



ASIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Dedicated to promotion and protection of human rights in Asia

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Kandhamal Massacres: Where is the State? Central Government of India must stop the killings

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I. Kandhamal Massacres: Centre must intervene to stop killings

On 23 August 2008 four leaders of the right wing Hindu fundamentalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) including 90 year old Laxmananda Saraswati were killed by unidentified gunmen at the VHP *ashram* in Jalespata, Kandhamal.

No one claimed responsibility for the murder. While the government held the Maoists responsible for the killings, the VHP blamed Christians for the incident.¹ Christian leaders condemned the killings but the VHP reacted predictably calling a dawn-to-dusk Orissa *bandh* – strike - on 25 August 2008.²

Since that time the entire district has been closed down by the VHP. The VHP activists have blocked all entry roads with logs. Law enforcement personnel have limited access to remote areas of the district. The press has been barred. India's Minister of State for Home, Mr Sri Prakash Jaiswal has been denied access to the areas on the grounds of lack of security.

In this closed off district of Kandhamal it appears that the VHP is being allowed to carry out mass killings of the local Christian community.

The Asian Centre for Human Rights has been informed by local sources that over 50 persons have been killed so far. Because of restrictions on movement and lack of security, it is not possible to verify all the names. However, reports of further killings continue to rise worryingly.

Large numbers of Christians have fled their villages. Some 5000 people are now living in seven relief camps at Chakapad, Tikabali, G. Udaygiri, Raikia, Baliguda, K.Nuagoan and Phiringia. According to informed sources, 200 villages have been affected. Hundreds of churches including house churches have been burnt down.

Failure of the State:

An attack on the Christian community has been expected for some time. On the Christmas Day in 2007 there were systematic attacks on the Christians documented by the National Commission for Minorities in the region. And the communal tensions are well known. Despite these very clear warnings, the State government has failed to take any steps to address the tension or react in accordance with the gravity of the situation.

On 24 August 2008, the State government of Orissa, instead of increasing security, suspended the Superintendent of Police and ordered a judicial probe.³ On 26 August 2008, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik stated that a special investigation team under the supervision of the State Crime Branch had been formed to

¹ · Leader's death: VHP calls for Orissa bandh, The Times of India, 25 August 2008

² · Leader's death: VHP calls for Orissa bandh, The Times of India, 25 August 2008

³ · Leader's death: VHP calls for Orissa bandh, The Times of India, 25 August 2008

investigate the murder of Swami Laxamanananda Saraswati.⁴ No one knows who is in charge of the inquiries.

As the violence spread, only two additional Rapid Action Force companies were sent in. This is clearly insufficient given the levels of reported violence. The police in the southern district claimed to have found too difficult to move into the interiors because of road blocks.⁵

What happens in Kandhamal is likely to resonate across Orissa's tribal belt and intensify conflict. Impoverished tribals and the Dalits will further be victimised.

The Government has a duty to protect the lives and property of the population and to maintain law and order. The State authorities have clearly failed.

Recommendations:

Given the high levels of killings preceding the closedown of the region and ongoing killings, ACHR urges that the Central government of India to take the following necessary and immediate measures to:

- intervene to stop the massacres;
- guarantee the physical integrity of all persons in the region;
- restore the rule of law;
- provide appropriate redress to victims and humanitarian aid to those displaced by the violence; and
- establish an independent inquiry into the events to establish responsibility and take steps to prevent any further politicisation of communal tensions.

II. Kandhamal: Political proselytisation and emerging religious conflicts in Orissa

While the attacks are clear results of religious intolerance, ACHR provides a deeper understanding of the political nature of the violence and the manipulation of religion for political ends in Kandhamal in particular and tribal belt of Orissa in general.

Kandhamal is part of the tribal belt of Orissa. According to 2001 census, Kandhamal had a population of 6,48,201. The Scheduled Tribes (STs) constituted 51.96% of the total population with 3,36,809 persons while the Scheduled Castes (SCs) constituted 18.89% with 1,09,506 populations.⁶

Kandhamal presently has three assembly constituencies respectively 102-Balliguda (reserved for Scheduled Tribe), 103 - G. Udayagiri (ST) and 04-Phulbani (Scheduled Castes).

⁴ . 6 killed in police firing in Barakhama; toll 11, The Pioneer, 27 August 2008

⁵ . Shoot-at-sight orders in Kandhamal, Orissa, The Times of India, 27 August 2008

⁶ . <http://kandhamal.nic.in/km-intr/km-demo.htm>

In the last assembly elections held in 2004, the three major political parties of the State – Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won one seat each. Following the 2004 elections and changes in constituency boundaries, rivalry among the political parties intensified.

Allegations of proselytisation became a key political issue. The political parties began to exploit existing communal tensions amongst the tribal Kandhs and the Dalit Panas. Over the years, a large number of Panas have reportedly become Christians, while large numbers of Kandhs have affiliated with the VHP and BJP.⁷

In early 1990s, the list of the Scheduled Tribes was amended with three more groups — Kui, Kuvi, Kuee — designated as ST, in addition to the original Kandh. Those on the list are entitled to state benefits and reserved jobs. Many Panas speak the Kui language and demanded ST status and a conflict over land immediately arose as the land rights of the tribals in Orissa are protected under the 5th Schedule of the Constitution.

