

society
for **threatened
peoples**

Persecution of Christians in the Indian federal state of Orissa

**Report of an investigation team of the
Society for Threatened Peoples**



Society for Threatened Peoples

Human rights organisation with advisory status at the UNITED NATIONS
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1. Summary

Christians in the Kandhamal district (Orissa) in India are being forcibly converted by radical Hindus to the Hindu belief, are being arbitrarily arrested and driven out of their villages. Christian native people returning to their home villages are threatened with death. Several people returning, who refused to convert by force to Hinduism, have already been murdered. This has been ascertained by an investigation team of the Society for Threatened Peoples (GfbV), which visited the crisis region, which is shut off from the outer world. The team conducted many interviews with expelled Christians. Following the murder of a radical Hindu leader on 23rd August 2008 53,000 Christian native people and Dalits („untouchables“) have been driven out of 315 villages. The Adivasi expert of the GfbV, Dr. James Albert, was able to interview several Christians who had been arrested arbitrarily at the instigation of Hindu extremists and been held for several weeks in police-cells. They were accused of being responsible for the murder of the Hindu leader although Maoist rebels had already taken responsibility for the murder.

The Christian native inhabitants were systematically driven out of their villages in order to destroy their means of existence. The Adivasi native people, who live as small farmers and gatherers of the fruit of the forest, have no perspective in the hastily erected refugee camps. More than 4,600 of their houses have been plundered and destroyed.

The Hindu extremists destroyed first and foremost the roofs of the mud and stone houses so that the rain would make them uninhabitable.

The expelled people could only return if they were prepared to allow themselves to be forcibly »converted« to Hinduism. The GfbV investigation team interviewed many victims of forced conversions. Those forcibly converted had to destroy their bibles and had to take up new names. They had to acknowledge in writing that they were converting voluntarily and that they themselves had set their houses on fire. They also had to accept living in future on the lowest level of the caste society.

The reports of the eye-witnesses confirm that the violence has not arisen spontaneously and emerging from the mob, but that radical Hindu organisations have been deliberately using the murder of their leader to drive out and intimidate the Christians. Thus more than 400 trees were felled in a few hours by Hindu activists to prevent members of the minority from escaping in their vehicles. This was an effective strategy for preventing police and aid-workers from reaching the crisis region. The criminals were not concerned with killing as many people as possible. The plan has been to spread fear and terror among the religious minority with a few particularly horrible murders.

The attackers could be sure in their acts of violence of the tacit support of the local police of the federal state of Orissa, who refused the Christians protection for weeks on end. It was only with the arrival of the federal police CRPF that there was any noticeable improvement in the security position, meaning that churches and houses were not burnt down so frequently.

Both the federal and the provincial authorities acted both too late and inadequately to secure the safety of the religious minority and their belongings. Particularly bad was the behaviour of the provincial government in Orissa. They granted Hindu propagandists access to the crisis region of Kandhamal, which was under a state of emergency, so that these could continue stirring up violence. They also gave permission for a funeral procession with the body of the murdered Hindu leader, which left a path of destruction and terror in hundreds of villages.

Those responsible for the violence are the radical Hindu organisations like the World Hindu Council (VHP), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and their paramilitary Organisation, Bajrang Dal. Politicians of the nationalist Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) must be banned since they stir up religious and ethnic conflicts not only in Orissa but also in twelve other federal states. Also affected by the harassing and provocations of radical Hindu organisations is the Moslem minority in the federal state of Gujarat. Six years after the pogrom-like attacks on the Moslems the provincial government of Gujarat, which is headed by the BJP, still refuses the minority any compensation. The Moslems, who were driven out in 2002, are still waiting in vain for adequate assistance in finding their way back into society.

The radical Hindu organisations are endangering with their hate propaganda democracy and the freedom of religion. Instead of encouraging the coexistence of the different religions and ethnic groups in a country with many peoples, they are deliberately stirring up conflicts in order to institutionalise and push forward Hindu nationalism.

A further aggravation of the situation is to be expected during the Christmas break 2008. The radical Hindu organisation »Swami Lakhshmananda Saraswati Sradhanjali Samiti« has called out to a general strike in Orissa for Christmas Day (25th December) if by 15th December 2008 charges are not laid against the murderers of the Hindu leader murdered in August. The object of the strike is clearly to disturb the Christmas holidays of the Christians. The federal government of Orissa has still not made it clear that it will not with all means at its disposal prevent a strike on this day which is so important for the members of the religious minority. The last general strike of radical Hindus in Orissa on 25th August 2008 produced a large number of violent acts against Christians.

2. Recommendations of the Society for Threatened Peoples

- Court action must be taken immediately to clear up the pogrom-like attacks and those responsible for the crimes must be punished.
- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI, the federal criminal intelligence service) must be directed to conduct investigations in the Kandhamal district since the local police authorities can offer no guarantee of comprehensive and neutral investigations, The failure of the local and federal authorities must also be examined.
- All persons and institutions affected by the wanton destruction must be suitably and promptly compensated.
- Radical Hindu organisations (like VHP, Bajrang Dal and RSS) must be banned throughout India since they stir up with their agitation ethnic and religious conflicts.
- Admission of national and international aid agencies to further the reconstruction of the destroyed houses, churches and social institutions.
- No withdrawal of the CRPF since they are the only guarantee for the protection of Christians. Strengthening of the protection of religious minorities and their institutions.
- Internally displaced persons (IDPs) must be given the possibility of returning to their home villages in humane conditions or they must be supported in their attempts to be accepted in other regions of the country.

3. Introduction

After the murder of the radical Hindu leader Swami Lakhschmanananda Saraswati and four of his supporters in Jalespeta (Kandhamal district, federal state of Orissa) on 23rd August 2008 the violence against Christians in India escalated. The local leader of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council) had since 1985 been agitating against Christians and other religious minorities without any hindrance from the authorities and was responsible for many attacks on members of these minorities. Several attempts were made on his life. Although Christian organisations condemned the murder immediately after the bloody event nationalist Hindu organisations held Christians responsible for the crime. Then however Maoist Naxalit rebels claimed responsibility for the murders.

