

CHHATTI SGARH LOK SWATANTRYA SANGATHAN

(PEOPLE'S UNION FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES, CHHATTISGARH)

30th October 2014

To

Ms. Mabel Rebello,
Member of the National Minorities Commission
(in charge of the State of Chhattisgarh)
5th Floor, Loknaya Bhavan,
Khan Market, New Delhi – 110003

Subject: Request for urgent intervention into repeated attacks on the Christian minority community in Village Madhota, Block, Police Station Bhanpuri, District Bastar, Chhattisgarh.

Respected Madam,

This is to bring to your notice that there is a serious situation of assault against the minority Christian community in Village Madhota, Police Station Bhanpuri, District Bastar, Chhattisgarh which requires urgent intervention on behalf of the Commission. Some of the salient facts are given below:-

1. On Sunday, 14.09.2014, when the Christian community was conducting worship in their Church, 30-35 karyakartas of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad entered the church, gave slogans of "Isaiyon ko maro, Ramrajya leke aao", and began beating up the persons present including women and children. They threatened the members of Christian community present there that if they did not come back into their old religion i.e the Hindu fold, they would not be allowed to drink water from the communal water sources, they would not be allowed to reap their harvests and would be dispossessed of their lands, and might even lose their lives. The Christian

community tried to register a complaint at the local police station at Bhanpuri, however the Town Inspector (TI - Stationhouse Officer), he refused to register an FIR.

2. On 16.09.2014, 40-50 members of the Christian community went to the District Head Quarters at Jagdalpur and informed the Superintendent of Police regarding the above incident. The SP Jagdalpur directed the TI of Police Station to go to the village and effect a compromise between the two communities.

3. On 19.09.2014, the TI of P.S. Bhanpuri summoned both parties to the dispute to come to the Police Station. The leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad - Yogendra Kaushik and Surendra Yadav – both residents of Jagdalpur, also went to the Police Station. They threateningly told the Police Officer that he should not get involved in this issue and that only their writ would run in Madhota village. They told the Christians that they must get re-converted to the Hindu fold otherwise they would face consequences. Slogans of “Bajrangbali” were shouted in the Thana itself. The TI then advised the Christian pastors who had accompanied the villagers not to enter the village, and not to conduct any collective prayer meetings. The villagers and the Pastors had no choice but to obey.

4. On 19.10.2014, once again while the Christians were conducting their prayers in the Church, the karyakartas of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad surrounded the Church and 5-6 of them entered the Church premises. The people can recognize Daulat, Sadhu, Bhadu, Nauratan and Raju by name and face from amongst these. These people had come with a photo of Bajrang Bali and began to abuse and beat the Christians. They initially wanted to put up the photo of Bajrang Bali in the church, but later they hung it on the borewell and declared that no Christians would be allowed to drink water from the borewell. The people again went to the PS Bhanpuri, where the TI refused to register their complaint. The next day, i.e. on 20.10.2014, they went to meet the SP, district Bastar. The SP not being available, they met the Additional Superintendent of Police Mr. Vijay Pandey, who assured them that he would personally look into the matter. He said that he would come to the village on 25.10.2014 and bring the City Magistrate along with him so that the matter could be resolved.

5. On 25.10.2014, the Village Kotwar announced by beating of drum that the district authorities would be visiting the village. The Christian community comprising 25-30 families gathered near their Church from 10am, but none of the officers came to the village. At around 2.30pm (afternoon), a crowd of about 250-300 people armed with lathis came in a procession to the village, and started beating up the Christians including women and children. Some were pursued right up to their houses and beaten there. Many ran away into the adjoining forest. Six were severely injured including a woman whose hand had been fractured. Shri Bhupendra Khora was informed by the villagers of this and he immediately contacted the SP, Bastar. Though the SP was not present, Mr Khora apprised his Reader of the tense situation, and he sent the police force to the village. When the police arrived, the VHP people were still beating the Christians and they ran away after seeing the police. When the ambulance service (called 108 in Chhattisgarh) was called, the Village Kotwar, who is himself a member of the Bajrang Dal and 2-3 others also got into the ambulance along with the injured Christians claiming that they had been hurt by the Christians, though they had no visible injuries. These persons were also admitted into the hospital. Persons named Bhagirathi, Sadhu, Bhadu, Raju and others of the VHP were detained in bailable offences. The Christian pastors were also detained under Section 151 CrPC.

7. On 27.10.2014, about 2000-2500 persons gheraoed the P.S. Bhanpuri to demand the release of the VHP members. They were however produced before the judicial magistrate and remanded to judicial custody. The Pastors were produced in the SDM's court, but since he was on leave and did not accept the bail bonds, they were also sent to jail.

8. Under the pressure of the VHP karyakartas, the injured Christians were discharged from the hospital, whereas the VHP persons with hardly any injuries continue to be admitted there.

9. The Christian community in Village Madhota is in terror. They are not being allowed to access the communal sources of water nor to harvest their crops. No Christian is being allowed to leave the village since the two roads leading from the village, one towards Bhanpuri and the other towards Jagdalpur are being guarded by the VHP persons. Many Christians are outside the

village and unable to enter the village for fear. The Pastors are facing death threats if they enter the village.

10. The main source of the impunity of the VHP members is because they are being fully supported by Shri Kedar Kashyap, Minister in the Chhattisgarh government who is carrying out a campaign of “Ghar Vapasi” in which Christians are being re-converted to Hinduism often forcibly. The District President of the VHP – Surendra Yadav – and the Janpad Panchayat Member of neighboring Village Usuri who is a BJP as well as VHP leader of the area and his close aide Mohan Mourya are inciting and mobilizing the villagers of Madhota and surrounding villages to attack the Christian community.

11. Earlier a complaint has already been made in this regard by the Jagdalpur Legal Aid Group which is pending before this Hon’ble Commission (which is appended again here). It is unlikely that the State authorities will take any action because of the involvement at the Ministerial level.

12. That the present complainant can put the Commission in touch with various persons who are having direct and definitive knowledge of the events, but who are under severe threat at present, if the Commission so requires.

13. Therefore, we earnestly request that:-

a) A team be immediately constituted by the National Commission for Minorities to investigate into this incident and submit their report to the State authorities.

b) The NCM request the State Government to constitute a Special Investigation Team independent of the local authorities and free from communal bias to prosecute the offenders.

c) The NCM request the State Government to depute a Senior Administrative Officer to ensure that the Christian community in the village can access communal resources, can carry out their livelihood including harvesting crops and can move freely in and out of the village.

Sudha Bharadwaj

Advocate, High Court of Chattisgarh, Bilaspur

General Secretary,

Chhattisgarh Branch of the People's Union for Civil Liberties

Mobile No:- 09926603877.

Email: advocatesudhabharadwaj@gmail.com