



OFFICIAL INDIA: ON THE SIDE OF THE MILITANTS

An analysis of the persecution
of Christians in India
with the tacit approval of
police and government
officials

(July-December 2017)

A briefing document prepared for the
Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence
(February 2018)

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COVER PHOTO Pastor Khel Prasad Kurre after being attacked by Hindu extremists in Chhattisgarh state in October 2017. (Photo Credit: World Watch Monitor)

Church in Chains is an independent Irish charity that encourages prayer and action in support of persecuted Christians worldwide. It is a member of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade NGO Standing Committee on Human Rights.

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Introduction and Background

This briefing has been prepared by Church in Chains in response to the dramatic upsurge in attacks on Christians in India by Hindu militants in the past two years, which has the tacit approval of local police and government officials. In addition to the authorities “turning a blind eye” and refusing to prosecute the perpetrators of the attacks, the insult and injury suffered by the Christian victims has in many cases been compounded by the arrest of victims on spurious charges of “false conversion”.

In 2015, Church in Chains gave evidence to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade on the topic of “Persecution of Christians Worldwide”. Church in Chains, at the request of committee members, prepared a briefing document detailing the persecution of Christians in China, Egypt, India, Iran, Nigeria and Pakistan together with a list of national and international commitments those governments had entered into. Acting on the briefing, the Joint Committee invited the ambassadors of these countries to appear before the committee in December 2015 to answer questions based on the briefing. The Indian ambassador chose not to appear.

Methodology

This briefing covers the period July - December 2017 and has been compiled by analysing publicly available reports from Indian and international sources. **It is important to note that it only documents a representative sample of 57 serious incidents of persecution of Christians during that period** and is almost certainly a gross understatement of the actual number of incidents during the period, for which figures are still being compiled by Indian Christian organisations and human rights NGOs. In 2016, 441 incidents were reported by Indian Christian organisations while 410 were reported in the first six months of 2017.

Persecution Category Definition

India is classified in the Church in Chains *Global Guide* as a country with **significant** persecution of Christians. The **significant** category indicates that some, but not all, Christians in such countries face many restrictions on practising their faith. In India, Christians face persecution from state authorities in the form of arrests, fines, beatings and imprisonment as well as prohibitions on meetings and public expressions of faith. Persecution by elements within Indian society includes threats of violence as well as organised mob violence against pastors and churches.

INDIA COUNTRY PROFILE



Population: 1.3 billion

Majority Religion: Hinduism (74%)

Christian population: 71 million

Persecution Category: Significant

Christians enjoy freedom in much of the Republic of India, but in some areas they face persecution. In recent years religious intolerance has grown with the rise of *Hindutva* (Hindu nationalism). Its followers use the slogan "One Nation, One Religion, One Culture", and consider Christians and Muslims to be followers of foreign religions. *Hindutva* violence against Christians includes burning church buildings, destroying property and violent attacks that leave Christians seriously injured or dead. Typically, intruders break up church services, beat the worshippers and call the police to arrest the Christians on false charges of "forcible conversion". The police rarely arrest the attackers.

"Anti-conversion laws" are often used as an excuse to raid church services and harass Christians. The laws forbid conversion by "force, fraud or allurement" and have been passed in eight states. It is claimed that they are intended to deal with inter-religious tension, but they lead to increased violence against Christians and are not used to stop extremist attempts to coerce Christians to become Hindus.

International Commitments

Universal Declaration of Human Rights: India was one of the original signatories of the Declaration in 1948.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: India acceded in 1979.

National Constitution/Legal System

Article 25 grants to citizens of India of all religious persuasions freedom to profess, practise and propagate their faith in a way that does not disrupt public order and does not affect public health and morality adversely.

Anti-conversion laws are promulgated on the false premise that forced or induced conversions happen and need to be prevented. Such laws are controversial because they run the risk of being abused by communal forces which may have the tacit approval of the dominant political party in the state. Prior to the election of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014, it pledged to introduce a nationwide anti-conversion law but this has not yet been introduced – possibly due to the fact that the BJP does not have a majority in the Upper House.