It seems that it was also Maoist rebels who on 5th November 2008 in the village of Kumbhara-gaon murdered the small entrepreneur Dhanu Pradhan, who as the local leader of the radical Hindu organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, National Organisation of Volunteers) was stirring up feeling against religious minorities in Kandhamal district. As in the case of the murder of the VHP leader –Swami L. the RSS, VHP and the brother of the dead man claim that the RSS activist was murdered by Christians (*www.odishatoday.com, 6.11.2008*).

Only a few hours after the murder on 23rd August thousands of Christian Adivasi native people and Dalits (»untouchables«) were attacked in their villages by Hindus, houses and churches were destroyed and the inhabitants driven out. In the Kandhamal district alone according to information of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India about 60 people were killed in pogrom-like attacks. 18,000 Christians suffered injuries. In 315 villages 4,640 houses belonging to Christians and 151 churches were destroyed. Apart from that many church institutions (schools and orphans' homes) were burnt down. Twelve priests or nuns were beaten, mishandled or raped and six later died of their injuries. Some 53,000 villagers fled to the neighbouring woods or sought refuge in refugee camps. At the height of the violence 23,000 Christian native people and Dalits were seeking refuge in 19 refugee camps which had been set up for them. The number of camps and of IDPs has meanwhile dropped. Many of those expelled have sought refuge with relatives in other parts of the province or moved on to other federal states in search of work and a decent life.

The worst violence took place in Kandhamal district, but then it spread to 14 of the 30 districts of the federal state of Orissa and to twelve other federal states. In view of the confusing situation and the many reports of severe infringements of human rights the Society for Threatened Peoples (GfbV) sent its Adivasi expert, Dr. James Albert, to the disturbed region to conduct talks with representatives of various religious minorities. Dr. Albert was in India from 21st October until 3rd November 2008. In the course of his visit of investigation he had many talks with Indian bishops and archbishops and with leading representatives of Christian and Moslem organisations. The most important station on his journey was a visit to the Kandhamal district of Orissa. Since in the light of the continuing violence all access roads to the region are closed off with road-blocks of the federal police CRPF, who have been stationed in the disturbed region, and the area can only be visited by non-residents with a special permit for a limited time the conduct of the study was extremely difficult. Despite these adverse conditions Mr. Albert managed to visit seven refugee camps in the hills. There are still about 13,000 Christians living in the camps, mainly Adivasi native people and Dalits.

4. Difficult situation of the refugees

It is not only women and children who are living in the camps, but mostly complete families. In most of the camps the GfbV colleague was able to move about freely and to conduct interviews with the refugees in English or Hindi (or in local languages translated by colleagues of church organisations). The refugees spoke out frankly and were concerned that the reports of their expulsion be known beyond the frontiers of India. They very often begged our colleague to speak about the suffering of the Christian refugees in Europe. Most of the camps are small towns of tents. The tents, measuring nine feet by twelve, sleep on average 19 people. The inmates of the camps are provided with water and food supplied by the Indian authorities. Private and church institutions have no access to the camps.

Originally seventeen camps were set up. However many camps were closed by the authorities. On 15th October 2008 one of the three camps in Baliguda was closed by order of the authorities. The 900 inmates of the camp received only ten kilos of rice per family and were sent away. Since they have lost their land and their belongings, having no money and not being able to return to their villages, their future is extremely precarious. The inmates have quite different religious faiths. In the Tikabali camp for example there were members of eight different religious communities: Catholics, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Lutherans, Salvation Army and the Community of Good News.

At least 12,000 refugees left the camps in the beginning of October 2008 because they did not feel safe there. Refugees appealed on many occasions to the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that he should ensure the safety of these IDPs. Since the Indian government has only little influence on the governing coalition government in Orissa, in which the radical Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is represented, some of the refugees see themselves as stateless because they do not perceive any national government which is seriously concerned with their protection.

Other refugees were housed in schools. Some 40 schools in the district are still closed because they are being used as reception centres for IDPs or as provisional accommodation for the security forces stationed in the region.

5. The expelled have little trust in the authorities

Many Christians, who are mistrustful of the authorities, have not even sought refuge in the government-controlled camps, choosing instead to hide in the woods or with relatives. A group of 56 Christian families, whose houses were destroyed by Hindus, managed to reach the federal state of Kerala at the end of October 2008, where they were finally granted asylum by the provincial government.

All the refugees remaining in the camps who were interviewed reported that their houses had been destroyed systematically by Hindus who did not come from their own villages. In one case brave Hindu neighbours intervened to prevent the destruction of the house of a Christian. The approach roads to villages in the district were blocked with felled trees by radicals a few hours after the murder, reported expelled people. The intention was to prevent in this way not only the escape of Christians in their vehicles but also the arrival of aid teams and security forces to the villages. More than 400 felled trees were counted by the roadside.

All refugees interviewed reported that already before 23rd August 2008 many attacks on Christians or Christian institutions had taken place. Houses of Christians or churches were burnt down to test the reaction of the authorities, of the police and of the religious minority. However these attacks were nothing in comparison to the pogrom-like attacks which began following the murder of the VHP leader on 23rd August 2008.

6. Heavily armed Hindu activists attack

A typical attack is described by residents of the three villages of Bada Banga, Burangia and Didrobadi. On 11th September their villages were attacked by Hindu activists. At this time the provincial government of Orissa was declaring that public order had been completely restored throughout the province.

