



# UNITED CHRISTIAN FORUM

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July 20, 2024

To,

Shri Kiren Rijiju

Hon'ble Union Minister

Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs

New Delhi, India

Subject: Memorandum pertaining to the targeted violence and hostility against the Christian Community

Hon'ble Minister,

1. This is to draw your attention to the increasing targeted violence and hostility faced by Christian citizens.
2. **In 2023, the United Christian Forum (UCF) recorded a total of 733 incidents of violence against Christians, with an average of 61 incidents per month, revealing a disturbing trend in religious persecution.** It is important to note that these figures, based on the calls received by the UCF, do not include any incidents from Manipur, which has experienced ongoing violence since May 2023.
3. **As of June 2024, a staggering 361 incidents targeting Christians or against persons with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have been recorded by the UCF.**
4. The primary reason for these attacks has been false allegations of fraudulent conversions. Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh emerged as the leading states with **96** and **92** incidents, respectively.

## Violent Attacks

5. A report titled *Criminalising Practice of Faith*<sup>1</sup> published by PUCL documented that police collude with Hindutva groups and turn a blind eye to offences committed against Christians. It was also found that mobs often disrupted prayer meetings and threatened those who gathered complaints under sections 295A and 298 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860.
6. In a petition filed before the Supreme Court of India, calling for strict action against vigilante groups engaging in anti-Christian violence in India, the petitioners highlighted the correlation between increased violence and the enactment of the anti-conversion laws.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Criminalizing the Practice of Faith* A report by PUCL Karnataka on the Hate Crimes on Christians in Karnataka, 2021, available at [https://counterviewfiles.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/executive\\_summary\\_english.pdf](https://counterviewfiles.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/executive_summary_english.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>*Rise in attacks on Christians coincides with enactment of anti-conversion laws, petitioners tell SC*, The Scroll, (May 9, 2023) available at <https://scroll.in/latest/1048835/rise-in-attacks-on-christians-coincides-with-enactment-of-anti-conversion-laws-petitioners-tell-sc>



7. In some recent cases, Christians have also been murdered. Though the police attribute these murders to land or family disputes, local Christians have alleged that the murders were religiously motivated. Details of some incidents are provided below:
- a. On March 13, 2024, Govind Mandavi, Shobha Kashyap, Sumitra Mandavi, and other individuals along with their families professing faith in Christianity in village Badeproda, under Police Station Badanji, Chhattisgarh, were severely assaulted and hospitalized. Their properties were damaged, and they were forced out of their homes. The police did not provide support. A complaint was filed with the local police in this regard. On June 12, 2024, the family faced another brutal attack along with some other believers. Some were beaten unconscious and forcibly taken to the panchayat office. Villagers demanded they renounce their faith. Their crops were previously destroyed, and burial rights were denied. Another complaint was filed on June 14, 2024, but there was no response from the police. The victims are now in hiding due to the death threats by the villagers. A copy of the complaint to the Superintendent of Police and an image of the injured victims are annexed here as **Annexures A1 and A2** respectively.
  - b. On May 4, 2024, Kosa from Kapanar, under the jurisdiction of Police Station Darbha, Bastar, Chhattisgarh, was tragically murdered by his relatives due to his Christian faith during a village celebration. While many others targeted for their faith sought refuge at the police outpost, Kosa and his family chose to stay in their house. Despite the urgent pleas of Kosa's wife, Kosa was brutally attacked and fatally injured, while his wife was assaulted and subsequently hospitalized. The perpetrators also inflicted damage on the residences of others who had fled, including that of Hidma Kawasi. A police complaint was filed, leading to the registration of an FIR in favor of the victims. However, the matter was framed as a land dispute rather than one of religious persecution. A copy of the said FIR bearing no. 0013/2024 and a newspaper report have been annexed here as **Annexures A3 and A4** respectively.
  - c. On May 5, 2024, in Nainanar village, under the jurisdiction of Police Station Kodanar, Bastar, Chhattisgarh, Motiram and his father, Lachchu, were attacked by villagers demanding Motiram's reconversion during a visit to pay respects to his deceased grandfather. Upon their refusal, both were viciously beaten with sticks and pelted with stones. Motiram sustained severe head injuries and remained in critical condition in the hospital for nearly a month. An FIR was registered in favor of Motiram; however, the issue was framed as a property dispute rather than one of persecution. Additionally, on the same day, an FIR was lodged with Motiram listed as one of the accused. A copy of the FIR filed by the victim, a copy of the FIR in which Motiram is one of the accused and Motiram's injured image are annexed here as **Annexures A5, A6, and A7** respectively.
  - d. On July 14, 2024, Rajesh Bomi's family members along with some friends in Nehru Colony, Dehradun; Uttarakhand, were praying at their residence when some religious extremists stormed into their property. The extremists vandalized the church and brutally attacked the worshippers, resulting in grave injuries to those present in the prayer.<sup>3</sup>



