

Press Release
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Red Cross society, Bhubaneswar

Observations and Recommendations about Continued Violence in Orissa

Concerned Citizens' Fact Finding Team

An all India representative fact-finding team of concerned citizens visited Khandamal district, met with the victims, the district administration and concerned citizens. The nature and extent of the violence, the relief and rehabilitation of the victims and the role of the state administrative machinery and finally make appropriate recommendations for the return of peace and constitutional governance in the affected areas.

I. Observations

1. The team through extensive interviews and survey determined that the violence was not spontaneous or due to local reasons but preplanned and communal attack on Christians. Both dalit and tribal Christians.
2. In the areas visited the churches were systematically burned and vandalized. Houses of those belonging to the Christian community were singled out looted and burned, and livestock were taken away. The team also investigated the burning and ransacking divyajyoti and jan vikas offices in Kanjamndi village near a police camp.
3. In the absence of comprehensive official information the team has substantiated information on A. the assault on the priest and a nun in K. Nuagagv village where the nun was gang raped; and both were paraded naked. A Bible preacher in Ludiamunda village was hacked to death when he refused forcible conversion to Hinduism, his paralysed mother was burned alive. C. We observed that all people who were forced to take refuge first in the forest and then in the camps have not been able to return to their homes because of threats that they will be killed if they do not convert. In several instances, Christians returning were attacked and some were killed.

II. Observation

Systematic nature of the violence clearly demonstrates that one of the main intentions was to change the villages' composition through a religious cleansing. Underlying element used to muster local support was to loot and capture the property. Under the pretext of stopping forcible conversions the Christian community was subjected to programme to make them change their religion and deny their fundamental under the Article 25 of the constitution, to preach practice and propagate their religion.

III. Observation

There is sufficient evidence collected by the team to indicate that the attackers were a combination of locals and outsiders. The leadership and motivation was provided by the Visha Hindu Parishad, RSS and the Bajrang Dal, in which the local business community played a major role. The attacking mobs were armed with guns and other weapons as well as

petrol and kerosene. The huge local mobilizations suggest to long term planning and ideological indoctrination.

IV. Observation

Even weeks after the violence Khandamal remains in the grip of terror. Large scale fleeing to the forest and camps are continuing while the burning and looting of houses are continuing.

The team witnessed hoses in Makwali and Salpagadi were burning in the morning of September 15 and were still smoldering.

Because of the continued rein of terror and lack of adequate security people are finding it impossible to return to their homes. Those who are leaving the camps are generally are fleeing the district for unknown destinations.

V. Observation

The relief camps are poorly organized and unable to meet the requirements of the victims. Malaria and Diahia and other undiagnosed fevers are rampant in the camps in the absence of proper medical care.

At last 20 births have occurred in camps without proper institutional care. In number of cases there were no adequate provisions for special food for pregnant women and the ailing. Nutritionally deficient food is being provided to the victims. Death is being reported from the camps.

No facilities have been provided for school and college going children to continue their studies

VI. Observation

The state government is guilty of providing misleading and distorted data including minimizing the extent of suffering and dislocations. The District administration is not registering FIRs and has consequently has not made significant number of arrest of the guilty to act as an effective deterrent and improve the security situation for the Christians.

The state government is guilty of criminal negligence for standing by while preparations were made for the carnage and turning a blind eye to the perpetrators of violence by not recording evidence or taking adequate action for relief and rehabilitation.

VII. Observation

The team believes that there is a prima facie case established that state government is protecting the perpetrators of the violence

The district observation has not taken effective action under the law for the security of the victims and their rehabilitation.

Recommendations

The team demands

1. The union government must immediately invoke its powers under the Article 355 and 256 and 257 of the Indian constitution to ensure that the state government fulfill its constitutional obligation to the citizens
2. Arrest the perpetrators and mobilisers, also using the power under the Section 153 and 153 A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)
3. The district administration and the police and the superior officers must be held accountable for their dereliction of the duty.
4. Using its special powers the central government should institute a high level judicial enquiry into the communal violence.

Concerned Citizen's Fact Finding Team

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