Between 200 and 400 Hindus armed with guns, spears, swords and axes came in large groups through the village and destroyed houses of Christians and churches. They were chanting slogans (*Long live the God Rama / Long live the power of Bajrang / Long live Mother India*). The Hindu youth organisation Bajrang Dal is seen as one of the moving forces behind the recent escalation of violence on the subcontinent. With the object of intimidating the residents and informing activists in neighbouring villages of the beginning of the attack fireworks were set off by the attackers.

Local shop-keepers gave the Bajrang Dal activists alcohol and the kerosine with which the houses were set alight. The business-people were not only concerned with keeping in with the demonstrators, but also with serving their own interests. They had been observing with suspicion in recent years how the Adivasi small farmers and gatherers were gaining self-assurance and pushing the marketing of their products with growing confidence. In this they found support from the Christian churches, which encouraged them on the road to improving their standard of living in the future. The local shop-keepers were however afraid that they would lose their position as middle-men and their primary interest was in the maintenance of the existing social order. The absurd point is that the same shop-keepers who stirred up the pogrom atmosphere against religious minorities were now demanding financial aid from the Indian government because their businesses had suffered losses as a result of the disturbances.

But it is clear that the attackers were not concerned with deliberately carrying out massacres and killing a large number of people. In view of the encircling of the villages and the overwhelming number of attackers it would have been easy to kill very many Christians. But the attackers were mainly concerned with spreading fear and panic and driving out the villagers. Something which stood out noticeably during the drive through the crisis region was the fact that it was always the roofs of the mud and stone houses which had been destroyed. It was clear that the roofs had been deliberately damaged to make sure that the entire belongings of the residents were destroyed and the house made uninhabitable in the monsoon which was just beginning at the time of the crimes.

In the village of Didrobadi with its 150 houses 20 houses inhabited by Christians were completely destroyed, a further 80 were damaged and a church was burnt down. In the village there lived before the attack a total of 100 Christian families and 50 Hindu families. One shop belonging to a Christian was completely destroyed.

7. Priests have been murdered

When the village of Totamaha was attacked during the afternoon of 26th August 2008 by Hindu nationalists the inhabitants took to flight. Akhbar Digal, the 46-year old minister of the Pentecostal community, also fled from the radical Hindus. He was however caught and denounced by villagers as the pastor, whereupon his head was cut off with a hatchet. Neighbours and relatives of the dead man said that they knew the name of the murderer. They had given the name of the presumed criminal to the police when they brought the charge. However the suspected person is still at liberty and nothing has been heard of criminal proceedings being taken by the authorities.

According to information from the police authorities about 700 charges for violence have been brought since the outbreak of the disturbances (www.odishatoday.com, 6.11.2008). Christians and official representatives of Christian churches had in the case of previous attacks advised the path of caution and deliberately refrained from bringing charges in order not to provoke the majority of the population, but this approach has fundamentally changed since the beginning of the attacks in August 2008. The churches now encourage Christians to speak out in public on the acts of violence and those responsible, and in addition they give support to Christians with legal advice when they are claiming their rights. Representatives of the churches have often accused the government offices in the federal state of Orissa with not acting in a proper manner in bringing to justice those responsible for grave violations of human rights.

In the village of Bakingia also a minister was murdered on 26th August 2008. The 50-year old minister of the Seventh Day Adventists, Samuel Naik, remained at the bedside of his seriously ill mother, Janumati Naik, when the attackers came to the village. The minister was struck dead with a hatchet. Kerosene was poured over his mother and they set light to her.

The minister Fidem Nayak set out with two young people on 23rd August 2008 to a prayer-meeting in the next village. But they were never to return. All three Christians were hacked to death on the way back on 25th August by radical Hindus. His house was also plundered and burned down in his home village. His 50-year old wife, Nalini Nayak, fled to the refugee camp of Tikabali after she had hidden for four days with neighbours in the woods. Two months after her flight she does not want to return because everything in her village has been destroyed and she does not want to give up her faith.

8. Christians are forced to convert

Christian Adivasi and Dalits report that Hindu attackers threatened to set their houses on fire and to murder them if they did not renounce Christianity and convert to the Hindu belief. About 600 Christians are said to have been converted to Hinduism by force in the past three months in Orissa. Two forced converts, the 45-year old Cyprian Digal, from the village of Pirigida and the 56-year old Daud Nayak from the village of Dahrapur described to the Society for Threatened Peoples the circumstances of their forced conversion. On 25th August 14 Christians from several villages were driven together by Hindu activists for the forced conversion. The ceremony was led by a Brahman priest, Srinivas. For inner cleansing the Christians were handed a drink from a mixture of cow dung, cow urine and cow milk. They had to take this drink in front of the nationalist Hindus. They were then shaved bald except for a small pigtail at the back. They had to chant many times the slogans: Long live the God Rama, Long live the power of Bajrang and Long live Mother India. They were directed to destroy their bibles.

The 42-year old Binod Kumar Pradhan from the village of Sirtiguda just narrowly escaped forced conversion. When the father of two children heard the radical Hindu rabble approaching in the afternoon of 25th August 2008 he quickly packed his mobile phone, MP3 player and two bibles in his bag and fled. But only a few blocks further on he was caught. The Hindu activists took away his mobile phone and MP3 player and tore his bibles to pieces. They beat him and called on him to convert to Hinduism. When he refused they tied him to a tree with the intention of chasing other fleeing Christians. They poured petrol over him, announcing that they would come back after the hunt for other fleeing Christians. Eventually after nightfall he was freed by a Hindu who knew him personally. He then fled to his parents-in-law in the village of Daringbadi. It was only on 9th October that he dared to return to his parents in Kudupakya.

The 30-year old Basant Digal tried to return with his wife and his sister-in-law after a month in the Tikabali refugee camp to their home village. However a group of about 40 Hindus, many of whom were women, stood on the road, blocking their way. They would only be allowed to live in their village if they converted to Hinduism, demanded the radical Hindus. Since Basant Digal did not want to renounce his Christian faith he returned to the refugee camp.