8. Even women and children have not been spared from such attacks and allegations. Some cases are outlined below:
- a. On June 24, 2024, a woman named Bindu Sodhi under the jurisdiction of Police Station Katekalyan, Dantewada district, Chhattisgarh was murdered. Villagers and some of her close relatives had been preventing her from plowing the field because of her faith in Christianity. After filing a complaint with the police against these individuals, the family resumed their work in the field. Subsequently, some villagers and her close relatives armed with bows and arrows, axes, and knives attacked during which Bindu Sodhi was caught and killed on the spot by having her throat slit in the evening. The dead body was kept at a hospital in Dantewada, and the villagers were not permitting her body to be buried in the village land. An FIR was registered framing the issue as a land dispute rather than persecution. An image of the body of the deceased, Bindu Sodhi, and a copy of the said FIR bearing number 0030/2024, have been annexed here as **Annexures A8** and **A9** respectively.
  - b. On July 30, 2022, six Dalit women were arrested in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh while celebrating a child's birthday – the son of one of the ladies. Local extremists witnessed the congregants praying for the child and reported it as an event where forced conversion was being carried out. All six women were booked under the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021. The copy of the said FIR bearing number 0286/2022 is annexed here as **Annexure A10**.

#### **Violence against Scheduled Tribes in Bastar Region, Chhattisgarh**

9. Since December 2022, there have been a series of attacks displacing Adivasi Christians in Chhattisgarh who are threatened to denounce their Christian faith and convert to the Hindu religion.
10. In one such occurrence on January 2, 2023, three Adivasi Christian women in Nāīayanpur were stripped naked publicly and physically assaulted in a bid to force them to give up their Christian faith.<sup>4</sup>
11. Apart from these incidents, there have been numerous cases where Adivasi Christians have been denied the right to bury their dead, with some instances of bodies being exhumed.<sup>5</sup> The police have shown little to no intervention in such matters, reflecting a broader indifference to the injustices faced by Adivasi Christians.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.newslaundry.com/2024/07/16/hindutva-rub-targets-christian-prayer-meet-dehradun-house-vandalised-7-assaulted/>

<sup>4</sup> "Memo to Chattisgarh CM - Violence Against Christian Community." Communist Party of India (Marxist), 23 Jan. 2023, [www.cpim.org/pressbriefs/memo-chattisgarh-cm-violence-against-christian-community](http://www.cpim.org/pressbriefs/memo-chattisgarh-cm-violence-against-christian-community); "Indian Left Party Demands Action on anti-Christian Attacks." Union of Catholic Asian News, 25 Jan. 2023, [www.ucanews.com/news/indian-left-party-demands-action-on-anti-christian-attacks/100150](http://www.ucanews.com/news/indian-left-party-demands-action-on-anti-christian-attacks/100150).

