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Open letter to Josep Borrell, EU Vice-President, on his visit to India

Open letter on human rights and religious freedom to High Representative/Vice-President of the European Union Josep Borrell on his visit to India. Human Rights Without Frontiers signed it

March 2, 2023

Mr Josep Borrell

High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP)

European Commission

Rue de la Loi 200

1049 Brussels

Open letter on human rights to High Representative/Vice-President of the European Union Josep Borrell on his visit to India

Dear Mr Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission

As you [visit India](#) from 1 to 4 March, we call upon you to publicly raise concerns about the EU and India's joint commitment to human rights in your engagements. The strategic partnership between the EU and India is rooted in joint values of [human rights](#), as both partners recall their obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights of all people. As you work with the international community to promote international security, peace and prosperity, we urge you to recall that this cannot succeed without a firm commitment to human rights.

You are visiting India in the midst of ongoing assaults on human rights, which stand as the "elephant in the room" and must urgently be addressed. Freedom House's [Freedom in the World 2020 report](#) ranked India as one of the 'Countries in the Spotlight' for the "deterioration of basic freedoms". Human rights defenders are [systematically persecuted](#), most notably through use of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, India's prime counter-terrorism law which allows the executive to designate individuals as terrorists without due process, and through [planted evidence](#). Religious freedoms are [systematically curtailed](#), and senior members of the ruling BJP have engaged in hate speech and legitimization of violence against religious minorities. This includes sitting Members of Parliament and Ministers, such as [Pragya Thakur](#), [Anurag Thakur](#), [Raja Singh](#), [Yogi Adityanath](#), and [Amit Shah](#).

In 2021, the European Parliament expressed concern at these developments in European Parliament Recommendation [2021/2023\(INI\)](#), and drew the attention of the European Commission towards the crumbling rule of law and human rights situation in India. Additionally, the European Parliament has recently [called](#) on the European External

Action Service to prioritise public statements about human rights over diplomacy behind closed doors.

Yet, neither you nor the executive bodies of the EU's foreign policy – the European Commission, the European External Action Service – have publicly condemned or expressed concern about human rights violations in India. Now again, the [agenda](#) made public for your visit does not contain a single mention of human rights, and instead notes that you will discuss “the bilateral aspects of the strategic partnership and a range of regional and international security issues,” the “green transition”, and “disinformation and cybersecurity”.

We are alarmed about this lack of commitment to human rights, which constitute a foundational element in the EU's foreign policy. Your silence on human rights is indicative not only of apathy towards human rights in India, but also a sign of the rule of law crisis that the EU is currently undergoing. The EU cannot be shortsighted and compromise on rule of law, human rights and democracy for the sake of staying relevant.

As the High Representative on Foreign Affairs of the European Union, you are obliged to publicly speak on human rights, a founding pillar of the European Union's foreign policy. We recall that Article 3(5) TEU reads: “In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall [...] contribute to [...] the protection of human rights”, and that Article 21(1) TEU reaffirms: “The Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by [...] democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity”.

As you attend the G20 Foreign Ministers meetings held in the framework of India's G20 Presidency, participate in the [Raisina Dialogue](#), and meet with India's Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, we expect that you will adhere to your legal mandate of promoting human rights. Concretely, it is critical that you publicly express concern about human rights violations in India, and ensure that human rights concerns are discussed in each of your meetings.

Human rights cannot be sacrificed in the name of diplomacy, and the EU must demonstrate an equal commitment to human rights of everyone, everywhere.

Signed by

Stichting The London Story

Aotearoa Alliance of Progressive Indians

Avinash Kumar

Gerard Oonk

Human Rights Without Frontiers

India Civil Watch International

India Labour Solidarity

India Solidarity Germany

International Solidarity for Academic Freedom in India (InSAF India)

Scottish Indians for Justice

South Asia Solidarity Group

The Humanism Project

Photo : Josep Borrell - ec.europa.eu

Concern in Goa as Hindu group storms Catholic college

The student wing of ruling pro-Hindu party stage a protest and disrupt classes in Goa's St. Xavier's College

UCA News (25.01.2023) - <https://bit.ly/3HvvsIL> - Church leaders in Goa, a former Portuguese colony in western [India](#), have expressed concern over the ruling pro-Hindu party's push to infiltrate Catholic educational institutions.

"Our Catholic educational institutions are getting more and more communalized," with the backing of the ruling pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the state and at federal level, says Jesuit Father Anthony Da Silva, director of Xavier Centre of Historical Research in Goa.

The aim is to push forward the pro-Hindu ideology on Christian educational campuses, the Jesuit priest alleged.

Father Da Silva was particularly referring to a recent incident in which some members of BJP's student wing created tension in the Church-run St. Xavier's College by shouting slogans and disrupting classes. The college comes under the [archdiocese of Goa and Daman](#).

The members of ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad or All Indian Students Forum) were protesting the college authorities' refusal to induct the new Student Council in the college after the pro-Hindu students' wing won the council elections held in December for the academic year 2022-23.

It was an "unfortunate and unprecedented incident" in the 60-year-old college, according to Father Tony Salema, the college administrator.

College principal Blanche Mascarenhas refused to meet the unruly protesters and the management asked them to disperse. But protesters refused, forcing the management to call the police.

The protestors also refused to follow police directions, and the college management sought the help of the deputy collector to bring the situation under control, Father Salema said in a statement.

"For the first time, we had a cultural shock with the political sloganeering," said Father Ramiro Luis, assistant professor of psychology at St Xavier's.

More than 2,000 students currently study in the college, set up in 1963, two years after the 450-year Portuguese rule ended in Goa.

Father Victor Ferrao, professor of philosophy at Rachol Seminary of Goa Archdiocese, told UCA News that BJP began to gain political prominence with several legislators, including Catholics, joining the pro-Hindu party in the state recently.

"Now, BJP is using its student wing to show its muscle power and to spread its ideology in Catholic institutions," Father Ferrao, told UCA News.

Father Ferrao said the ruling party was trying to establish a foothold in Christian institutions.

Frederic Noronha, journalist-publisher and former student of St. Xavier's said the BJP was "trying to infiltrate all branches of the administration, including bureaucracy, police, media, and the legal system and educational institutions."

Father Da Silva said the tone was set last year by state Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, who appointed a committee to prepare the list of Hindu temples destroyed by the Portuguese rulers.

The government has set aside a huge amount of money to achieve this aim, the priest said, adding that the diverse activities should be seen in the background of the BJP's proclaimed goal of turning India into a nation of Hindus.

Goa was once considered the center of the Catholic mission in Asia, particularly after the Goa diocese was established in 1533. The diocese at the time had jurisdiction from the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa to China and Japan.

Catholics once dominated Goa's socio-political activities but currently, they form only some 25 percent of the state's estimated 1.5 million people. Hindus are a dominant community forming 65 percent of the population.

Photo: Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrao, Archbishop of Goa, offers incense during a religious service held during the exposition of the body of St. Francis Xavier in Old Goa, on Nov. 21, 2004. (Photo: AFP)