Even Christians who accepted the forced conversion still had problems with the Hindu majority later on. The family of Sukhdev Digal from the village of Dagpadar allowed themselves to be converted under pressure from extremist Hindus. But Sukhdev had also to flee since his family were victims of violent crimes. On 26th September 2008, one month after the outbreak of the disturbances he set out with his two brothers, Bispat and Santari, to a nearby village to collect material. There they spent the night in the house of a Hindu. At midnight Sukhdev woke up when about one hundred demonstrators attacked the house. He could only watch helplessly while his two brothers were struck dead by the attackers. In the dark of night he managed to escape to the Tikabali camp, fifteen km away.

The government of the federal state of Orissa, in which the radical Hindu party BJP is represented, said at the end of September 2008 that the situation in the district of Kandhamal had settled down. It stated also that the local peace committees which had been set up by the authorities had made sure that there had been a return to law and order. »Normal life« however only returned to those villages in which there were no longer any Christians or in which Christians had announced under duress that they were prepared to convert. So on 2nd October 2008 22 out of 30 Christian families in the village of Ladapadar were forced to convert to Hinduism. Among them was Jonathan Digal, whose father, Jakhyachandra Digal, was the minister in another village in the region. Jonathan took on after his forced conversion a new name and now calls himself Sujit Digal.

9. Refugees cannot return

Those returning home from the refugee camps are in deadly danger in their home villages. The 14-year old Ranjit Paricha was threatened with death by Brahmans if he returned to his village to visit his grandparents.

Other people returning home have been killed when they tried to find out if it would be possible to return to their destroyed houses. On 8th September 2008 Mr Purendra Malik visited his home village Nilungia to inspect the condition of the family home, reported his wife, Shantilata Malik. His visit of investigation cost him his life for he was murdered at once. His body was dropped inside a sack in a pond and was only found five days later.

Only a few days later the 35-year old Mr Eswor Digal was murdered when he visited his home village of Guttingia. He was killed with a hatchet.

If the refugees want to return to their houses, which for the most part have been destroyed, they must sign declarations in which they accuse themselves of setting fire to their houses themselves. They must also declare in writing that they had converted voluntarily to the Hindu faith. If they return to their villages the people who have been driven out are threatened with being given a place in the lowest social class of society. For the refugees these are unreasonable conditions which make any decent return to their traditional home impossible.

For the Adivasi native people this expulsion from their land has far-reaching consequences. The native people, who traditionally have lived as small farmers and gatherers, are dependent on their traditional land and on the forest and nature. A life in the slums on the edge of a large town would have for them not only profound social consequences, but would also mean the loss of their ethnic and cultural identity. Land is for them not a saleable commodity, but something which secures their link with their ancestors and is thus an indispensable part of their identity. The land of the ancestors is not something which can be exchanged at will, so the allocation of new land in another region is a gesture which is quite inadequate.

10. Arbitrary arrest of Christians

Merely on account of their confession Christians are not only harassed and intimidated, but also arbitrarily arrested. So the small farmer and day labourer Jacob Pradhan was held in custody for weeks because he was wrongly suspected of the murder of the VHP leader Swami Lakshmananda in August 2008. Jacob's ordeal began when the 35-year old left his village, Bogadi, on 24th August to buy medicine in the town of K. Nuangau for his sick father. There he was held by the local Bajrang activists and beaten. Later they brought him to the police-station in Phandi (on the edge of the town of K. Nuangau), reported the farmer to the Society for Threatened Peoples. At the police-station they accused him of having murdered the Swami. So Jacob Pradhan was arrested on 24th August. He was first placed in prison in the town of Phulbani. Later he was moved to the capital of the federal state, to Bhubaneswar, to undergo there a test with a lie-detector. In custody he was mishandled and beaten, with the result that until the present day he still has pain in his right knee. Six other Christians were held with him in prison on similar charges, reported Jacob Pradhan after his release. It was only on 2nd October that on the pressure of lawyers who had become aware of his case he was finally released. He was sent away penniless and without any apology. He wandered aimlessly for a long time through the unknown town until he came to a house with Christian symbols. It was a bible college, the director of which gave him money to enable him to return home.

Many of those arrested do not wish to be mentioned by name, fearing disadvantages for themselves and their families. So a highly regarded citizen of the town of Phulbani, who suffered a similar fate to that of the arrested small farmer, does not want to be mentioned. The Christian Bernhard Najk (name changed) was spoken to by a Hindu at a filling-station in Phulbani when he wanted petrol for his new car. The Hindu admired the car and inquired how he had been able to get this beautiful car. Najk assured the Hindu that he had taken out a credit to buy the vehicle. The Hindu refused to believe this and accused Najk of having obtained money for his part in the murder of the VHP leader Swami Lakshmananda. The Christian denied vehemently any involvement in the murder of the radical Hindu leader, but gradually more and more Hindus stopped at the filling-station and intimidated Najk. In order to save his vehicle and his life the Christian suggested going to the police-station with the Hindu to clear up the accusations. When they

arrived the police recommended that he spend the night at the police-station since they could not guarantee his safety outside. In the meantime the Hindu who had caused the incident had laid a charge against Najk at the police-station, so the following morning the Christian was kept in custody. The highly regarded citizen had to remain a further four weeks in custody because he had been arbitrarily suspected by the Hindu of the murder of the VHP leader Swami Lakshmananda.

The cases of these arbitrary arrests show that there is no justice for the members of religious minorities in Orissa and that they are exposed to latent persecution. Government security organisations like the police are by no means neutral, being so infiltrated by Hindu organisations that they refuse protection and justice to members of religious minorities.

