

INDIA: Six months of violent incidents against Christians

ADF India (23.08.2019) – In the first six months of the year 2019 there were 158 incidents of violence against Christians in 23 states of India according to the records of UCF Helpline Number 1800-208-4545. Out of the 158 incidents recorded, 130 are mob attacks against Christians assembled peacefully in a church/house-church for prayer service or intimidation and threats by a violent mob.

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is severely curtailed in 23 out of 29 states in India, which means practicing one's faith is dangerous in over 90% of India. Similarly, mob violence accounts for over 90% of the incidents.

In fact, mob violence has become a norm in our country, with no political party taking strong position against such acts of violence. Another practice that is also becoming normal is the trend of not filing first information reports (FIRs) against violent perpetrators. This is evidenced by only 24 out of 158 incidents having FIRs registered against them. Remarkably, 11 states are under the rule of so-called secular parties in comparison to 12 states that are under the rule of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

List of States where violence against Christians is reported:
Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Puducherry, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Uttar Pradesh continues to witness the highest number of incidents with 32 incidents of violence reported against Christians followed by 31 incidents in Tamil Nadu. The modus operandi followed in all of these incidents is very similar. A mob accompanied by the police arrives at the prayer service, shouts slogans, and beats up the congregations which include women and children. Then the pastors are arrested or detained by the police under the false allegation of conversion.

There were 110 women and 89 children who were injured in these 158 incidents. Sadly, these incidents have become so common that nobody has publicly condemned them including political, civil society and religious leaders. There are only a few publications that give an unbiased report.

One thing that can be clearly seen is the consistent increase in violence against Christians since 2014. There were just below 150 incidents in 2014, which rose closer to 200 in 2015. In 2016, this number was over 200. The years 2017 and 2018 reached 250 and 300 respectively. Now, in 2019, there have already been 26 incidents per month in comparison to 20 incidents per month the year before.

To track violence against Christians in India please visit:
<https://mapviolence.in/> .

SWITZERLAND/IRAN: A Christian convert under threat of being deported back to Iran

ADF (13.09.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2MYGU9R> – According to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), L.B. is a Christian convert from Iran. For him, being a Christian means believing in Jesus Christ and telling others about Christ's message of salvation. He has been baptised, studies and recites the Bible, and considers the members of his church to be his family[1].

L.B. is also an asylum seeker in Switzerland. If he is returned to his home country, he will likely face ill-treatment and possibly death under Iran's apostasy laws. [2]

Yet the Swiss authorities recently denied L.B's asylum request finding that the "applicants who practice their faith discreetly, do not face real ill-treatment upon their return"[3] to Iran. The ECtHR affirmed that ruling thereby undermining the scope of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).[4]

My name is Jennifer Lea. I represent ADF International, a legal organization dedicated to protecting the right to freedom of religion, assembly, and expression.

For ADF International the rule of law is essential for the protection of human rights. In this case, the various courts' decisions all fell short of the standard written in law. The legal standard is not whether L.B. can exercise his religion privately and discreetly. According to Article 9 of the ECHR,

and OSCE Guidelines, the standard grants L.B. the right to freely and publically manifest his religion in a broad range of ways.[\[5\]](#)

At the supplementary HDIM meeting in Vienna, in 2017, Professor Marco Ventura rightly underscored that religious freedom is in danger of becoming an “‘empty’ right, not taken seriously.”[\[6\]](#) Indeed, the scope of religious freedom is increasingly eroded here in Europe.

Religious freedom is a fundamental human right, and a positive cornerstone of democracy, that cannot be derogated even in times of public emergency.[\[7\]](#) ADF International is therefore dedicated to supporting the right of individuals to freely and publicly manifest their religion or belief, in worship, practice, and observance.[\[8\]](#)

Indeed, religious freedom is a key OSCE objective. Ambassador Clemens Koja recently remarked, “The right to freedom of religion provides an indispensable contribution toward promoting stability and security [...] respect for religious freedom is a clear indicator for the respect of other, closely interlinked, human rights: freedom of association, assembly, and freedom of expression.”[\[9\]](#)

Without adequate respect for the legal standard of religious freedom, OSCE member states will continue to return many individuals like “L.B.” to countries where they will face discrimination, persecution, and the constant threat of death.

ADF Internationally therefore strongly urges the OSCE to clearly reject a standard of religious freedom that would require individuals to live their faith privately and discreetly and recommit itself to the recognized standard in law – that is the right to freely and publicly manifest one’s religion.

[1] A. v Switzerland, (2017) Application No. 60342/16 § 13.

[2] Ibid., § 11.

[3] Ibid., § 36. Emphasis added.

[4] ECHR, Article 9. See also International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Articles 4(2), 18(1) and OSCE Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities, (2014), pages 15-17.

[5] Ibid.

[6] OSCE Press Release, Ensuring FoRB and tolerance and non-discrimination for all is vital to security, (22 June 2017), available at <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/324851>.

[7] ICCPR, Article 4(2).

[8] European Convention on Human Rights, Article 9.

[9] OSCE Press Release, previously cited.

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