Tension rose still further when the Kandhamal Lok Sabha seat reserved for SCs was changed to ST by the Delimitation Commission responsible for constituency boundaries. The Delimitation Commission also reserved all three constituencies of Kandhamal for Scheduled Tribes in December 2006.

The Panas resumed their demand for tribal status so that their leaders might contest the seat. The attacks on the Christians in Phulbani on the Christmas Day in 2007 should be seen in this context: the violence was perpetrated with a view to divide the communities and strengthen the political support base. The murder of VHP leader on 23 June 2008 appears to have been carried out with the similar political aim.

III. Violence against the Christians

On the day of the *bandh* (strike) on 25 August 2008, as the dead bodies of the murdered VHP leaders were taken from Jalespeta to Chakapada, mobs torched vehicles at Baliguda, G-Udayagiri and Nuagaon and damaged a police outpost and NGO offices at Nuagaon. Churches and prayer halls were attacked.⁸

Across the State there has been systematic violence against Christians. 22 year old Rajni Majhi was burnt to death as suspected Vishwa Hindu Parishad activists set fire to a missionary school hostel in Bargarh district. Sub-collector of Padampur, Pravat Bhoi stated that 22-year-old Rajani Majhi was burnt alive. A missionary

⁷ · http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Kandhamal_has_a_history_of_communal_flare-ups/articleshow/3414130.cms

⁸ · Leader's death: VHP calls for Orissa bandh, The Times of India, 25 August 2008

who ran the hostel suffered serious burn injuries and is admitted in the Padampur hospital.⁹

On the same day, the VHP activists ransacked a hospital run by missionaries in Diptipur in the Bargarh district. Orissa Director-General of Police, Mr Gopal Nanda said a group of “bandh supporters” attacked the hostel at Khuntipali in Padampur around 2pm.¹⁰

Another person, identified as Rasananda Pradhan, was burnt to death when his house was set on fire at Rupa village in Kandhamal district.¹¹

Churches were attacked in Khurda, Bargarh, Sundergarh, Sambalpur, Koraput, Boudh, Mayurbhanj, Jagatsinghpur and Kandhamal districts as also in the state capital, police sources said, adding that 40 houses were set ablaze in Phulbani town.¹²

On 26 August 2008, another four persons were killed when the police opened fire to disperse a mob that attacked places of worship, prayer halls and shops at Barakhama in Kandhamal district, DGP Gopal Chandra Nanda said.¹³

Three persons were killed when their houses were torched in Raikia area on the night of 26 August 2008.¹⁴

A large number of churches, houses, and vehicles were torched by mobs in several areas, including Tikabali, Nuagaon, Udaygiri, Raikia, Phiringia and Baliguda.¹⁵ Across Kandhamal, as many as 200 houses have been burnt down by mobs.¹⁶

At Phiringia, an angry mob attacked the local block development officer and his team and torched their vehicles. At some places, the protesters set fire to official quarters.¹⁷

On 26 August 2008, hundreds of houses, including 60 at Barimunda village in Kandhamal, were set on fire and churches and prayer halls damaged.¹⁸

⁹. Ibid

¹⁰. Two killed, 12 churches torched in Orissa, The Tribune, 26 August 2008

¹¹. Two killed, 12 churches torched in Orissa, The Tribune, 26 August 2008

¹². Two killed, 12 churches torched in Orissa, The Tribune, 26 August 2008

¹³. 7 more killed in Orissa backlash, The Tribune, 27 August 2008

¹⁴. Ibid

¹⁵. Ibid

¹⁶. Ibid

¹⁷. Orissa attacks on Christians spread, 7 more die in violence, The Asian Age, 27 August 2008

¹⁸. Shoot-at-sight orders in Kandhamal, Orissa, The Times of India, 27 August 2008

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On 26 August 2008, shoot-on-sight orders were issued in eight places in Kandhamal district. The Minister of State for Home is to visit the violence affected areas.¹⁹

Since the 26th August 2008 the area has been closed down by the VHP.

Asian Centre for Human Rights has been informed that more than fifty persons have been killed and the names of the following names of the persons killed so far are provided below:

Name	Village	Sex
1 Samuel Nayak	Bakingia, Kandhmal	Male
2 Dibya Sundar Digal	Grepana, Kandhmal	Male
3 Tunila Bordhan	Rayagada district	Female
4 Kumodo Bordhan	Rayagada district	Male
5 Tikina Bordhan	Rayagada district	Male
6 Rajan Majhi	D/O.Babu Majhi, Baragarh	Female
7 Sidheswar Pradhan	Kandhmal	Male
8 Rasanand Proadhan	Rupagram , Kandhmal	Male
9 Praful Nayak	Barakhama , Kandhmal	Male
10 Ajuba	Barkhama , Kandhmal	Male
11 Merry Digal	Kandhmal	Female

¹⁹. Ibid

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12	Dayadhar Digal	Kasinpodar	Male
13	Ramesh Chandra Digal	Gudamaha , Kandhmal	Male
14	Gopan Digal	Bodimunda , Kandhmal	Male
15	Trinath Digal	Tiangia , Kandhmal	Male
16	Dasarathi Pradhan	Taingia Kandhmal	Male
17	Bikram Nayak	Tiangia , Kandhmal	Male
18	At Raikia (3 persons – names not available though reported in the press)	Kandhmal	Male
19	At Tikabali (1 person - name not available)	Kandhmal	Male
20	At Mukundapur Gajapati (1 person no name available)	Mukundapur Gajapati	Male