11. Bishops criticise lack of protection for Christians

In view of the arbitrary arrests of Christians and of the lacking protection of the members of the minority by security forces six bishops accused the authorities of failure in their job. »We are filled with sorrow that both the provincial and the national governments have reacted so late against the continuing terror against Christians in Orissa«, said the bishops in a pastoral letter read out at the end of October 2008. »We are sad that both governments have failed so miserably in implementing the duties laid upon them by the constitution«, criticised Bishop Thomas Thiruthalil, chairperson of the Regional Council of the Bishops of Orissa and the Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar and the bishops of Rourkela, Sambalpur and Berhampur.

The bishops emphasise in their pastoral letter the social dimension of the attacks on Christians. The church supports the poor and excluded, who are now demanding their rights, said the bishops. This commitment of theirs to justice fills the powerful in the land with fear because it questions their influence. For this reason they resorted to violence to secure their position of power, said the bishops.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (The Indian episcopal conference) condemned sharply on 26th September in a joint statement the unsatisfactory reply of the authorities to violence against Christians. „It is with shock and deep concern at the recent scenes of extreme violence against the Christian community in different parts of the country that the Executive Committee of the Episcopal Conference of India expresses its deep disappointment concerning the apathy and inadequate reaction of the federal and provincial governments to the violence“, said the most important organ of the Catholic Church of India (www.zenit.org. 30.09.2008). The Catholic Church is not afraid of naming those responsible. »It was clear that those responsible for these horrible crimes were well-trained colleagues of Hindutva activists, who had directions from somewhere else and put into action a master-plan of destruction... It is India's old civilisation which is being tarnished and traditional values like truth, tolerance and the respect of the religions, which it has preserved for centuries and which are now being dragged through the dirt.« The bishops also expressed quite concrete demands: »A forceful fight against anti-social and anti-religious forces which damage human rights and terrorise innocent people«. Also »Those responsible for violence should be brought to justice«. All »individuals and institutions affected should be immediately given adequate compensation«, demanded the bishops. The Central Bureau of Investigation should be given the task of investigating the events in Orissa. Fundamentalist organisations which in the name of Hindutva or any other name train »terrorists« should be banned.

Archbishop Raphael Cheenath of Bhubaswar-Cuttack accuses a commission set up by the provincial government of Orissa to investigate the disturbances in Kanhamal district of not being neutral. He has no trust in the two judges placed in charge of the mission, said the archbishop. The judges were appointed without any consultation with the victims of the violence so there is little confidence in their work. The time calculated (until 15th November) for the collection of all statements of eye-witnesses was also too short, criticised the church representatives (*Asia News*, 23.10.2008). Nothing has been learnt from the mistakes made in an investigation of the riots against Christians in December 2007.

12. Christian organisations call for radical Hindu organisations to be banned

Even clearer than the Catholic episcopal conference was the All India Christian Council (AICC), the most important organ of lay people in the Christian churches of the subcontinent. Together with Moslem organisations and countless civil rights movements in India the AICC organised on 25th and 26th October 2008 in New Delhi a »National Conference for the Control of Fascist Forces« to defend the ideals of India. Some 750 activists of 90 non-governmental organisations from 18 federal states took part in the conference. In their final declaration they spoke out against the hate campaign which had been launched by the BJP, RSS, and other bodies from the Sangh Parivar movement against Christians in Orissa and ten other federal states. Moslems also were being condemned wholesale by Hindutva activists throughout India as terrorists and extremists. In their final declaration the NGOs called among other points for a ban on the RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal and the confiscation of their funds inland and abroad. All members of the BJP and the RSS student organisation ABVP with contacts with terrorist Hindutva organisations should be brought to justice. They also call for the resignation of the Indian Minister of the Interior, Shivraj Patil, because he did not stop the attacks on Christians in Orissa in time and unjustly suspected Moslem youths of committing crimes to save his political career.

13. Hindu organisations stir up violence against Christians in Orissa

In no other federal state are there so many ethnic conflicts as in Orissa. According to information from the Indian Ministry of the Interior there were between January and September 2008 695 ethnic conflicts registered in the whole of India. At the top of the list lay Orissa with 159 cases (www.Indianexpress.com, 21.10.2008), although in Orissa there are not many different ethnic groups and the share of native people in the total population is similar to that in Madya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkand and Chhattisgarh. It is true that there are many land conflicts, yet with 1,431 cases of land rights under dispute their number is considerably lower than for example in Andhra Pradesh, where 65,875 cases are waiting for a decision (*The State of India's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples 2007, Asian Indigenous & Tribal People's Network, p.26*).

The reason why there are so many ethnic conflicts in Orissa lies above all in the policies of the ruling coalition government of the radical Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) under the Prime Minister, Naveen Patnaik, which stirs up on purpose ethnic and religious conflicts. This has been particularly clear since August 2008 with the riots against Christians.

Only a few hours after the murder of the VHP leader Swami on the evening of 23rd August activists of the VHP and of the Bajrang Dal erected road-blocks in Bhubaneswar and other towns in Orissa and protested in the streets. They were not prepared to believe the suspicion spread by the police that Maoist Naxalit rebels were responsible for the act of violence. The VHP has in

Orissa over 125,000 activists (Tehelka Magazine, 13.9.2008). The RSS has in the federal state 6,000 local groups with about 150,000 supporters. Bajrang Dal can mobilise 50,000 radical Hindus, who are organised in 200 groups. The BJP too has in Orissa 450,000 supporters. Women's organisations and trades unions with links to Hindutva can also mobilise tens of thousands of Hindus. A general strike lasting twelve hours called out by one of these groups brought public life in the federal state to a halt on 25th August. Shops, banks and schools closed their doors.

During this general strike houses of Christians and churches were plundered and burnt down. The situation became particularly bad when the provincial government of Orissa gave in under pressure from the VHP and permitted a funeral procession of Swami's supporters from his ashram and last dwelling in Jalespata to Chakapad. The procession, which began in the afternoon of 24th August in Jalespata and ended 24 hours later in Chakapad, led through hundreds of villages and left a path of destruction. The controversial procession was attended by the President of the BJP in the province, Suresh Pujari, and other leading representatives of Sangh Parivar. In the villages along the route attacks took place on both houses of Christians and also those of supporters of the Congress Party, who form the national government and are seen as critics of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar movement. Eye-witnesses reported that the local police on the whole did not take steps against the violence and did not protect the harassed Christians.

