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INDIA | Church Attacked, Pastor Doused in Gasoline

A pastor and his wife were doused in gasoline during an attack on their church in Karanji Village, Chattisgarh State, India, on April 17, during which the church was vandalized.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) received reports that two men visited Pastor Deenanath of Berseba Church in Karanji Village posing as Christians requesting prayer. The pastor was forced to let the men into the church and made to chant “jai sri ram” (hail Lord Ram) before he and his wife were doused with gasoline in an attempt to force them to convert to Hinduism.

Considerable damage was done to the church building and contents, including Bibles, furniture, public address system, pulpit and church offerings consisting of fruits and vegetables offered by local church members. A First Information Report was lodged with the police against unknown persons. It is believed the two men belonged to a Hindu fundamentalist group from outside the village.

Christians in Chattisgarh State, especially in Bastar district where Karanji Village is located, often face physical violence and social discrimination. According to the Evangelical Fellowship of India, Chattisgarh ranks second among Indian states for recorded incidences of attacks against Christians in 2015.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “CSW condemns this and all other incidences of targeted violence against religious minorities, which have outraged civil society in India. CSW joins with the people of India in calling for justice and for the fulfilment of the Prime Minister’s promise to put a stop to the harassment of religious minorities in India. We are deeply concerned at the trend of increasing attacks on religious minorities in the country, and especially in Chhattisgarh State, which betray India’s pluralistic heritage. The Indian government must follow through on its promises with concrete actions to stem these attacks.”