President Joseph R. Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

As Indian Americans, human rights organizations, and concerned allies, we are writing to urge you to engage publicly and meaningfully to push back against the Indian government’s escalating attacks on human rights and democracy, especially ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s state visit to the United States.

Despite objective evidence that India’s democracy is under critical attack, you have not spoken out about this crisis. In early 2023, Indian authorities conducted retaliatory raids on the BBC’s Delhi and Mumbai offices for releasing a documentary about Prime Minister Modi. The week before the Summit for Democracy, the Indian government made three successive attacks on Indian democracy. First, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party expelled Rahul Gandhi from Parliament. Second, the Indian government shut the internet down in Punjab, severely impacting the rights for Sikhs to peacefully organize and protest. And third, the Indian Supreme Court ruled that Indians can be found guilty by association for terrorism. And yet, not one representative from the Biden Administration said anything about even one of these developments. Instead, while Islamophobic violence gripped India in late March, you invited Prime Minister Modi to speak at the Summit for Democracy. Mr. Modi visits DC at a time when the state of Manipur has experienced heavy communal and anti-Christian violence after Modi’s ruling party pushed an initiative to undermine Indigenous rights in the state.

Even when confronted with questions by Indian reporters about human rights in India, your administration has only had private two-way conversations about how both of our governments can always improve. Quite frankly, we find it unacceptable to see such equivocation on Indian democracy from an administration that has been strident in its defense of American democracy and the rule of law.

India is one of the fastest autocratizing nations in the world, mostly thanks to the current government. Freedom House has rated India as a “Partly Free” country for the past three years, and has blamed Prime Minister Modi’s government for a rise in discriminatory policies, including persecution against Muslims and caste-based violence against Dalit and Adivasi communities; harassment of civil society, protestors, academia, and the media; and the targeting of political opponents. It has also rated Indian-Administered Kashmir as “Not Free,” citing violations of human, civil, and political rights after the Modi government revoked the territory’s autonomous status. In Reporters Without Borders’ press freedom ranking, India has dropped to 161st out of 180 countries in 2023. India has appeared in the Committee to Protect Journalists’ Impunity Index—which examines accountability for unsolved journalists’ murders—every year for the past 15 years, and currently ranks in 11th place worldwide. According to PEN America’s Freedom to Write Index, in 2022, India was one of the top 10 countries that jailed writers globally. The Varieties of
Democracy Institute characterizes India as an “electoral autocracy” and blames India’s descent into autocracy on Prime Minister Modi. And the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has said India has been one of the top 15 countries at risk for a mass atrocity event every year since 2017, which reflects the toxicity of Indian politics under Modi.

Given the magnitude of this crisis, we ask you to engage directly with Indian-American and human rights civil society leaders to explore solutions to address India’s human rights crisis. We also ask you to employ the tools at your disposal to ensure that the Indian government cannot attack Indians’ human rights with impunity. As the 2022 Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor report details, several government individuals have committed human rights violations that, under U.S. law, would qualify them to be sanctioned under the Global Magnitsky Act. Indian security forces that have engaged in human rights violations should have security assistance rescinded, under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

Finally, we urge you to publicly call on the Indian government to honor its commitments to human rights, including calling on Prime Minister Modi and his cabinet to halt the use of anti-terror laws to arbitrarily detain political critics. You can publicly denounce the rising numbers of political prisoners and the weaponization of the rule of law in India to shut down criticism. Even if you are not willing to personally criticize the Prime Minister, you have ample opportunity to criticize the Indian government’s misuse of public trust and public institutions to consolidate power and undermine the will of the Indian people.

As President of the United States of America, you hold a unique position to lead the fight against authoritarianism. Prime Minister Modi will listen to you when you speak. But he and his allies will only change if you take a stand publicly. We urge you to listen to those of us who care about India and ensure that one man cannot steal the futures and the rights of our loved ones in India.

