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INDIA | Government Urged to Uphold Constitutional Guarantees

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) urges the government of India to uphold constitutional guarantees on the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), ahead of Republic Day on Jan. 26.

India will celebrate 68 years of having a constitution, which recognizes the largest democracy in the world as an independent Republic and which, in its preamble, resolves to secure the “liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship” of all its citizens. Article 25 of the constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion or belief, stating that “all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.”

Since May 26, 2014, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power, there has been a notable shift in public discourse, increasing hostility towards religious minorities. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological arm of the BJP which promotes a Hindu nationalist agenda, has sought to polarize the society by relentlessly dividing communities based on religious grounds, leaving religious minorities in the nation unsettled about their future.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has remained largely silent on the hate campaigns, threats, violence and attacks against religious minorities. Christian organizations state that between 2014 to July 2016, they have recorded approximately 424 cases of violence against Christians. It is suspected that many more cases go unreported.

Far right groups have threatened and intimidated those who voice dissent in response to the attacks on religious minorities, while non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who are engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, have had their foreign aid contributions stopped by the government.

Dr. John Dayal, the former national President of the All India Catholic Union said, “India is a signatory to the United Nations Charter, and human rights especially Freedom of Religion or Belief, enshrined in it. We have always maintained that relations, political, economic including trade, between nations have a strong commitment to these fundamental rights of all men, women and children everywhere in the world. This Republic Day as new leaders emerge in

Europe and the United States, we pray for a strengthening of the rule of law in India and end to hate, and a commitment to human rights, civil liberties and religious freedom.”

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "On this important day, we call on the Indian government to give due attention to the Constitution, which grants every citizen, despite his or her religion or caste, the freedom to profess, practice and propagate his or her religion without fear of reprisal."