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INDIA Still awaiting justice on 10th anniversary of Gujarat violence

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) today joins human rights groups in India in observing the tenth anniversary of communal violence in Gujarat state, which resulted in the deaths of around 2,000 people, mostly Muslims. The delivery of justice is still far from complete and there continue to be widespread, credible allegations of complicity from the highest levels of the state government.

On February 27, 2002, two coaches of the Sabarmati Express caught fire in the town of Godhra; whether deliberately or by accident has not been decisively established. 59 Hindus, many of them activists returning from the disputed religious site of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh state, died as a result.

After the Godhra train burning, Hindu nationalist groups called for state-wide protests in Gujarat, which set the context for a massive pogrom of violence carried out against Muslims in the state, beginning in the principal city of Ahmedabad. For three days, severe violence continued unabated, and it continued sporadically for several weeks. It is estimated that 2,000 people were killed. Mosques and homes of Muslims were looted and burned, leaving thousands homeless. Hate campaigns against Muslims fueled further violence in cities and rural areas across the state.

The state government of Gujarat initially stated that the violence was a spontaneous reaction to the Godhra incident. However, the violence appears to have been well-planned, and numerous human rights groups have documented evidence that implicates police in attacks, with witnesses claiming that police officers in many instances were directing people towards the rioters and ignoring cries for help. Strong and credible allegations of state complicity at highest level have been made, with Chief Minister Narendra Modi widely accused of directing police not to obstruct attacks by Hindus on Muslims. Following the violence, the delivery of justice was deeply flawed, although some progress has been made largely as a result of Supreme Court interventions.

Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "The tragedy of Gujarat still looms large in the consciousness of Muslims and other religious minorities in India, not least because it is so far from any satisfactory resolution. The thorough delivery of justice is fundamentally important, not only for the sake of the victims but also to uphold the rule of law, end a culture of impunity, and help to prevent tragedies of this sort from happening again. Rising concerns about communalism in Karnataka again underline the urgency of this. Justice involves not only the essential work of prosecuting all those implicated in the violence, but also resolving underlying issues, and tackling the marginalization and social ostracism faced by the victimized community. We welcome the moves taken by the government of India to address communal violence more systematically, such as through the bill that has been drafted to prevent, control and deal with such violence, and encourage them to see this process through".

Notes to Editors:

1. In a submission to India's Universal Period Review (UPR) at the United Nations (UN), CSW highlighted the fact that "allegations of complicity at the highest levels of the state government have not been addressed satisfactorily."

2. For further information on the bill to address communal violence, see CSW's briefing, ['India: anti-conversion, communalism and religious freedom'](#).