<sup>5</sup> "Right to Die With Dignity: Christian Tribal Denied Burial Rights, Shril Campaign on 'Conversion' Afoot." Citizens for Justice and Peace, 6 Nov. 2023, [cjp.org.in/right-to-die-with-dignity-christian-tribal-denied-burial-rights-shril-campaign-on-conversion-afout](http://cjp.org.in/right-to-die-with-dignity-christian-tribal-denied-burial-rights-shril-campaign-on-conversion-afout).



- a. On 28 June 2024, in the Bastar District of Chhattisgarh, Mahadev reported the passing of his 55-year-old Christian mother, Pando. When the family attempted to bury her in the village, they faced obstruction from villagers who pressured them to undergo Gharwapsi (reconversion to Hinduism). The local police failed to provide the necessary support, prompting the filing of complaints with the Superintendent of Police (SP), the Inspector General (IG), and the collector of Bastar division. However, both officials refused to authorize the burial on the family's land. A copy of the said complaint to the Superintendent of Police is annexed as **Annexure A11**.

The lack of police cooperation necessitated filing a writ petition before the High Court in Bilaspur. On July 1, 2024, the High Court ruled in favor of the writ petition, mandating the burial of Pando on her family's land and directed the authorities at the Government Medical College in Jagdalpur to release Pando's body to her family and instructed the SP Bastar to provide police protection until the burial was completed.

#### **False complaints and Third-party complaints:**

12. Though many of the more recent enactments under the State Freedom of Religion Acts state that only a person directly affected by the forcible conversion can register a complaint, the police have regularly arrested Christians at the behest of Hindutva groups who have filed complaints based allegedly on some prior information received by them.
13. Article 14, a legal research and reportage group, analyzed over 100 FIRS filed under the anti-conversion law in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Of these, 63 were registered after third-party complaints, including 26 from extremists groups.<sup>6</sup>
14. Some such cases are outlined below:
  - a. On August 20, 2023, Santosh Nishad from Maharajganj District in Uttar Pradesh was hosting a prayer gathering and get-together at his house when a group of approximately 10 individuals trespassed his property and physically assaulted him, accusing him of engaging in fraudulent religious conversions. On the evening of August 21, Pastor Santosh was taken into custody at the Nichloul police station. An FIR bearing number 0410/2023 was registered under IPC sections 323 and 506 and the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021 leading to his imprisonment.

In this case, the complainant testified before the Maharajganj Sessions Court that he had been coerced into filing the complaint against Santosh Nishad. Copies of the FIR and the complainant's testimony are annexed here as **Annexures A12** and **A13**, respectively, illustrating how the FIR was lodged under duress.

<sup>6</sup>A. Kumar, Hindutva Groups Are Misusing UP's Anti-Conversion Law, As Police Register Cases With No Legal Standing, Article 14, (October 11, 2023) available at <https://article-14.com/pcst/hindutva-groups-are-misusing-up-s-anti-conversion-law-as-police-register-cases-with-no-legal-standing--65260e4c5987e>



- b. On October 1, 2023, in an incident in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, Father Babu Francis, and eight others were arrested during a prayer meeting in Naini, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh based on a false complaint alleging fraudulent religious conversions under the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021 and IPC Sections 295A, 147, 307, 504, and 506.
  - c. In another incident in Kasganj, Uttar Pradesh, on November 21, 2023, ten individuals were arrested during a prayer meeting in Kasganj, following false accusations of forceful conversions and assault.
15. The FIRs for these above two separate incidents have **strikingly similar content**, strongly suggesting that the allegations are fabricated. The copies of the FIRs bearing numbers 0515/2023 and 0364/2023, respectively, are annexed here as **Annexures A14 and A15**.