Signed:

Organizations
12Uummah
18 Million Rising
Alliance of South Asians Taking Action
Aotearoa Alliance Of Progressive Indians
Asian American Feminist Collective
Asian Children’s Education Fellowship
Bangladeshi Americans For Political Progress
Black Lives Matter of Greater New York
Canadians Against Oppression And Persecution(CAOP)
Caribbean Equality Project
Center for Pluralism
Center for Security, Race, and Rights
Chicago Coalition for Human Rights in India
Coalition of Seattle Indian Americans
Collective Knowledge Works
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Council on American-Islamic Relations - Minnesota
Courtyard Dancers
Dalit Solidarity Forum
Democratic Socialists of America, Religion & Socialism Working Group
Desis Rising Up and Moving
Engage Action
Ensaaf
Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations
Food Empowerment Project
Food Sovereignty Alliance, India
Freedom Road, LLC
Friends of India - Texas
GEMS USA
Global Bahujan Group
Great Truth
GreenFaith
Hindus for Human Rights
Hindus for Human Rights (Australia-New Zealand)
Hindus For Human Rights UK
India Civil Watch International
Indian American Muslim Council
Indian Muslim Association of Carolinas
Insaf Bulletin
Interfaith Community of Treasure Coast
International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal
International Commission for Dalit Rights
International Council of Indian Muslims
International Network of Democratic Indians Abroad
Islamic Education Center of Lexington
Jewish World Watch
Justice for All
Justice For All Canada
Justice News
LittleSis / Public Accountability Initiative
Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK
MPower Change Action Fund
Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative
Muslims for Progressive Values
New York State Council of Churches
North American Network of Malayali Muslim Associations
Overseas Friends of Socialist Party of India
Pax Christi USA
Peace Action Montgomery
Polis Project
Queer Crescent
Religions for Peace USA
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Sikh Coalition
Social Harmony Federation
South Asian American Coalition to Renew Democracy
South Asian Network
The India Observer
United Against Racism and Fascism-NYC
Virginia Muslim Political Action Committee
World Sikh Parliament

Individuals
A Syed
Aadita Chaudhury
Abdul Gundru
Abhi Nimmagadda
Abusaleh Shariff
Ajay Kumar
Alekya Kumar
Aliya Karmali
Amar Shergill
Amrita Shodhan
Amritjit Singh
Anamika Haksar Sahu
Anand Patwardhan
Andrew J. Nicholson
Angana Chatterjee
Angela Rudert
Anjalee Dave
Anjali Enjeti
Anjum Rafiqi
Anne Murphy
Antara Dev Sen
Aravinda Pillalamarri
Arjun Singh Sethi
Ashim Jain
Ashok Daryani
Ashwin Rodrigues
Audrey Truschke
Ayesha Akhter
Ayesha Mehrotra
Azra Menon
BabuRao Renikuntla
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Gaurav Sabnis
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Govind Acharya
Grace Hills
Halima Khan
Hannah Davidowitz
Haripriya Rangan
Harsh Mander
Harsha Ram
Hassan El-Tayyab
Helen Muddamalle
Iden Sheng
Imama Mian
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J. Barton Scott
Jessie Monisha
Joel Lee
John Clifford Holt
John Dayal
John Nidhiry
Rev. Jennifer Butler
Rishi Bayya
Riti Sachdeva
Robert De Rose
Roger Samuel
Romi Mahajan
Roopa Shivaprasad
Rosa Maria Perez
Roshani Thakore
Ruth Messinger
S. Ansari
Sadaf Afshan
Safoora Zargar
Sahil Kalyani
Sakina Nayaz
Sam Beera
Sami Uddin
Samit Chatterjee
Sanjana Rajesh
Sanjay Kanvinde
Sanjoy Chakravorty
Sarah Gecus
Sasi Menon
Shabana Hameed
Shabana Mir
Shagufta Hakeem
Shaifali Puri
Shailja Sharma
Shakeel Syed
Shan Sankaran
Shana Sippy
Sharmistha Mohanty
Shayan Malik
Sheldon Pollock
Shima Nayaz
Shruti Ganguly
Simranjeet Randhawa
Smera Singh
Sonia Sikka
Soraya Deen
Steven M. Poulos
Sumathy Vijayakumar
Sunita Viswanath
Susan Dhavle