

Notice: Undefined index: et_header_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

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INDIA: Madhya Pradesh also passes new anti-conversion law

By Nirmala Carvalho

Hindu nationalists in the state legislature voted the bill on 8 March as a gift to women. For the president of the Global Council of Indian Christians, the law “promotes hatred, divisions and tensions between different communities”, and endangers vulnerable minority Christians.

Indian state has passed an anti-conversion law. After **Uttar Pradesh** and Uttarakhand, both ruled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Madhya Pradesh yesterday became the third Indian state to pass such legislation.

This is causing great concern among Christians; the new law “promotes hatred, divisions and tensions between different communities within society,” said Sajan K. George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), speaking to *AsiaNews*.

The state’s Home Affairs Minister Narottam Mishra officially introduced the *Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill 2021* on 1 March to replace an ordinance in force since 9 January. The bill was voted yesterday. BJP state legislators called it a gift for women on their day.

“Under the new bill, forcing religious conversion on someone will attract one to five years of imprisonment and a minimum Rs 25,000 fine (US\$ 350),” said Narottam Mishra. “Forced conversion of a minor, a woman or a person from a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe would draw a minimum jail term of two to 10 years with a minimum penalty of Rs 50,000 (US\$ 700).”

“In secular India, it is absolutely inconsistent for a state to indicate which religion a person can follow or who they can marry,” said George.

“The Indian constitution is secular. There is no state religion and this law is a flagrant violation of personal

freedoms,” he added.

“The right to freedom of religion in Article 25 to practise, profess and propagate a religion is part of the guarantees enshrined in the constitution.”

Anti-conversion laws, ironically called ‘Freedom of Religion’ laws, have existed in Indian states for a long time, the first one in Odisha (formerly Orissa).

According to **data collected** by the police in Madhya Pradesh, since the Ordinance came into effect on 9 January, “of the 23 cases, at least half of them concern Christians,” George explained. “All of them are fabricated cases of conversion. Vigilante groups attack, intimidate, even disrupt family gatherings under the guise of conversion activities.”

For George, nationalist right-wing groups enjoy tacit state approval. “They endanger lives among vulnerable minority Christians with violence.”

“The theory of conversions is widespread in the country even though the majority group still represents 80 per cent of society”.

Photo : AsiaNews

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