Main Religious Freedom Issues

- Growing number of violent attacks by Hindu extremists against Christian and Muslim minorities.
- Discrimination against Dalits who convert to Christianity or Islam.
- Anti-conversion laws.
- Lack of government action to protect religious minorities.
- Growing tolerance of “hate speech” against religious minorities.

Christians facing Persecution

Violent attacks on Christians in India have been a serious issue for many years but the dramatic increase in the number of attacks can be traced back to 2014 when the BJP won a landslide election victory and Narendra Modi became Prime Minister.

Dr Joseph D'Souza (All India Christian Council) spoke at the Church in Chains national conference in 2014 and predicted that the next five to ten years would be difficult for Indian Christians as Hindu extremists who strongly supported Narendra Modi had been emboldened by his election and were confident of pursuing their Hindutva agenda. His predictions have been clearly fulfilled

Year	No. of Incidents
2014	147
2015	177
2016	441
2017 (Jan - June)	410

NOTE: Statistics compiled by Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) and All-India Christian Council of cases that have been fully documented. EFI estimates that the true number of attacks is much greater. Persecution of Christians has been recorded in 23 of India's 29 states.

UN Concerns

In 2014, Heiner Bielefeldt, the UN's then Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (FORB), expressed concerns about anti-conversion laws, stating that the laws place unreasonable restrictions not only on people's right to convert to another religion, but also their right to propagate their own religion. Following a visit to India to meet victims of sectarian violence (both Muslim and Christian), he stated: *“There is a continued climate of fear, and maybe that's even the purpose. The acts of violence are part of a broader pattern of instigating fear into the minorities, sending them a message they don't belong to this country unless they either keep at the margins or turn to Hinduism.”*

In 2017, Dr Ahmad Shaheed, the current UN Special Rapporteur on FORB, drew attention to the persecution of Christians in India as being one of the current challenges to FORB. Speaking at the Human Rights and Religions Summer School at Trinity College Dublin, he said that the idea that collective rights of religions trump individual rights was another big challenge to FORB. He emphasised that the intersectionality of FORB with other human rights such as freedom of expression (Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and freedom of association (Article 20) is fundamental for the enjoyment of religious freedom.

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The coffin of Pastor Sultan Masih, who was shot outside his church in Punjab in July 2017.



Hindu extremists wounded Pastor Karthik Chandran in Tamil Nadu state in December 2017.



Pastor Muniyandi Elangoan Jebraj was left with head injuries after he was attacked in Tamil Nadu in July 2017.



Pastor Daniel Jebraj receives medical attention after he was attacked in Tamil Nadu in July 2017.

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Pastor Harjot Singh Sethi suffered head and leg injuries after beating from Hindu extremists in Rajasthan in August 2017.



Pastor Abhay Sagar lost hearing in one ear after severe beating by Hindu extremists in Uttar Pradesh in September 2017.



Pastor Banothu Sevyu after attack by Hindu extremists in Telangana state in October 2017.



Mother comforts daughter after being separated by Hindu mob on train at Indore, Madhya Pradesh in October 2017.

States of India



List of states and number of incidents (July-December 2017) detailed in this briefing:

Assam - 1
 Chhattisgarh - 9
 Haryana - 3
 Jharkhand - 7
 Karnataka - 3
 Kerala - 2
 Madhya Pradesh - 6

Maharashtra - 3
 Odisha - 1
 Punjab - 1
 Rajasthan - 2
 Tamil Nadu - 7
 Telangana - 2
 Uttar Pradesh - 10

Total - 57

Incidents of persecution of Christians in India (July- December 2017)

