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INDIA National People's Tribunal makes "troubling" assessment of Orissa violence aftermath

The National People's Tribunal on Kandhamal on 2 December released its final report, 'Waiting for Justice', which makes a "troubling" assessment of the current situation in the aftermath of the 2008 communal violence in Orissa state, India. The report includes a raft of recommendations to the state government, which Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is urging should be taken seriously.

The report is the outcome of a series of hearings held in New Delhi from 22-24 August 2011, over the third anniversary of the violence, and is based on evidence from 45 victims and fifteen expert statements. It highlights a wide range of concerns arising from these testimonies, including: attacks on human rights defenders since 2008; sexual violence, which has been largely undocumented; the impact of the communal violence on children, including those who have suffered trauma; the long-term socio-economic impact of the violence on survivors; the ongoing inability of the Christian community to manifest their faith openly; the failures of the justice system, including evidence of "institutional bias"; and the absence of comprehensive rehabilitation packages and effective reconciliation mechanisms.

Published just days after two senior state officials in Orissa admitted that the 2008 violence was pre-planned, the report also castigates the police and district officials for their failure to take preventative action. It notes with particular concern that recommendations made by the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) after an earlier wave of violence in December 2007 were not implemented, and that the lengthy funeral procession for Swami Lakshmananda Saraswati, which sparked the violence, was allowed to go ahead.

Shabnam Hashmi, Director of the noted campaign group ANHAD, which co-organized the tribunal and co-published the report, said, "This report records chilling stories of victims of violence from Kandhamal. It is a very important document for understanding the rise of communal ideology in India."

Dr John Dayal, Secretary General of the All India Christian Council (aicc) and one of the most prominent activists working long-term on Kandhamal, said, "For the people it has been a long and very frustrating wait. There is no political will."

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "The National People's Tribunal has painted a very troubling picture of the situation in Kandhamal, but it reflects concerns which have been raised consistently over the past three years. India will undergo its Universal Periodic Review at the UN next year, and one area likely to be raised is the long periods of time taken for victims of communal violence to receive justice and reparation. India will also likely be praised for its vibrant civil society, of which this tribunal is another example, but it is important that government takes seriously their views. We strongly encourage the state government of Orissa to engage seriously and constructively with these recommendations, which represent long-term concerns held by many civil society groups."

Notes to editors:

1. The National People's Tribunal on Kandhamal was organized by the National Solidarity Forum, a coalition comprising 56 organizations and networks.

2. For further information on the 2008 communal violence in Orissa, see section 5.1 of CSW's briefing, '[India: Communalism, anti-conversion and religious freedom](#)'.