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INDIA | Minister Urged to Honor Pledge for Police Investigation into Church Desecration

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) urged India's Union Minister for Home Affairs, Shri Rajnath Singh, to honor his pledge for the police to investigate the desecration of St. Alphonsa on Feb. 2 as a hate crime.

The minister made the pledge Feb. 5 following a meeting with church leaders and human rights defenders, who had been temporarily detained by police following a peaceful gathering outside the Catholic Sacred Heart Cathedral in Delhi. According to Fr. Dominic Emanuel, spokesperson of the Delhi Catholic Archdiocese, the gathering, which was also attended by nuns and children, was conducted in a peaceful manner, with the intention of voicing concerns about the recent attacks on churches in Delhi.

There has been a spate of attacks on the churches in Delhi in the last couple of months, which have raised fears about the future of Christians in the nation's capital. In the most recent incident, the sacristy cupboards were desecrated at St. Alphonsa. The Holy Communion was found scattered all over the church table and floor. Church sources dismissed police claims that the incident was a mere break-in, alleging instead there is an insidious plot behind these attacks, which is to undermine the Christian community in India.

On Dec. 1, 2014, St. Sebastian's Church in east Delhi was gutted by fire and the church altar, Bible and cross were reduced to ashes. A promised judicial inquiry into the arson has not taken place. On Dec. 7, 2014, stones were pelted at the church of Our Lady of Fatima Forane during evening Mass, which resulted in broken windows. On Jan. 3, 2015, a Christmas crib erected in the compound of the Church of Resurrection was reduced to ashes. CCTV footage revealed that a burning object was hurled into the church premises. On Jan. 14, several men vandalized the church of Our Lady of Graces by toppling the statute of Mary.

CSW's Chief Operating Officer Andy Dipper said, "We urge the Minister Shri Rajnath Singh to honor his pledge for the police to investigate the desecration of St. Alphonsa as a hate crime. We are also concerned by the heavy-handed approach of the Delhi police in arresting people who had gathered peacefully to express their dismay about attacks on their churches, and the threat to their right to freedom of religion or belief. CSW calls on the government to ensure that the promised inquiry into the arson at St Sebastian's Church also takes place. India's religious minorities need to be reassured that their right to freedom of religion or belief will be protected."