (R-Roseville), Ami Bera (D-Elk Grove), and Doris Matsui (D-Sacramento).

On Monday, delegations also visited the offices of Jerry McNerney (D-Stockton) and Jeff Denham (R-Modesto), while OFMI Advisor Jada Bernard visited Rep. McNerney’s Capitol Hill office on Tuesday. Bernard commented: “I had a pleasant meeting with Silpa Rajan, Congressman McNerney’s foreign affairs aide. To the young staffer, I expressed that HR 417 is America’s opportunity to unify against the injustices in India. Her advice was to contact other congressional offices, which I plan on doing in the upcoming week. I am excited and inspired to continue working in support of the Indian people, and this resolution.”

Constituents from Rep. Denham’s district presented his staff with 339 signatures requesting the congressman co-sponsor HR 417, while 490 signatures were presented to Rep. McNerney’s staff. Among the constituents who visited Rep. McNerney was Bhajan Singh, OFMI’s Founding Director, who said, “People of faith must unite to end oppression everywhere it is found. We are hopeful that California’s congressional delegation will listen to their constituents who are turning out in droves to support HR 417.”

Schwegler, a United States Marine Corps veteran, continued: “Growing any relationship requires accountability, and restraining a friend is sometimes as, if not more, important than offering blind support. This resolution praises what is praiseworthy while encouraging commitment to moral standards acceptable to any civilized people. This is a moral issue, not a partisan one, and anyone who fails to support it is willingly blinded by special interest politics and pay-to-play campaign donations. If our US representatives are committed to friendship with India, how they stand on HR 417 will reveal

whether their loyalties lie with justice or with personal ambition.”

The resolution, jointly introduced by Joseph Pitts (R-Philadelphia) and Keith Ellison (D-Minneapolis) on November 18, has strong bipartisan support. It currently has 22 Democrat and 20 Republican co-sponsors, representing nearly ten percent of the U.S. House of Representatives. It is awaiting hearings in the U.S. House Foreign Affairs and Judiciary committees, both of which it must pass before proceeding to the House floor for a vote.

“This is the strongest mercy plea the United States can currently offer for the liberty of religious minorities in India,” remarked Pieter Singh, an advisor to OFMI who was present at all five congressional visits. “Passing HR 417 means valuing peace and the preservation of human life over political gain, and supporting the resolution is one of the key ways Christians can act to relieve the oppressed.”

HR 417 highlights three specific instances of anti-minority massacres in India for which victims have not received justice — the 1992 Babri Mosque riots, the 2002 Gujarat genocide, and the 2008 Odisha riots. Estimates of India’s Christian population range from 25 to 60 million; violence in Odisha is one of the most recent examples of mass persecution of Indian Christians in which state security forces were complicit.

HR 417 say that “the August 2008 murder of a prominent Hindu leader of Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Odisha sparked a violent campaign against Christians, although Maoist extremists claimed responsibility for the assassination.” As a result, All India Christian Council reports, “640 Christian houses burnt, 54,000 Christians homeless, 70 deaths and another 50 people missing and presumed dead (of these, 6 Protestant pastors and one Catholic priest killed), 18,000 Christians injured, 2 women (including a nun) gang-raped, at least 149 churches destroyed, and 13 Christian schools and colleges damaged.”

The nun who was gang-raped was Sister Meena Lalita Barwa. On August 25, she was assaulted by “a mob of up to 50 men armed with sticks, axes, spades, crowbars, iron rods and sickles” while at a prayer hall. They dragged the nun into the streets. While chanting Hindu slogans and pouring kerosene on a priest they had also seized, the mob began to rape Sister Meena. She was then paraded half-naked past a group of 12 police officers, who “ignored her and talked in a ‘very friendly’ manner to her attackers.”

On January 9, Reuters noted a huge spike in global persecution of Christians, reporting that documented cases of Christians being persecuted for their faith doubled from 2012 to 2013. Human rights groups, the U.S. State Department, and Christian rights groups universally identify India as a particularly dangerous place for Christians. Human Rights Watch reported in 2007: “Right-wing Hindu organizations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal have been promoting anti-Christian propaganda in [Odisha] because they want the state’s Christians, most of them members of tribal groups, to convert to Hinduism.”

...

[\[Full Story\]](#)