On the afternoon of the 25th August the body of the Swami was cremated in Chakapad. Present at the ceremony were three BJP ministers from Orissa, several parliamentarians and leaders of the VHP and other radical Hindu organisations, among them VHP President Praven Togadia. In spite of the state of emergency ordered for several towns Togadia travelled by car through the Kandhamal district without being in any way hindered by the police in his freedom of movement. He agitated against the Christians, who were in his eyes responsible for the murder of the Swami. He also accused the Christians with luring Adivasi to conversion to the Christian faith with gifts of money, thus endangering the peace in the region. The VHP leader accused the provincial government with not having provided the murdered man with sufficient protection.

While the most important VHP demagogue was able to move around freely in the Kandhamal district and agitate there the Indian Minister of the Interior, several delegates of the Congress Party from Orissa, a delegation of the Communist Party of India and other parliamentarians and human rights workers were refused entry to the disturbed region. The restrictions on entry were not removed until 3rd September 2008 and then only through the intervention of the Indian Minister of the Interior.

It was in vain that several political parties and NGOs called for investigations to be initiated by the Central Bureau of Investigation, but the government in Orissa insisted that criminal proceedings be taken by the local police authorities. The police-force does not have a good reputation with the Christian native people. It is said to be infiltrated and tailored to match the policies of the radical Hindus. A 29-year old nun, Sister Meena Barwa, who was raped by radical Hindus on 25th August, had severe criticism of the local police after the violent crime. Two policemen had led her half-naked after the rape through the village instead of helping her, reported Sister Meena to the Society for Threatened Peoples. They were not prepared to believe that she had been raped and advised her to refrain from pressing a charge, said the nun (*Asia News*, 25.10.2008). »I was raped and I do not want to be made a victim again by the police of Orissa. I want a proper court case«, said Sister Meena. When she wanted to include her criticism of the police in the charge, the police officer contradicted her and told her to make it short.

Leading Sangh Parivar activists in Orissa have since made public announcements calling for Sister Meena to be arrested. With her »false charges« she was poisoning the atmosphere, said Susri

Suchitra Mohapatra from the organisation Rastrasevika Samiti. The nun had not been raped at all and it was a »national shame« that Christians were damaging the reputation of Orissa (VISAKEO, 20.10.2008). Meanwhile the BJP in Orissa considered it a disgrace that as a result of the police violence residents from the Kandhamal district had had to flee (www.odishatoday.com, 2.11.2008). The radical Hindu organisation Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, which belongs to the Sangh Parivar movement, called for »better protection and more safety for the Hindu minority in Kandhamal district« (www.odishatoday.com, 7.11.2008). The fact that the Hindus in the disturbed region are not in the minority, but make up the majority, does not trouble the demagogues of Sangh Parivar very much. The Prime Minister of Orissa is only representing the interests of the Christian minority, criticised the Hindu extremists. The public statements of Sangh Parivar make clear with what means the Hindutva movement works in furthering its aims, and that it has little regard for the truth of its propaganda. It could therefore come as no surprise that the chairperson of the VHP in India, Praveen Togadia, recently said: »No Hindu can be a terrorist« (*The Hindu*, 5.11.2008). Christians like Father Edward Sequeira, sees things rather differently. He calls the radicals in Orissa »terrorists« (*Asia news*, 5.9.2008). The minister has worked in Orissa for 25 years. Among other things he built an orphanage, which has now been burnt down by Hindu extremists. When the orphanage was attacked he was forced to hear how the 19-year old Raini Maih, who had grown up in the institution, was thrown alive into the flames by the attackers.

In view of the continuing agitation by radical Hindu activists nobody in the Kandhamal district has trust in the assurances of the police-chief of Orissa, Manmohan Praharij, that by 25th December 2008 normal life will return to the disturbed region (www.odishatoday.com, 6.11.2008).

The Prime Minister of Orissa and President of the BJD, Naveen Patnaik, condemned the violent act immediately after the murder of the Swami. He later visited the ashram of the murdered radical Hindu leader in Jalespata. Only ten days after the beginning of the disturbances Patnaik spoke about the attacks in the Kandhamal district and called them »unpleasant«.

14. Federal police protects Christians

The Christians have absolutely no faith in the local police of Orissa, but they hold the federal Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in high esteem. It was only after the arrival of 39 CRPF companies in the disturbed region, who sealed off the crisis area with road-blocks, that hardly any more churches and houses of Christians were burned down. On 13th October a CRPF soldier was murdered and mutilated in the village of Sisapanga in the Kandhamal district by someone who is suspected of being a Hindu activist (*Compass Direct News*, 20.10.2008). Since this murder the CRPF is firmly resolved to make sure that Christians are protected. They have arrested about 1,000 persons, half of whom are according to a statement of the Prime Minister of Orissa activists of the VHP or Bajrang Dal.

15. Unjustified charges against Christians

Hindu extremists accuse Christians of systematically proselytising above all the Adivasi native people. In accordance with the constitution of India a change of religion is permissible, provided this takes place on a voluntary basis. Historically the conversion of native people or Dalits from Hinduism to Christianity or Islam offered them the chance of escaping the oppression of the caste system and discrimination in society. So more and more Adivasi and Dalits turned to the Christian churches, which provide them with entry to educational establishments, by which they could improve their social status. The VHP and leading levels of the caste society have been viewing this with great concern. So the VHP encouraged in the year 2006 the passing of a law banning the conversion to non-Hindu religions. In June 2008 the VHP even declared that conversion is a crime.

For the year 2007 Sangh Parivar had planned to convert 10,000 Christians in Orissa back to the Hindu faith. However in the year 2007 there were many less conversion ceremonies than in the years 2004 to 2006. Adivasi who are more politically aware are increasingly rejecting subordination in the caste system and are instead demanding rights.

Christians accounted in the census of 2001 for only 2.4% of the population of Orissa. There live in the Kandhamal district 117,950 Christians and 527,757 Hindus. The number of Christians in India has in recent years not increased but decreased. 2.6% Christians were registered in a census of 1971, in 1981 there were 2.44%, in 1991 only 2.32% and in 2001 the number sank to 2.3% (*Asia News*, 30.9.2008).

Sangh Parvar is stirring up fear of Christian proselytising by the spreading of false news. RSS activists stated recently that missionaries were active in the coastal region of Orissa, who had converted hundreds of Hindus by force. The Ministry of the Interior has repudiated these rumours and made it clear that there were no foreign missionaries in the region under question (*Press Trust of India*, 27.10.2008)

16. Fresh violence threatened at Christmastime

An escalation of the situation is threatening at Christmas 2008. The radical Hindu organisation »Swami Lakhshmananda Saraswati Sradhanjali Samiti«, which has close connections with the VHP und RSS, has threatened to call out a general strike in Orissa for Christmas Day (25th December) if charges are not brought by 15th December 2008 against the murderers of the radical Hindu leader killed in August (IANS, 20.11.2008). The object of the general strike is evidently to disturb the Christmas celebrations of the Christians. The Catholic archbishop of Bhubaneswar-Cuttack has addressed the provincial government of Orissa in a memorandum and given emphatic warning of the consequences of giving permission for a general strike. The provincial government of Orissa has not yet made it clear that it is prepared to prevent with all means a general strike on a date which is so important for the members of a religious minority. The last general strike of radical Hindus on 25th August 2008 resulted in a massive outbreak of violence by Hindus against Christians.

17. Adivasi have been discriminated for decades

The number of Adivasi living in India (Hindi for native people, the first people) is according to the census of 2001 with 84.32 million higher than the population of Germany. They make up 8.25% of the Indian population. There are altogether 557 ethnic groups of different size officially registered as so-called »scheduled tribes« (ST). Some of the tribes, like the Bil, Gond and Santal have several million people, while others like the native people of the Andamanen islands have only a few hundred. About 250 different languages make it clear that the individual Adivasi groups are also culturally very varied.

The Adivasi are descendents of shepherd nomads, fishermen, nomad farmers and hunters and gatherers, who as first inhabitants of India 2,500 to 1,500 years BCE (oder B.C. NP) were conquered and displaced by warlike shepherd tribes. These shepherd tribes called themselves Arya, the Noble Ones. The Arya introduce the caste system as the order of society. Some of the native people were subordinated and integrated as »untouchables« or casteless (Dalits, Scheduled Castes, SC) on the lowest level. The other Adivasi groups retreated into remote mountainous and forest regions.

Most of the Adivasi peoples still live in remote forest and mountain regions of the »Tribal Belt« of Central India (in the federal states of Orissa, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jhrarkhand and Gujarat). For approximately ten million Adivasi native people today the forest still provides the immediate means of life. For years there have been conflicts between the Indian authorities and the Adivasi concerning access to the forest and the use of its resources. About 1.4 million people, most of them Adivasi, were forcibly resettled between 1951 and 1995 to make room for dams, canals, mining projects ad other industrial ventures.

The illegal seizure of land by government offices has a history in Orissa. 85% of the land in Kandhamal district is today in the hands of the state, which systematically disregards the traditional rights of the native population. Much of the land which was originally used by the Adivasi for nomadic agriculture has been taken over in recent years by the government and changed into wooded areas. The provincial government of Orissa has without consideration for the traditional land rights of the Adivasi forced the establishment of industry even on the land of the native people. Between the years 2002 and 2005 at least 42 preliminary contracts were signed with companies on the setting up of industrial and mining projects on the land of the native people.

The census of 2001 shows that 8.14 million Adivasi live today in Orissa. 62 different ethnic groups of native peoples live in the federal state, making up 9.66% of the population. Their situation is here as throughout the country desperate. 90% live beneath the poverty line. Illiteracy is disproportionately high. While 64.84% of the population could read and write in the year 2001, the literacy rate lay with the Adivasi at only 47.10%. The statistics show that every 29 minutes a crime against an Adivasi is committed. While throughout the country the clear-up rate for crimes against the Indian Criminal code is 42.4%, only 24.2% of the crimes against native people were prosecuted. (*The State of India's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples 2007, Asian Indigenous & Tribal People's Network, p. 18*).

More than 60 years after the independence of India the Adivasi are still being discriminated. There are certainly some notable laws for the protection and advancement of the disadvantaged minority, but in everyday life the rights of the native people are also being trampled upon by government offices. Their problems are forgotten and repressed. Their peaceful resistance against the illegal seizure of land and the deprivation of rights is crushed by force and criminalised. This is also

the case in the state of Orissa. When on 2nd January 2006 in Kalinganagar (Orissa) about 400 women, children and men demonstrated against the loss of their land they were confronted by police using rubber bullets and tear gas. After a policeman was killed by the enraged mob the police shot 14 Adivasi. Two of the dead were clearly shot while running away and two other native people died from shots in the head at close range. Six bodies of the dead were mutilated (among them all sexual organs) before being given to the relatives.

18. Hindu nationalists harass Moslems also

It is not only Christian organisations which are calling for a ban of the radical Hindu organisations. Moslem organisations also are speaking out for a ban of VHP, RSS, BJP and Bajrang Dal because these groups systematically intimidate all religious minorities, they harass them and disregard their rights. Above all in the federal state of Gujarat, in which the BJP as ruling party has institutionalised Hindu nationalism, Moslems are complaining of arbitrary attacks, attempts at intimidation and restriction of the freedom of religion.

Six years after pogrom-like attacks on the religious minority, to which more than 2000 Moslems fell victim, most of the criminals have still not been punished. Ten thousand Moslems fled from the violence and thousands of shops and dwellings of Moslems were plundered and set on fire. Hundreds of mosques were damaged or destroyed. More than 150 towns and 990 villages were affected by the violence. The disturbances broke out after Moslem extremists on 27th February 2002 set fire to a train killing 58 Hindus. The disturbances were planned by the BJP and the VHP as they saw here a welcome opportunity to accuse all Moslems of terrorism. Radical Hindus called out to a boycott of all Moslem shops and firms, which lasted for years. The Hindu organisations spoke in public of the pogrom as the spontaneous outbreak of the anger of the majority, but it was only too clear that the VHP and BJP had been mobilising against members of the religious minority.

The Supreme Court did indeed order the reopening of many cases of proceedings against those responsible for the acts of violence. Nearly 1600 cases were reopened, but the Moslems in Gujarat are waiting for justice to the present day.

The government of Gujarat declares that normality has now returned and that there is no tension between the religious communities. However Moslems feel themselves treated as second-class citizens and complain of an atmosphere of fear. There are in fact still new attempts at intimidation, boycotts of Moslem shops and firms and arbitrary attacks on members of the minority.

A typical example is that of Moslems working as cattle-traders. Pressure from the BJP resulted in a ban for the slaughter of cows in Gujarat. Moslem cattle-traders are arbitrarily suspected of disregarding this ban. Cattle-transporters are stopped, not by the police, but by members of the RSS youth organisation Bajrang Dal. The drivers are called on to produce more and more documents and permits to prove that the killed animals are not cows. The transporters are kept waiting so long until the meat has gone bad, report Moslem victims of these arbitrary measures to the Society for Threatened Peoples. In this way the economic existence of Moslem traders is purposely destroyed.

About 30,000 Moslems who were driven out during the pogrom are six years after the attacks still living in camps which are very badly conducted. The Adivasi expert of the GfbV in India also met representatives of a group of 50 expelled families (about 300 persons), who are living today in Sojitra (Anand district, Gujarat). They have had for six years no running water, toilets, electricity or roads in their make-shift accommodation. The group has written more than 30 appeals to the Indian national government and to the provincial government of Gujarat without ever receiving a

reply. On 12th November 2008 these expellees began a hunger-strike to draw attention to their miserable situation. After three days they received a written assurance that their houses would be connected with the gas and water supply. The allusion of the expellees to their support from the Society for Threatened Peoples had worked wonders. However the provincial government of Gujarat showed itself at bottom unimpressed by the fate of the pogrom victims. It has been stating for years that all IDPs have been reintegrated and supported.

19. Appendix

Nationalist Hindu movements

The **RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh)** is an extreme nationalist Hindu organisation, which is classed by Indian political scientists as fascist. It was founded in 1925 by Sawarkar. The RSS has a strictly hierarchical structure. It has already been banned three times (1948, 1975-77 and 1992). It operates throughout India under the most varied names. It has over the years built up sub-groups and sub-organisations which often contain in their name the concept »Sangh« (league).

Examples of sub-groupings:

Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (Indian Workers' League)
Bhartiya Kisan Sangh (Indian Farmers' League)

This is how the collective term came about for the entire nationalist Hindu movement: **Sangh Parivar** (Parivar means family or clan). Nowadays a multitude of different names prevents the rapid identification of their sub-groupings.

Some of the main branches are:

1. **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**, a political party founded in the year 1980, which has formed part of the Indian government three times and is still the ruling party in some federal states, as in Orissa and Gujarat, where religious minorities are discriminated and intimidated by it.
2. **Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council)** a cultural association founded in 1964 and operating world-wide for the encouragement of religion and culture. Together with other Hindutva organisations the VHP is accused of having stirred up pogrom-like attacks on Moslems in Gujarat in 2002 and on Christians in Orissa in the years 2007 and 2008. The VHP has offices throughout the world. The central office of its section in Germany is in Frankfurt am Main.
3. **Bajrang Dal**, the paramilitary arm of the movement founded in 1984. The group claims to have 1.3 million members
4. **Mahila Morcha** and **Durga Vahini** are women's organisations.
5. **Rashtriya Sevika Samiti** is another women's organisation.

6. **Akhil Bhartiya Vidya Parishad (ABVP)** is a student movement.
7. **BJP-Yuva Morcha** is the youth organisation of the party.
8. **Adivasi Morcha** is the nationalist Hindu movement of the native people.

Secret directives of the RSS

The following flyer was passed to the Adivasi expert of the GfbV by a camp resident of a camp. It is in the Oriya language (of Orissa) and is not an original. In the introduction to the leaflet it is pointed out that it is a publication of the RSS which was taken by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). In the flyer the RSS gives instructions on how its members are to deal with non-Hindus in subversive battle.

We present here a selection out of 38 points:

- Doctors who are Hindus should give their Christian and Moslem patients slowly working poisons
- Take Dalits and tribals into our institutions (e.g. schools) so that we can indoctrinate them. If they are resistant to influence, give them poison!
- Support the consumption of alcohol in the slums to destroy the people!
- When there are riots between religious communities, stir up the conflicts with mass rape!
- When riots take place, help yourselves to their belongings!
- Bury statues of Hindu gods on the site of churches and mosques. Then maintain that this was previously a religious place of the Hindus. Then you can stake a claim to erect a Hindu temple there.
- If you are in charge in the public libraries, remove the books of the Christians and Moslems and those of the Ambedkar!
- If you have the power in the administration of the commune then make sure that people from lower castes and the tribals (SC and ST) do not get into good positions.
- Stir up strife between Christians and Moslems! Spread false information in order to produce strife!
- Make problems for the non-Hindus in the villages and inform the local RSS offices!