Date (DD/MM/YY)	Place	State	Brief description of the incident	Police action
02/07/17	Itha	Uttar Pradesh	Seven Christian families from two separate villages in Bahraich district faced extortion at the hands of local police who disrupted their church services and arrested seven Christians including a pastor.	The police warned the Christians to disperse and not to gather in the future or they would be arrested.
15/07/17	Ludhiana	Punjab	Pastor Sultan Masih (50) was shot dead in front of his church premises in Ludhiana. District CCTV footage recovered by police showed two attackers on a motorbike shooting him while he talked on his phone.	Police stated that attackers couldn't be identified.
19/07/17	Thyagaraja Nagar	Tamil Nadu	Five Hindu militants (later identified as Hindu Makkal Katchi activists) used steel rods and a butcher's knife to attack a father-son pastoral team, injuring the brain tissue of the elder clergyman.	Police ignored identification of Hindu militants and arrested a minority community boy.
31/07/17	Tripunithura	Kerala	Hindu woman named Shweta was detained and harassed for 22 days at a yoga centre because she had married a Christian.	Not Known
08/08/17	Muzzafarnagar	Uttar Pradesh	Members of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) stormed into a worship service and beat Pastor Amar Stephen with belts, shoes and sticks before dragging him to police station.	Police took a written statement from him and released him.
16/08/17	Dabli Rathan	Rajasthan	An Indian pastor was among those injured when about 50 Hindu extremists (from the RSS and Bajrang Dal) attacked a group of Christians holding a prayer meeting in one of their homes. The extremists assaulted the 150 Christians present.	Police took Pastor Sethi and his injured 24-year-old assistant to the police station, where the attackers filed a complaint for "forceful conversion".

Incidents of persecution of Christians in India (July- December 2017)

18/08/17	Vithura	Kerala	The 7-metre tall concrete cross installed by Catholics of Neyyatinkara Latin Catholic diocese is believed to have been destroyed on the night of August 18 by some anti-social elements.	Not Known
23/08/17	Kasganj District	Uttar Pradesh	Christian teenager, Sandeep Kumar (18), christened Karan Anthony, was jailed for 12 days after anti-Hindu comments appeared on a fake Facebook account in his name.	Police charged Sandeep Kumar with promoting enmity between classes, and publishing obscene material.
11/09/17		Karnataka	Two Christian women were taken to a police station by Hindu activists, who accused them of trying to convert other women, despite there being no complaints from the women themselves.	Police officers released the two women with a warning not to try to convert anyone.
16/09/17	Tukupani	Jharkhand	Six Christians were beaten by police and jailed for a month for praying for a sick woman in eastern India. They had already been beaten by Hindu extremists.	Police arrested and jailed the 6 Christians. Bail application was rejected.
17/09/17	Chitradurga district	Karnataka	A church was broken into and its contents destroyed in an arson attack, including furniture, music systems, Bibles and communion vessels.	Police have helped guard the church each night since the attack.
24/09/17	Biswan Town	Uttar Pradesh	Pastor Abhay Sagar (37) lost hearing in one ear after Hindu extremists tortured him and pressured police to falsely charge him and prevented doctors from treating him.	Biswan police charged Pastor Sagar with "criminal conspiracy" and insulting Hindu religious beliefs.
27/09/17	Hazaribagh	Jharkhand	Mohan Mahto alleged that Pastor Soma Singh was pressurising him to convert to Christianity and had even beaten him up on his refusal to do so. Mahto also named Professor Amit Soren as a co-conspirator.	Police arrested Pastor Singh and also raided Professor Amit Soren's house.

Incidents of persecution of Christians in India (July- December 2017)

