

Standing By and Watching

- but what are we going to do?

I am writing to you because of my deep concern for the discrimination and violence that is taking place in India at present, particularly in Orissa, a state in Eastern India.

Violence started in Orissa just before Christmas last year. During that time, churches, houses and children's homes were torched, Christians were beaten and tens of thousands of Christians were driven out of their villages into the jungles. While this has happened, the rest of the world has sat by, watching in relative silence.

Our sources reveal that the attacks were planned by Hindu militants well in advance and that Indian Intelligence agencies were aware of the plans for violence months in advance. But they did nothing. A consistent theme has been that government officials and police have stood by, but done nothing.

The violence then seemed to have abated until a prominent Hindu leader was assassinated by Maoists in late August.

Since that time, the attacks against Christians in Orissa (summarised below by leaders of the All India Christian Council) have been:

- 315 villages damaged,
- 4,640 Christian houses burnt,
- 53,000 Christians homeless,
- 57 people killed including at least 2 pastors,
- 10 priests/pastors/nuns seriously injured,
- 18,000 Christians injured,
- 2 nuns gang-raped,
- 149 churches destroyed,
- 13 Christian schools and colleges damaged.



An elder from a church in Orissa who survived a machete attack

These reports are estimated to be conservative. We have heard stories of the Hindu militants using rape, in particular gang rape, as a weapon against Christian women. Unfortunately the violence has spread to other states as well, and news has just come to hand of 50 muslims being killed in the state of Assam.

The Federal Government in India is deeply concerned about the attacks and has made a number of protests to the government in Orissa. But so far, their protests have fallen on deaf ears. The Federal Government admit the violence, including deaths, rape and burnings but seem powerless to act

The Indian Federal Government has faced little international pressure so far, other than:

- the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, asking questions about the violence and in particular the rape of a nun.
- The French President Nicolas Sarkozy along with the chief of the European Union, Jose Manuel Barroso have taken up the issue of the violence with the Indian Prime Minister.
- the Italian government calling in the Italian Ambassador to explain what the Indian government was doing to arrest the situation.

Whilst there have been calls for the Federal Government to implement the Presidents Rule and intervene, there seems to be little resolve to take action. As a result, they like the west are sitting back watching the violence.



One must ask why the Indian Federal Government does not intervene. Many believe that it is because the federal elections will be held next year. The current government was an unlikely winner at the last elections, defeating the BJP (the Hindu aligned party). It is perceived that if the government acts to move against the violence perpetrated by the Hindu militants, there will likely be a voter backlash at the next elections. So, they bring pressure, but ultimately sit back and do nothing as the violence continues.

I recently read a story of a young woman who was gang raped and burnt to death. It was reported that policemen and government officials watched, and did nothing, while the innocent victim was violated and killed. That is what the Indian government is doing, and it is what we in the west are doing. We are watching and doing nothing while men and women are being raped, abused, killed and persecuted.

India prides itself on being the world's largest democracy, yet violence and terror prevent basic human rights. In the current violence, many are threatened with death and rape unless they renounce their beliefs and turn to Hinduism. One might ask how this can be tolerated, but the answer perhaps is indicated by the fact that seven states have enacted anti conversion laws making it a jailable crime to convert from Hinduism to Christianity. Perhaps the violence is merely a reflection of the attitude of many in government.

How can this be tolerated in the world's largest democracy? If India wants western acceptance and respectability, surely it must understand that such outright and violent discrimination cannot be accepted.

What can we in the west do?

- Open our eyes to what is really going on in India; to the discrimination, the violence, the rapes, the intimidation and the killing.

- Use our voice to say that it is not acceptable and must be stopped. That the Federal government must take action to stop the atrocities and that the anti conversion laws are an infringement of basic human rights are undemocratic and must be repealed.
- Use our voice to say that militant groups such as the RSS (which have 3 million trained and armed militants in India) and pursue their ends via violent means, are terrorist organisations that should be outlawed.



We in the west sat by and did nothing as genocide swept through Rwanda and Uganda. Will we allow the same to happen in India? We may be at a tipping point where the violence left unopposed will escalate to unimaginable proportions, if it is not called for what it is and opposed.

Those in the media in the west have the opportunity to open the eyes of the west so that we have a voice. Those in government have the opportunity to make India hear our voice. Those who are concerned have the opportunity to petition our media and governments to make our collective voice heard.

Will you stand up and use your voice for those who have no voice?

For me, I can no longer stand by and do nothing. That is why I am asking you to use your voice. You can call or write to your media and government, calling on them to use the voice that they have so that pressure will be brought on the Indian government to intervene and protect those who have no protection.

Please, use the voice you have to open our eyes and to use the voice we have.

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[http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/
Kandhmal_tribals_caught_in_conversion_crossfire/articleshow/3563850.cms](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Kandhmal_tribals_caught_in_conversion_crossfire/articleshow/3563850.cms)

(<http://indianchristians.in/news/content/view/2448/42/>)

[http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Cong_wants_Bajrang_Dal_VHP_banned/
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