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INDIA | CSW Asks President Obama to Address Religious Minorities Situation

Christian Solidarity Worldwide calls on US President Barack Obama to raise the concerns of India's religious minorities in his bilateral meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to India Jan. 25-27.

President Obama's visit to India is a crucial step forward in US-India relations in recent years, and follows the lifting of a visa ban on Prime Minister Modi ahead of his official visit to the US in September 2014. President Obama will be the chief guest at the Republic Day function on Jan. 26.

In the eight months since Modi's BJP party took office, the plight of religious minorities has become increasingly embattled. Systematic, orchestrated and audacious hate speech campaigns by government ministers and leaders of Hindu nationalists groups have provoked violent attacks on religious minorities, particularly the Muslim and Christian communities, which comprise 13.4 percent and 2.3 percent of the population, respectively. There are concerns the sanctity of the Indian Constitution, which safeguards the right to practice one's religion, is being eroded.

In recent months, there have been large-scale and coercive "ghar wapsi" or homecoming ceremonies across the country, in which religious minorities are pressured to convert to Hinduism. In December 2014, an estimated 100 Christians in the state of Gujarat and 30 individuals in Kerala reportedly converted to Hinduism. Another 57 families went through such ceremonies in the tribal region of Bastar, Chhattisgarh. The families were denied food rations, which they are entitled under the law, unless they renounced their Christian faith. There were also conversions to Hinduism of about 50 impoverished Muslims in Agra in Uttar Pradesh in the same month.

Approximately 22 Catholic schools run by missionaries in the tribal region of Bastar in Chhattisgarh have come under intense pressure by hardline Hindu groups to erect Hindu deities and for students to stop referring to school principals as "Father." In New Delhi, Muslim and Christian communities and places of worship have been attacked, including four churches between December 2014 and January 2015.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, 'Prime Minister Modi's silence on these issues affecting India's religious minorities has left many within these communities feeling nervous about the future of their identity and place in India. As Prime Minister Modi's guest on Republic Day, an important day that affirms the nation's history and vision for the future, we call on President Obama to highlight the plight of India's religious minorities, who find their place in this

diverse nation under threat, to raise their concerns about widespread hate campaigns and attacks against them by state and non-state actors, and to insist that justice is done for the victim-survivors of violence.”