

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

India, huge increase in Hindu fundamentalist attacks on Christians

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As the new year progresses, Christians in India still find themselves increasingly at risk of violence from **Hindu extremists** in the country who think that all Indians must be Hindu. A **recent report** from the New Delhi-based United Christian Forum (UCF), titled “**Violence Monitor Report 2024**”

, revealed that “745 incidents of violence were registered on its toll-free helpline number” by Christians across India from January to November 2024.

As per a report by Premier Christian News (PCN), the 2024 UCF report detailed 673 cases of alleged violence and discrimination up to October 2024. Additionally, UCF stated that only 47 of these cases have led to formal police action in the form of First Information Reports (FIRs), PCN added. Furthermore, the same UCF report highlighted how India’s Uttar Pradesh was the state with the highest number of incidents.

Besides, UCF added the number of anti-Christian violent incidents has increased steadily over the past decade. There were fewer than 100 recorded incidents of violence against Christians in 2014, just before the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) assumed federal power. However, that figure had risen to almost 300 incidents by 2018, with the total number rising every year since.

“As per the complaints received on the helpline, there were 127 incidents in 2014, 142 in 2015, 226 in 2016, 248 in 2017, 292 in 2018, 328 in 2019, 279 in 2020, 505 in 2021, and 601 in 2022,” A UCF press statement elaborated, in remarks cited by UCA News.

A.C. Michael, the UCF convener, told UCA News in December 2024 that these figures did not encapsulate assaults on Christians and their churches in war-ridden Manipur, where sectarian violence that began in May 2023 has killed 250 and displaced 60,000, most of them Christians.

“This is in spite of Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to choose any religion of one’s choice,” Michael, a former member of India’s minorities commission, said, before calling on the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi “to consider setting up a national level inquiry to look into the rising incidences of Christian minority persecution in India.”

The BJP and allied Hindu groups support the idea of making India a Hindu theocratic nation and oppose conversion activities and even missions in villages, projecting them as tactics to convert gullible tribal and socially poor villagers. UCF stated that apart from the violent episodes it has documented, there were likely many other incidents that were not reported by victims for several reasons. “Local police collude with the perpetrators of violence and turn a blind eye to offenses committed against Christians,” the rights group, People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), asserted.

On December 31, 30 church groups emailed a letter to Indian President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging for immediate and decisive action to curtail violent mobs, threatening religious minorities, UCA News reported.

Notably, A.C. Michael, Supreme Court lawyer Sister Mary Scaria, and UCF President Michael Williams, signed the aforementioned letter.

Reverend Vijayesh Lal, general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) **admitted** to *UCA News* on January 1 that the letter “highlights the misuse of anti-conversion laws, growing threats to religious freedoms and exclusionary policies denying Dalit Christians Scheduled Caste status.”

“Rising hate speech, especially from elected officials, has emboldened people to commit acts of violence against Christians. Mobs disrupted peaceful Christian gatherings and threatened carol singers with impunity”, Lal stated, alluding to various incidents over the Christmas period.

“The freedom to distribute and sell religious texts like the Bhagavad Gita [Holy Book of Hindus] on street corners and weekly markets is a testament to India’s cherished values, enshrined in our constitution. Christians are routinely beaten up if they distribute the Bible or even a small part of it,” Lal continued.

“Such disparities in the treatment of different faiths undermine Article 25 of our Constitution, which guarantees all citizens the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate their religion.”

The UCF report comes amid worries over the Indian government’s inadequate response to religious violence, including violent incidents in Manipur. Animosity toward Christians rose as Modi **won** a third term in June 2024, spearheading his Hindu-leaning Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Indian national elections.

Strikingly, the BJP and like-minded Hindu groups back the **notion** of making India a Hindu theocratic nation (Hindu Rashtra), thus resisting conversion activities and even Christian missions in villages.

Northern Uttar Pradesh, India’s most populous state, has become the most risky place for Christians as the BJP-led state government **boosted** its draconian anti-conversion law in August.

The Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion (Amendment) Bill, passed on July 20, 2024, **enforces** a maximum sentence of life imprisonment and bolsters the provisions against fake or forced conversions. What is more, the amendment permits anyone to lodge a complaint about a breach of the law, altering a previous provision that enabled only a victim of conversion or a close relative to do so, *UCA News* **indicated**.