**Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America**

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Mr. George Koshy, President Rev. Neal Christie, Executive Director

August 4, 2024

The Honorable Governor Kathy Hochul

Executive Chamber

New York State Capitol Building

Albany NY 12224

The Honorable Mayor Eric Adams

City Hall

New York, NY 10007

Dear Governor Hochul and Mayor Adams:

The Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America (FIACONA) is profoundly alarmed by the inclusion of an anti-Muslim float at the India Day Parade scheduled for August 18, 2024, in New York City.

This float, organized by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) in collaboration with the Indian consulate, Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), and the Federation of Indian Associations (FIA)[[1]](#footnote-1), and the Federation of Indian Associations (FIA), starkly contradicts the values of inclusivity and respect that New York City and the state of New York uphold. The VHPA, an offshoot of India’s Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), has been designated a “militant religious organization” by the CIA’s World Factbook.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Inordinate government funding went into the infrastructure and inauguration of the Ram Temple in January 2024 by India’s Hindu supremacist Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has heightened religious tensions, leading to widespread violence instigated by “triumphant Hindu mobs,” as reported by the Washington Post. The newly built Ram Temple stands on the ruins of the historic 1528 Babri Mosque in the town of Ayodhya, which was deliberately demolished on December 6, 1992, by over 150,000 Hindu supremacists, triggering nationwide uprisings and the deaths of thousands, predominantly Muslims[[3]](#footnote-3). In November 2019, the Supreme Court of India awarded the site to Hindus for the construction of the temple, legitimizing an act of violence against a Muslim place of worship.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In August 2022, Hindu supremacist groups similarly provoked the India Day Parade in Edison, New Jersey, into a hate event, by displaying a bulldozer symbolizing the demolition of Muslim homes in India, alongside images of Prime Minister Modi and other Hindu supremacist leaders.[[5]](#footnote-5) This incident was condemned by both U.S. Senators Cory Booker and Bob Menendez.[[6]](#footnote-6)

We see firsthand the violence targeted against thousands of churches, schools, and ministries by organizations associated with the VHP and BAPS and we applaud [Human Rights Watch](https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/19/india-government-policies-actions-target-minorities)[[7]](#footnote-7) which says the Indian government has not only failed to protect Muslims and other minorities from attacks, but authorities in India have adopted laws and policies that systematically discriminate against Muslims and stigmatize critics of the government.

This concern is also lifted in our [Open Letter signed by over 300 clergy and lay leaders from across denomination and tradition calling condemning religious persecution in India, and growing Hindu supremacist religious nationalism in the U.S.](https://fiacona.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/FIACONA-Christian-Leaders-Letter-on-India.pdf)

As Christians we have a profound tradition of repentance and speaking prophetic truth to power, having witnessed countless burnings and bombings by white supremacists of African American churches which provide sanctuary and hope to historically oppressed peoples. We stand with Indigenous and Native peoples whose sacred sites have been desecrated in the name of faith for over 500 years. The devastation of the Babri Mosque and the erection of the Ram Temple are yet another egregious example of such injustices perpetuated by an ethnonational agenda.

If we abhor such historical practices in our nation, how can we stand by as our Muslim siblings experience similar attempts at erasure in India? Symbols of hate can never be disguised as symbols of celebration or triumph.

We request that your offices immediately rescind the invitation for the Ram Temple float in the India Day Parade and publicly repudiate the actions of the VHP and BAPS.

Thank you for your commitment to justice and a genuine spirit of inclusion.

Yours sincerely,

**Rev. Neal Christie**

Rev. Neal Christie

Executive Director

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1. https://fianynjct.org/bi-weekly/flipbook/DIASPORA-BI-WEEKLY-Wednesday-July-10-2024-Issue[1]119.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Georgetown University's Bridge Initiative also identifies VHPA as an Islamophobic group https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-vishwa-hindu-parishad-of-america-vhpa/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/01/25/india-ayodhya-hindu-nationalism-attacks/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.livelaw.in/top-stories/babri-mosque-demolition-an-egregious-violation-of-the-rule-of-law[1]wrong-committed-must-be-remedied-sc-read-judgment-149643 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/25/nyregion/bulldozer-indian-parade-new-jersey.html [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.booker.senate.gov/news/press/booker-menendez-staff-meet-with-iamc-cair-nj-and-indian[1]american-groups-following-india-day-parade-inciden [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/19/india-government-policies-actions-target-minorities [↑](#footnote-ref-7)