04/10/17	Panchasheel Colony	Chhattisgarh	A man identified only as Srivastava led a crowd including local Municipality officials in a bid to demolish India Full Gospel Mission church. Pastor Vinod Achari stopped the demolition by producing legal documents.	Not Known
05/10/17	Gondia district	Maharashtra	Hindu extremists protested at plans for a Christian prayer meeting scheduled from 6-8 October at Circus Ground, Ganesh Nagar demanding that the programme be cancelled.	The organisers approached the police for protection which was granted to them during the event.
05/10/17		Telangana	Pastor Seviya was attacked and knocked unconscious by five Hindu extremists with rods and thick sticks He was in a critical state for many days in hospital.	Not Known
08/11/17	Dumka district	Jharkhand	Central Joint Secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Dr Surendra Jain issued an open threat to Christian missionaries and warned them to leave the country.	Not Known
11/10/17	Coimbatore district	Tamil Nadu	Ten Protestant churches in Coimbatore district were ordered to stop their worship meetings.	Christians asked for police protection and the reopening of the churches, but this was not granted.
12/10/17	Jabalpur	Madhya Pradesh	An agitated mob led by several Hindu leaders went to local police objecting to a Christian meeting scheduled to be held in the area.	The Superintendent of Police objected in writing to the event.
13/10/17	Sakti Tehsil	Chhattisgarh	Pastor Khel Prasad Kurre of Believer's Church was attacked by Hindu extremists on his way home after visiting a member of his church. He was hospitalised and needed 12 stitches to his head.	Police threatened Pastor Kurre with arrest on charges of luring people into Christianity.
14/10/17	Maskawad village	Maharashtra	A mob of 300-400 Hindu extremists stormed into the house of Janu Barela and started to manhandle the family. They questioned their faith and stole many items including Bibles and song books.	Not Known

Incidents of persecution of Christians in India (July- December 2017)

15/10/17	Lakhvariya	Madhya Pradesh	Pastor Munnalal Baiga's house fellowship was disrupted by a mob of 60-70 Hindu extremists who argued with the pastor and threatened him and the Christians present.	Police reprimanded the extremists and told Pastor Baiga to obtain permission to hold meetings.
16/10/17	Khilamara	Assam	A local Hindu extremist raided the farm of Biren Raba (a Christian) during the night and cut about a hundred rubber plants amounting to almost all the rubber trees on his farm.	A few people have reportedly been arrested by police in connection with the incident.
17/10/17	Panipat	Haryana	An open-air meeting was organised (with necessary permissions), with Bishop Amos Singh as guest speaker. However, there was strong opposition from Hindu extremists.	Police intervened and the event was not allowed to use a sound system.
20/10/17	Kishanpur village	Rajasthan	Angry villagers attacked Pastor Phul Singh's house in the late evening with iron rods and threw burning firecrackers at it. A mob accused Pastor Singh of carrying out conversion activity.	Pastor Singh and his daughter were given protection in the local police station.
21/10/17	Sarvoday Nagar	Uttar Pradesh	Pastor Jitendra Kumar of Grace Church was threatened by Hindu extremists if he did not stop conducting church services.	No action was taken by the local police and no protection granted.
22/10/17	Pharasgaon	Chhattisgarh	Lalsay Markam was physically assaulted and verbally abused by villagers and later summoned by Hindu extremists before the village council for peace-talks. At the meeting Markam was forced to flee after being attacked.	Lalsay Markam reported the incident to police and lodged a complaint. Police action is not known.
23/10/17	Ghattemni village	Maharashtra	Hindu extremists barged into the screening of a film on the life of Jesus. They created a ruckus and filed a complaint against Pastor Laxman Mesram at the local police station.	Police let Pastor Mesram go after issuing him a strong verbal warning for showing the film without a permit.

Incidents of persecution of Christians in India (July- December 2017)

23/10/17	Indore	Madhya Pradesh	Anita Francis (50) and her daughter Sophia Francis (19) with seven children in their care were forced off a train at Indore station by a mob of extremists from the Hindu nationalist organisation Hindu Jagran Manch.	Police detained the seven children for a week and two adults for ten days, charging the adults with kidnapping and forcible conversion.
23/10/17	Chhoti Themli	Chhattisgarh	Sahdev Markam was forced out of his own house by angry villagers for his new-found faith in Jesus Christ.	Not Known
23/10/17	Poompuhar village	Tamil Nadu	Christians Santhosh and Sathish (together with their wives and children) were expelled from their homes by the village council along with their wives and children owing to their Christian faith.	Police intervened and were successful in rehabilitating one family back to their own home.
01/11/17	Mura village	Chhattisgarh	Five Christian families were socially boycotted by the village council, including denying them access to drinking water.	The local police superintendent ordered the Christian families to immediately stop conducting all services.
04/11/17	Faridabad	Haryana	A group of RSS activists barged into a Christian meeting which was being conducted at the New Industrial Township, and accused the Christians of running a conversion racket.	A local councillor arranged for police personnel to attend and facilitate the meeting.
04/11/17	Satyamangalam taluk	Tamil Nadu	Pastor K. S. Jaisujanth of India Every Home Crusade was called to the Bangalaputhur police station based on a complaint filed by some RSS activists against him.	Police questioned him and ordered him to cancel all his speaking engagements in the area.
04/11/17	Morappur village	Tamil Nadu	Police officers questioned Pastor Joseph Prabahakar of the Assembly of God Church in a threatening manner and ordered him to get permission to hold prayer services.	As described

