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INDIA | CSW Strongly Supports Calls For Communal Violence Legislation

CSW fully endorses the recommendation, made this week by a civil society team in India in its [fact-finding report](#) on communal violence against Muslims around [Muzaffarnagar](#), Uttar Pradesh state in September, that India must introduce a proposed Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence Bill.

The violence that erupted in the area on Sept. 7 was mostly carried out by the majority Jat community, a Hindu caste group, against the Muslim minority. According to official figures, 39 people were killed, six of them Jats and the rest Muslims, and at least 25,000 were displaced, almost all Muslims. Local sources say the real figures may be significantly higher, with up to 53 deaths and 50,000 displaced.

The fact-finding team, coordinated by the New Delhi-based [Centre for Policy Analysis](#), found these two communities used to live harmoniously together, but communal tensions had been manufactured for political gain. It concluded that the state government failed at every stage: in preventing the violence, controlling it once it had begun, rescuing victims, and bringing about rehabilitation and justice.

The violence took place against the backdrop of rising tensions which had not been defused effectively. The immediate trigger was a confrontation on Aug. 27 between a Muslim and two Hindu cousins, which ended in the deaths of all three men. Accounts of the incident differ, however it was capitalized upon by local politicians, Hindu nationalist groups, and sections of the media to claim Muslims posed an imminent threat. This claim was then bolstered with disinformation. A local politician from the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was complicit in circulating footage, purporting to show the incident, which was later identified as a mob attack in Sialkot, Pakistan, in 2010.

On Sept. 7, members of the Jat community, many of them wielding weapons, gathered for a large meeting in Kawal village, at which anti-Muslim sentiment was stoked further. Fighting broke out

between Jats and Muslims shortly afterwards. It quickly spread, becoming increasingly one-sided against Muslims, without being brought under control. On Sept. 8, the local administration imposed a curfew with the help of the army. Even at that stage, local media headlines reported “Muslim terror” and “Mass murder of Hindus by Muslims.”

Dr. John Dayal, a National Integration Council member who was part of the fact-finding team, said, “It is depressing and traumatic to witness what havoc communal and targeted violence can wreak on a victim community, and the effect it has on peace and harmony. India must enact legislation to prevent and control targeted violence. This will go a long way towards ending impunity and will expedite healing.”

David Griffiths, South Asia Team Leader at CSW, said, “The Muzaffarnagar violence follows a pattern all too familiar in India. Bitter experience of communal violence shows the same characteristics again and again, and the need for a comprehensive legislative solution that is implemented thoroughly is once again starkly illustrated. In particular, incitement and hatred must be combated much more effectively to prevent situations such as this from escalating. Just one of the many layers of this tragedy is that the killing of innocent boys in Sialkot has now directly contributed to more violence. Together with the fact-finding team, and those countries which raised it during India’s Universal Periodic Review last year, we call on the government to introduce the Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence Bill as a matter of urgency.”