

# INDIA - Orissa trip back on after government climbdown

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NEW DELHI (UCAN) — A European Union delegation’s trip to Orissa will now go ahead after an apparent climb-down by the government.

The 12-member [EU](#) team scrapped early plans after the government barred it from visiting Kandhamal district, the epicenter of anti-Christian violence in 2008. The group will visit the state next week, officials said.



A statue inside a church damaged during anti-Christian violence in Orissa

There is a question mark, however, on what the diplomats will be allowed to ask. They will not be able to act as a fact-finding mission and “they cannot publish their report, nor can they speak to media about their findings,” Father Ajay Singh, a priest in the Cuttack-Bhubaneswar archdiocese, told UCA News.

Father Babu Joseph, spokesperson of the Catholic Church, confirmed the trip was back on. “The delegation is set to visit the state from Feb. 2-5,” he told UCA News. “Naturally, the team has to inform the government of the details of its plan such as the villages they want to visit and the place of their night’s rest,” Father Joseph said.

But he said “that is a security need, not a limitation.” The EU delegation was originally due to travel to the state on Jan. 27. It was cancelled just hours before it was due after the government confined the visit to Bhubaneswar, the state capital. The delegation said it was not worth visiting only the capital.

## A change of mind

Media reports say the state government changed its mind after pressure from the federal government. “That is what the general inference is. Otherwise, how can a government decision be withdrawn the next day?” asked Father Singh.

He told UCA News that despite the government conditions, the diplomats can visit the village, witness trial proceedings of riot crimes and interact with villagers.

Father Singh said the government was reluctant about outsiders seeing Kandhamal because it projected a “rosy picture” telling the world that normalcy has returned, victims have gone home, and justice has been done for them.

“The truth will damage that picture,” he said.

Father Joseph questions why, if the government has nothing to hide, “should it be shy about people visiting people.”

He wanted the government to be transparent on issues of human rights.

Father Joseph said Christians are happy about the EU delegation's visit, which shows the European nations' concerns about violations of human rights and religious freedom in the country.

"It is not so much an issue concerning only Christians. The EU sees it as a global human issue," Father Joseph said.

He said the visit "will have a serious and positive impact on India's approach to human rights and religious freedom" because the country has strong relations with EU in trade and commerce, as well as cultural and friendly exchanges.