Incidents of persecution of Christians in India (July- December 2017)

05/11/17	Gabitwada village	Karnataka	Two policemen visited the DCM Bethel church during the evening prayer service, and informed the Christians who had assembled at the prayer house that they had received complaint about the prayer services.	The police ordered the Christians to stop all the prayer services immediately.
08/11/17	Lanji	Madhya Pradesh	Christian family received a notice from city officials to stop any Christian congregational activity on their house on threat of demolition of their house.	None
10/11/17	Sagar	Madhya Pradesh	A Catholic bishop has sought protection for the Christian community in the state after Hindu nationalists marched through the streets waving burning torches and denouncing missionaries.	Not Known
12/11/17	Ahladpur village	Uttar Pradesh	8-9 Hindu activists barged into a Christian prayer meeting where about 300 people were present and demanded that the meeting be stopped immediately.	The police arrested eight Christians under section 151 of the Indian Penal Code.
15/11/17	Balod district	Chhattisgarh	Three pastors - Younus Kumar, Balalaram Ahirwar and Vikram Sonwani were arrested by the police after they had come out of a prayer meeting.	The pastors were charged under Sections 151, 107-16.
16/11/17	Charoda	Chhattisgarh	Members of Bajrang Dal and Dharma Jagran Manch made violent threats stopping a planned three-day gospel meeting.	Police told the organisers to stop the event immediately.
15/11/17		Haryana	Hindu Patriarch Ramesh Kumar beat his wife and four children and threw the family out of his home for converting to Christianity.	Family was called to the police station for questioning three times.
18/11/17	Birejhar village	Chhattisgarh	Police came to Mahndra Kumar Sahu's house and warned him not to conduct Sunday worship service.	Police threatened Mr Sahu with arrest.
26/11/17	Ghatkesar suburb	Telangana	Pastor Keshav Kumar of Philadelphia Church was threatened by the police to stop the construction of an extension to their church building.	Police asked for permission documents to construct the new structure.

Incidents of persecution of Christians in India (July- December 2017)

26/11/17	Palladam town	Tamil Nadu	Ten Hindutva extremists barged into the India Gospel of Jesus Church and accused the Christians of carrying out religious conversions.	Police told local Christians that meetings cannot be held without permission.
26/11/17	Rajaji Nagar	Tamil Nadu	Police from C3 Saibaba Kovil police station came to a Christian prayer meeting conducted by the King Tabernacle and directed the Christians to stop the meeting immediately.	Police told local Christians that meetings cannot be held without permission.
29/11/17	Larambha Marketpada	Odisha	A group of Hindu radicals gathered at a Christian home where a funeral service was being held. The radicals threatened to beat up the four pastors present who had to flee.	Not Known
04/12/17	Mathura	Uttar Pradesh	Six Christians were arrested on charges of hurting religious feelings after Hindu extremists savagely beat them when they gathered to pray for a sick man at his home.	The six Christian men were taken into custody.
06/12/17	Tarra Kopra	Chhattisgarh	Hindu extremists kept hundreds of Christians from attending a prayer service and attacked those who managed to attend. They broke into the premises and vandalised furniture.	
09/12/17	Periyanaickenpalayam	Tamil Nadu	Hindu extremists savagely beat four Christians for conducting a pre-Christmas charity event for destitute widows.	Police took Pastor Vinodh Kumar (38) into custody and arrested several other Christians.
11/12/17	Pathakpur village	Uttar Pradesh	Pastor David Amarnath was summoned to a police station and told that the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] government is ruling now, and he can no longer assemble to pray.	On 25 December, seven police officers at Pastor Amarnath's house prevented a service being held.
14/12/17	Dara Kalan	Madhya Pradesh	A Hindu man, Dharmendra Dohar, complained to police that carol singers had illegally converted him. Alleging that the carol singers paid him 5,000 rupees and told him to worship Jesus Christ.	Police detained thirty-two carol singers and later arrested six of the Christians on charges of conversion.

