

ICC Note: It has been over a year since the violence took place in Orissa, India. Many Christians died, tens of thousands were displaced, and to date very few convictions have been reached. Instead there has been a sweep of acquittals to many who were at the center of initiating the violence. We are asking you to voice your support by signing the petition below and let the Indian government know that this needs addressed; there are many waiting for justice, and it is not something that can be ignored.

Her Excellency Ambassador Meera Shankar
Embassy of India
2107 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Ms. Ambassador,

It is with great concern that we petition your government seeking timely justice on behalf of the Christian victims of persecution in Orissa.

As you know, during the week of Christmas 2007, Christians in Kandhmal district of Orissa were attacked. Several people were killed and property was destroyed following the violence. Then, on August 23rd, 2008, when a prominent Hindu leader Swami Lakshmananda Saraswati and four of his followers were killed by Maoist insurgents, Hindu groups blamed local Christians. In the ensuing violence, more than 100 Christians were killed and 50,000 displaced.

We commend measures taken immediately by India to restore security in Orissa by deploying a large number of security forces and later through the creation of a fast track court.

We are, however, deeply concerned about the continuing challenges, particularly:

- Exoneration of many suspects due to alleged lack of evidence and negligence by the police to properly investigate the suspects. There have been over 120 acquittals including the accused Manoj Pradhon, a legislator from the Hindu BJP party.
- Intimidating mobs that gather outside courtrooms threatening victims and witnesses.
- Continuing inability for Christians to return to their homes due to threats they face.
- Housing problems faced by Christians in the refugee camps.
- Many children of the Christian community were unable to attend school. Because of this and emotional stress, many students failed tenth grade examinations.

As a country of a widely diverse culture and as the largest democracy in the world, India has a position of leadership to demonstrate its commitment to justice and equality. The violence against minorities and the ensuing lack of accountability for those who carried out the attacks goes against the Constitution of India and its commitment to international human rights laws.

Therefore, we call upon your government to take the following measures in order to serve justice to victims of Orissa and prevent impunity for the guilty:

- Investigation of the 2007 and 2008 attacks in Orissa by a special investigation team. Currently the same police are responsible for the case as who failed to protect the victims.
- Ensure proper conduct of the justice system by protecting witnesses and victims from mobs that intimidate them outside the courtroom.
- To maintain a sufficient force deployed to protect Christians and ensure the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion in Orissa.
- Provide housing and proper compensation for Christians who lost their property in the attacks.
- Take measures to ensure that Christian students have a safe environment to attend school without fear. Take into account the special condition of students who failed their exams as the result of disruption of school during the violence and give them opportunity to retake their exams.

Sincerely,

International Christian Concern
(and attached)