

20 May 2020

## **India Must Act to Protect its Religious Minorities and its Internal Migrant Workers**

1. The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), together with our member the Evangelical Fellowship of Indian (EFI), submit to the 44<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council the following written statement addressing the increasing violence, threat of violence and discrimination against religious minorities in India, as well as the fallout of COVID-19 lock-down on India's internal migrant workers.

### **India Must Protect its Religious Minorities**

2. In 2019, the EFI recorded 366 incidents where Christians have been targeted using violence, intimidation or harassment.<sup>1</sup> Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state of India, maintained its position as the state with the highest number of recorded incidents against Christians. Disturbingly, in November 2019, Uttar Pradesh's Law Commission drafted a controversial report recommending heavy penalties of up to seven years in prison to persons deemed to be violating a proposed new law against religious conversions.<sup>2</sup>
3. Tamil Nadu stands second in the number of incidents against Christians after Uttar Pradesh documented by the EFI. In Tamil Nadu, the anti-Christian violence is traced to caste supremacist attitudes in villages and their linkages with political elements currently positioning themselves for power in the state which goes for elections soon.
4. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lock-down in India, New Delhi witnessed deadly sectarian riots. Between 23 February and 1 March 2020, 53 people were killed, two-thirds of whom were Muslims, and over 200 were injured. Leading up to these riots was a seemingly organized hate campaign<sup>3</sup> against India's Muslim population which began mid-December 2019, and which erupted mid-February 2020 in the "ilakas" (loosely translated as ghettos) in the North eastern suburbs of the Indian capital city New Delhi.
5. To-date, police forces have not been held accountable for their failures to protect the population, amid allegations from civil society and observers of complicity with Hindu nationalist groups.
6. These riots are consequent to the Citizenship Amendment Act which was passed by the Parliament of India on 11 December 2019. The EFI shares the widespread concern in India of the detrimental impact of the enactment of amendments to citizenship law which threatens to deprive a large number of Indian citizens from their nationality on basis of their religious affiliation.

1 The 2019 EFI report is available at the following link: <http://efionline.org/articles/351/20200315/rlc-report-hate-and-targeted-violence-against-christians-in-2019-persecution-persecuted-church-church-in-india.htm>

2 Proposed anti-conversion law triggers panic in Uttar Pradesh Proposed anti-conversion law triggers panic in Uttar Pradesh, The Sentinel, 29 November 2019, <https://www.sentinelassam.com/national-news/proposed-anti-conversion-law-triggers-panic-in-uttar-pradesh/>

3 Delhi violence: Jamia committee demands BJP leader Kapil Mishra's immediate arrest, India Today, 25 February 2020, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/delhi-violence-jamia-committee-demands-bjp-leader-kapil-mishra-immediate-arrest-1649645-2020-02-25>

7. Furthermore, Muslims in India have faced increased stigmatization in March and in April 2020 because some of the earliest patients to test positive for COVID-19 had been linked to a congregation of Islamic preachers, Tablighi Jamaat, at Nizamuddin in New Delhi.
8. Apprehensions on the controversial citizenship laws and violence against religious minorities cut across communities as people recall sectarian slogans such as “*Pehle Kasai Phir Isai*” (First the Butcher, then the Christian). *Kasai* or butcher is a derogatory reference for Muslims. Such slogans were first shouted in Gujarat in 1998 and thereafter in many places across India.
9. To address the longstanding threats of violence to religious minorities in India, to effectively protect life as well as minority religious groups, the WEA and the EFI would like to reiterated the following recommendations to the government of India that we had made in prior years:
  - a) Withdraw the National Register of Citizens in Assam state and the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019;
  - b) Enact a comprehensive national legislation against targeted and communal violence;
  - c) Ensure stringent action under criminal law against all those who channel hate speech with the intention of inciting violence against the Christian community, the Muslim community, and other minority groups;
  - d) Advise the state governments, especially Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, to engage with right wing organizations operating in these states with the aim of reducing sectarian tension and alleviating fear among the Christians, Muslims and other religious minorities;
  - e) Prosecute police officials who fail in their constitutionally mandated duty to enforce the law and investigate allegations of police complicity in attacks against religious minorities.

### India Must Protect its Internal Migrant Workers

10. On 25 March 2020, with only four hours’ notice, India’s prime minister Narendra Modi announced a nation-wide lock-down for a period of three weeks in response to the spread of the virus COVID-19. With no precautionary measures, the sudden lock-down immediately and severely impacted the lives and livelihood of millions of Indians, namely the lives of internal migrant workers living away from home. The ill-conceived lock-down was accompanied with a failure of the public administration in ensuring safe distancing at major transport terminals, and in providing food and transportation to the migrant laborers returning home.
11. In 2012, UNESCO and UNICEF had published a policy brief titled “Internal Migration in India Initiative: For a Better Inclusion of Internal Migrants in India.”<sup>4</sup> The World Evangelical Alliance, together with our member the Evangelical Fellowship of India, would like to highlight hereinafter some of the recommendations of this policy brief, whose relevance only increased in light of the detrimental impact of the lock-down on India’s migrant workers.
12. Under the title “Develop a coherent legal and policy framework on migration,” the brief recommended to the Indian government, *inter alia*, to:
  - a) Develop a universal national minimum social security package covering minimum wages and labour standards and incorporating portability of benefits in all government social protection schemes and public services.”
13. And under the title “Improve institutional preparedness and build capacity for facilitating and promoting migration,” the brief recommended to the Indian government to:
  - a) Create inter-district and inter-state coordination committees to jointly plan institutional arrangements between administrative jurisdictions of sending and receiving areas to ensure service delivery;
  - b) Build capacity of *panchayats*<sup>5</sup> to maintain a database of migrant workers (with details of numbers of migrants and recruitment by contractors) and establish vigilant committees to identify entry of new migrants at the local level;
  - c) Establish migrant labour cells in each state labour department with the support of the Labour Ministry;
  - d) Increase financial and human resources in migration-prone areas;
  - e) Promote public-private partnerships for the promotion of safe internal migration; and
  - f) Ensure access to formal banking facilities for migrants to enable safe and secure transfer of remittances.

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4 The UNESCO and UNICEF policy brief is available at the following link:  
[www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/New\\_Delhi/pdf/Policy\\_briefs\\_full\\_low\\_01.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/New_Delhi/pdf/Policy_briefs_full_low_01.pdf)

5 The *panchayat* is a system of local government in India.