



11.5.2009

INDIA Orissa acquittals create fears for widespread lack of justice, 25 years after anti-sikh violence in Delhi

A week after releasing a new report "On the Edge of Survival: The Continuing Rat Infestation and Food Crisis in Chin State, Burma," Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO) Executive Director Salai Bawi Lian Mang is in London briefing British Parliamentarians.

As the EU-India Summit approaches, CSW has sent a letter to EU leaders, urging them to use Friday's Summit to raise fresh concern about the aftermath of last year's anti-Christian violence in Orissa, including "legitimate fears of impunity on a large scale".

There are rising fears among NGOs and lawyers in Orissa over the growing number of accused persons being acquitted or released on bail, and the intimidation of witnesses. These include Manoj Pradhan, elected to the Orissa legislative assembly from prison in May. Pradhan, who is facing fourteen charges, including several courts of murder, was released on bail on 29 October.

One witness, speaking during a recent trial in which three men were acquitted of burning alive an elderly widow and murdering a tribal leader, said anonymously, "We cannot now return to the village as the murderers would be on the street with more hatred and anger against us".

The rising concerns over impunity for perpetrators of the Orissa violence, coincide with the 25th anniversary this month of the massacre of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984, whose victims are still waiting for justice.

Dr John Dayal, Secretary General of the All India Christian Council (aicc), who recently contributed a civil society round-table meeting in Orissa, said, "The situation on the ground is a mess. The growing number of acquittals on spurious grounds are a grave miscarriage of justice, and the manner in which the fast-track courts are proceeding is highly concerning."

Tina Lambert, CSW's Advocacy Director, said, "India is described in the 2005 EU-India Joint Action Plan (JAP) as a paradigm of how various religions can flourish in a plural, democratic and open society. Given the commitment in the JAP to a candid engagement on human rights issues, the EU should take this opportunity to urge the Indian government to do all in its power to secure peace and justice for the victims of violence in Orissa and to put an end to the culture of impunity for perpetrators of mass violence against religious minorities."

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