Incidents of persecution of Christians in India (July- December 2017)

17/12/17	Aligarh	Uttar Pradesh	Hindutva organisation issued a circular threatening all city schools against celebrating Christmas.	Not Known
21/12/17	Aligarh	Uttar Pradesh	A group of men broke into a private home where Christians were singing carols. They kicked the musical instruments before trying to attack one man with a knife.	None
24/12/17	Harmu village	Jharkhand	Hindu extremists repeatedly beat Pastor Karma Oraon as he refused to worship the monkey god. They also destroyed his identification card and threatened him with murder.	Police refused to register a case against the assailants or even receive the complaint of the pastor
25/12/17	Berratoli village	Jharkhand	60 Hindu nationalists stormed into a house church on Christmas Day and beat tribal Christians while they worshipped.	Police officers refused to accept the complaint of the pastor.

CONCLUSION

The dramatic upsurge in the level of persecution of Christians in India is clearly linked to the landslide election victory in 2014 of the Hindu nationalist BJP in 2014, leading to Narendra Modi becoming Prime Minister. Prior to the election, the BJP pledged to introduce a nationwide anti-conversion law. While this law has not yet been introduced (possibly due to the fact that the BJP does not have a majority in the Upper House of Parliament), its promotion by the BJP has led many of the militant elements among its support to be emboldened to attack religious minorities with impunity.

As the number of violent incidents has dramatically risen, no effective government action has been taken to combat the attackers, protect the victims or promote religious freedom. This government inaction (at local, state and national level) has emboldened the militants to carry out further violent attacks in pursuit of their Hindutva ideology. Without firm government action in support of religious freedom, it is likely that the number of violent attacks on Christians and other religious minorities will continue to grow.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the government of India

- Prime Minister Modi to speak clearly and consistently in support of full religious freedom for all in India. He did not follow up his only major speech on the issue (in February 2015) which had no visible effect in stemming the religiously-motivated violence.
- National leadership of BJP to abandon its calls for a national anti-conversion law which is demonstrably at variance with the promotion of national harmony and is against international norms of human rights and religious freedom.
- State governors to make clear that religiously-motivated violence will not be tolerated and instruct police under their jurisdiction to bring perpetrators of such violence to justice and to refrain from the current widespread practice of arresting victims of such violence rather than perpetrators.
- Police at all levels to impartially uphold the law at all times; to protect religious minorities in daily life; to prosecute the perpetrators of religiously-motivated violence rather than the victims, and to treat seriously threats against religious minorities.

To the government of Ireland

- Minister for Foreign Affairs to publicly express concern at the dramatic upsurge of violence against Christians in India and to encourage the government of India to combat the attackers, protect the victims and promote religious freedom.
- Minister for Foreign Affairs to raise the matter with the Indian ambassador to Ireland.
- Ensure that the Irish embassy in India is fully briefed on the situation of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in India, as outlined in the 2013 EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief.
- Raise the matter as a priority issue for the next session of the EU-India Human Rights dialogue.

To the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence

- Arrange a meeting of the Joint Committee to discuss the dramatic upsurge of violence against Christians in India either as a single issue or as part of a wider discussion on the ongoing persecution of Christians worldwide (last examined by the Joint Committee in 2015).
- Invite the Indian ambassador to Ireland to attend a meeting of the Joint Committee to respond to the serious situation outlined in this briefing document.

SOURCES

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www.persecution.in

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