

## Orissa: A call to action and a call to prayer

### Religious Liberty Partnership\*

Two years after the first outbreak of mob violence against Christians in Kandhamal district, Orissa state, India, the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) remains deeply concerned for the situation. As a collaborative effort of Christian organizations focused on religious liberty, the RLP is urging its members to call upon Christians to unite in continued prayer for justice, reconciliation and peace in the area, and to encourage the Indian government to do all in its power to bring this about.

During the week of Christmas 2007, Christians belonging to Dalit and adivasi communities in Kandhamal were targeted in a wave of violence, which resulted in the widespread destruction of property. Then, in August 2008, when Swami Lakshmananda Saraswati and four of his followers were condemnably assassinated, allegedly by Maoist insurgents, the Christians were blamed, and became targets of ferocious reprisals. This resulted in the worst communal violence suffered by Christians in the history of post-independence India. At least 75 people have been confirmed as dead, and over 50,000 were forced to flee their homes. More than a year later, thousands of victims of violence are still suffering and waiting for justice.

The RLP welcomes the efforts made by the Indian government and Orissa state government to restore security and bring justice, reconciliation and peace. However, deep concerns remain about the continuing challenges. The government relief camps are now closed,

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\* The International Institute for Religious Freedom is a member of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) and endorses this call. The RLP is a collaborative effort of Christian organizations from around the world focused on religious liberty. The RLP seeks to more intentionally work together in addressing advocacy and in raising the awareness of religious persecution globally. Members of the RLP are primarily involved (that is the majority of their time, personnel, and resources) with ministry to persecuted Christians and/or in religious liberty issues in whatever context and strategy. For more information on the RLP, contact Brian O'Connell, RLP Facilitator at: [Brian@REACTServices.com](mailto:Brian@REACTServices.com); +1 425-218-4718.

yet a large proportion of victims have been unable to return to their villages for fear of death or forcible conversions to Hinduism. Many are living in grievous poverty in makeshift camps, often with no regular means of sustenance. Although compensation has been delivered to many victims, often it does not match their needs. Victims are continuing to receive threats from the perpetrators of violence, witnesses are facing intimidation by mobs outside courtrooms, and there is widespread fear of the danger posed by impunity. Hundreds of cases have not been registered properly by police, and therefore will not be subject to investigations or prosecutions. The future of the children of victims is also at risk. Many are fearful of attending school, and a large proportion of those sitting their tenth grade examinations have been failed, largely as a consequence of the severe disruption during the past year. “In general, India has a history of tolerance and inter-faith harmony, but religiously motivated violence has flourished in recent years,” said Dr. Joseph D’souza, President of the All India Christian Council and member of the RLP.

As the world’s largest democracy, my beloved country must enforce the strong laws on the books and protect the right for people of faith – or no faith at all – to freely worship as they choose. We pray that root causes are addressed like hate speech, lack of convictions for planners of attacks, and civil rights for Christians from the lowest castes.

Mervyn Thomas, Chairman of the RLP Leadership Team, and CEO of Christian Solidarity Worldwide in the UK said, “We urge that justice must be served in Kandhamal: it will be crucial for the restoration of peace and stability in the area. The wheels of justice are turning slowly, but the authorities need to tackle the significant challenges facing the judicial system. India is famous for her diversity and pluralism, and we look forward to the restoration of inter-communal harmony in this area.”

Additional members of the Religious Liberty Partnership’s Leadership Team include Floyd Brobbel of Voice of the Martyrs, Canada; Godfrey Yogarajah of the World Evangelical Alliance’s Religious Liberty Commission; Linus Pfister of HMK Switzerland, and Johan Compañen of Open Doors International.

The RLP also supports a call to prayer for the victims of violence, from Mgr. Raphael Cheenath, Catholic Archbishop of

Cuttack-Bhubaneswar in Orissa, who requests that churches around the world use the following prayer for Orissa on Christmas Day, 2009:

Gracious Father, Lord of all the earth, we praise you for the gift of Jesus Christ, sent into the world to break down the dividing walls of hostility. Have mercy upon those in Orissa who are suffering. Give them the peace and the justice that they crave, and cause the walls of bitterness and hatred in Orissa to be torn down. Comfort those who have been bereaved, counsel those who have been traumatised, provide for those who have lost everything. Give them the grace to forgive and confidence in your gracious favour. Do not let us forget them, our brothers and sisters in Christ, as we celebrate the coming of the Prince of Peace and look forward to his coming again in glory.

Members of the Religious Liberty Partnership (websites are listed for prayer resources and additional information, geographical names only indicate the main seat of an organisation):

- Advocates International, USA: [www.advocatesinternational.org](http://www.advocatesinternational.org)
- All India Christian Council, India: [www.indianchristians.in/news](http://www.indianchristians.in/news)
- China Aid, USA: [www.chinaaid.org](http://www.chinaaid.org)
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide, United Kingdom: [www.csw.org.uk](http://www.csw.org.uk)
- Danish European Mission, Denmark: [www.daneu.dk](http://www.daneu.dk)
- Friends of the Martyred Church, Finland: [www.martyredchurch.net](http://www.martyredchurch.net)
- HMK, Switzerland: [www.hmk-aem.ch](http://www.hmk-aem.ch)
- Hilfsaktion Märtyrerkirche, Germany: [www.h-m-k.org](http://www.h-m-k.org)
- International Christian Concern, USA: [www.persecution.org](http://www.persecution.org)
- International Institute for Religious Freedom, Germany, South Africa, Sri Lanka: [www.iirf.eu](http://www.iirf.eu)
- Jubilee Campaign, USA: [www.jubileecampaign.org](http://www.jubileecampaign.org)
- Norwegian Mission to the East, Norway: [www.nmio.no](http://www.nmio.no)
- Middle East Concern, Middle East: [www.meconcern.org](http://www.meconcern.org)
- Open Doors International, The Netherlands: [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org)
- Release International, United Kingdom:  
[www.releaseinternational.org](http://www.releaseinternational.org)
- The Voice of the Martyrs, Canada: [www.persecution.net](http://www.persecution.net)
- World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission, GLOBAL: [www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc](http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc)