18 February 2020


Dear Friends,

Greetings in the name of Christ from the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America (FIACONA) and New York State Council of Churches! FIACONA is a coalition of Protestant, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal and Independent Church Organizations of Indian Americans across the United States and Canada. FIACONA is a voluntary, cultural, and charitable organization with an emphasis on advocacy on behalf of the persecuted Church in India. The New York State Council of Churches affiliated with the National Council of Churches and comprised of 7,000 congregations, is deeply committed to religious freedom and the ecumenical movement and supports laws and policies which respect diversity and do not discriminate.

Anti-Christian violence in India has been viewed by the organization Human Rights Watch, as a tactic used to meet political ends. The acts of violence include arson of churches, conversion of Christians to Hinduism by force and threats of physical violence, sexual assaults, murder of Christian priests and destruction of Christian schools, colleges, and cemeteries.

In August 2017, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) ranked India’s persecution severity at “Tier 2” along with Iraq and Afghanistan. Over the past seven years, India has risen from No. 31 to No. 10 on Open Doors’ World Watch List, ranking just behind Iran in persecution severity. As of 2019, USCIRF repeatedly placed India as Tier-2 in minority persecution.

The persecution of Christians is part of overall nationalist agenda to make radical forms of Hinduism the state religion and to discriminate against all religious minorities including Muslims. To advance this nationalist cause, the government is seeking to undermine India’s secular constitution which has protected religious freedom and undermine any laws, practices or policies which might be of help to religious minorities and people discriminated against based on caste, work and descent.

Here in the United States, we and our families are blessed with the freedom to worship God openly in our places of worship and our homes. We who are free have a responsibility. We are commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up”.

On behalf of FIACONA and the New York State Council of Churches, we are writing to request you to please join us in supporting our persecuted brothers and sisters in India. Please partner with us in the following:

- Please advise your parishioners and clergy to attend FIACONA’s and NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES’ conference on “RELIGIOUS FREEDOM and HUMAN RIGHTS in INDIA” on March 28th, 2020 to be held at The Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, 130 Jerusalem Ave, Hicksville, NY 11801 with lunch at 12:00pm followed by the conference starting at 1:00pm. Please visit www.nyscoc.org for registration and sponsorship details. Please visit www.fiacona.org for details about the conference and an extensive compendium of news reports and background material about religious freedom and human rights in India. Modeling our commitment to religious freedom and open conversation, the agenda for the Conference will be comprised of a wide diversity of Christian speakers, speakers from other religions including Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, and representatives of human rights groups. US Congressman Tom Suozzi will be the keynote speaker during the dinner session. We are requesting a minimum registration fee of $50.00 per person which includes conference expenses, refreshments, lunch and dinner. Since this amount will not meet all the
expenses of our mission, we also request sponsorships. While we welcome any tax-deductible amount, suggested sponsorship levels are as follows:

**Supporter: $250, Promoter: $500, Champion: $1000 and above. Purchase sponsorships here**

- Please advise all your parish clergy and members to contact FIACONA with:
  - personal stories of US citizens rejected visa upon arrival in India for declaring any intended church-related activities
  - personal stories of OCI cards being denied or cancelled for declaring any intended church-related activities
  - personal stories of family & friends suffering any form of persecution or harassment for being Christians, or for belonging to other religious minorities in India
  - personal stories of Dalits and other people disenfranchised by the caste system.

Some of FIACONA’s goals are as follows:

- Write educational materials, lead, and publicize gatherings and publish writings which educate the American public about persecution of religious minorities and Dalits in India.
- Collaborate with US leaders and introduce legislation to protect human rights and religious freedom in India, for eg, such legislation could include but is not limited to, reversal of recent discriminatory immigration laws on the basis of religion, introduce legislation that protects against banning of foreign NGO’s and their assistance, and to protect against educational policies which discriminate against non-Hindus and Dalits.
- Ensure that US citizens are not denied entry to India because of their faith or because they are engaged in religious activities including gatherings and conferences.
- Actively participate in the religious freedom roundtable convened by Sam Brownback, United States Ambassador for Religious Freedom.
- Work with the National Council of Churches and New York State Council of Churches and many denominations across the theological spectrum to educate constituencies about religious freedom and human rights in India.
- Work through the legislative vehicles and commissions of the United Nations to lift up and promote human rights in India including the rights of Dalits.

Lastly, we are reminded of the famous words of Irish statesman, Edmund Burke, “Evil will flourish if good men do nothing”.

Let us join hands and do what we can to stem the scourge of evil against Christians and other religious minorities and those discriminated against based on caste, work and descent.

Thank you and God bless.

Sincerely,

Koshy George  
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"God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline."

2 Timothy 1:7

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