### Police Complicity and Failure to Verify the Veracity of The Incident

16. Researchers have documented how the anti-conversion laws have been weaponized to target religious minorities. False cases linger for many years, and the police and mob brutality against Christians accused under the anti-conversion laws<sup>7</sup> and growing legal costs all result in undue violation of the right to life and liberty<sup>8</sup>.
17. Some of the cases are outlined below:
- a. On November 23, 2022, a complaint was lodged in the Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh, alleging fraudulent religious conversions by Prashant Singh as the complainant, who claims to be a leader of the Bajrang Dal. As a result, an FIR bearing number 0370/2022 was registered under the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021, naming Harkharam and Achhelal as the accused. Achhelal Rahi was subsequently placed in judicial custody on November 24, 2022. Notably, **Harkharam, one of the accused in the FIR, had passed away 12 years earlier**. Copies of the FIR and Harkharam's death certificate are annexed as **Annexures A16 and A17**, respectively.
  - b. On November 29, 2023, in Sonbhadra, Uttar Pradesh, 22 individuals were apprehended by the police with arrests made across various police stations in the district. The charges against the pastors include allegations under the Uttar Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 2021 with a total of 42 individuals implicated in the FIR bearing number 0269/2023. The complainant's status as a leader of a Hindu extremist group suggests that the FIR against the 42 pastors is driven by motives. The copy of the said FIR is annexed here as **Annexure A18**.
  - c. On June 23, 2024, Pastor Sarju Prasad was illegally detained for almost 48 hours without the registration of an FIR when a prayer gathering at his home was disrupted in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, by journalists alleging fraudulent religious conversions by the police. The two online complaints were filed alerting the police regarding this

<sup>7</sup>O. Rashid, Free Books and Classes: Behind UP Police's 'Conversion' Arrests of South Indian-Origin Social Workers, The Wire (December 15, 2023) available at <https://thewire.in/government/uttar-pradesh-police-religious-conversion-south-india>

<sup>8</sup>S. Landrin, Hindu extremists ruthlessly hunt down Christians in India, Le Monde, (January 6, 2024) available at [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/01/06/hindu-extremists-ruthlessly-hunt-down-christians-in-india\\_6406265\\_4.html#](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/01/06/hindu-extremists-ruthlessly-hunt-down-christians-in-india_6406265_4.html#)



**illegal detention**, accompanied by tweets addressing the police regarding this incident. An FIR bearing number 0206/2024 at Police Station Cantt. under the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021 was subsequently filed against him on June 26, 2024, and was subsequently arrested and has been in judicial custody since then.

A copy of the above-mentioned complaints has been annexed here as **Annexures A19** and **A20**

The instances highlighted above represent only a fraction of the persecution faced by the Christian community in India infringing on their constitutional rights. The continuing violence and hostility have instilled a sense of fear and insecurity among Christians, hampering their ability to practice their faith freely. It is imperative that the government takes swift and decisive action to address these issues, restore justice, and ensure that all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs, can live in harmony and peace.

#### 18. Recommendations

- a. The Ministry of Home Affairs should provide training on human rights and religious freedom standards and practices to the state and central police and judiciary.
- b. Although maintenance of public order is a state responsibility, the central government should issue an advisory to the state governments to repeal the anti-conversion laws.
- c. The government should ensure that an active Commission for Human Rights and Commission for Minorities is operational in every state and that members of each commission are appointed through transparent and nonpartisan procedures.
- d. Prevent and pursue, through the judicial process, all violent acts against religious and tribal minorities and Dalits.
- e. Increase opportunities for dialogue between leaders of religious communities, legal experts, and civil society representatives to address any allegations of improper conversions in the states with anti-conversion laws.
- f. Ensure adequate compensation to those who are targeted for their faith and have suffered loss of life and property and who have been wrongly accused under the anti-conversion laws
- g. Provide financial assistance and grants to Christian mission schools and colleges that offer nearly free education to tribal, Dalit, and economically disadvantaged children.
- h. Urgently implement the recommendation of the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities and other bodies, to no longer use religion as a criterion for determining eligibility for Scheduled Caste membership.



In light of these grave concerns, immediate intervention is urgently requested to safeguard the rights and dignity of the Christian community in India. The implementation of these recommendations is crucial and will significantly contribute to fostering peace and tolerance in the country.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing issue.

Sincerely,

**Dr. Michael Williams**  
**National President**  
**United Christian Forum**