

ORISSA, INDIA. CHRISTMAS ASSAULT

30 CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS ATTACKED; 15 CHURCHES BURNED

(December 27, 2007). The Washington-DC based human rights group, International Christian Concern (ICC) www.persecution.org, has learned that Hindu extremists killed at least one Christian and attacked over 30 Christian institutions on the eve and day of Christmas in the Baliguda sub-division of the Kandhamal district in the eastern state of Orissa, where an indefinite curfew has been imposed.

Baliguda has been tense since December 24 when a mob allegedly led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) attacked Christians and vandalized their shops to protest Christmas Eve celebrations by the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Brahmani village.

Rabi Sudhasundar, the priest of the church, said that there were more than 200 Catholic families in Bamunigam area where Brahmani village is situated, and that the church had received permission from authorities to hold a Christmas program.

According to Sudhasundar, a local Hindu leader, Swami Laxmananda Saraswati, did not want Christians to openly celebrate Christmas.

“The leader instigated local residents and led a mob of more than 100 people carrying sticks and guns to attack the Christians indiscriminately,” he told ICC.

The priest added that later, when Saraswati was returning to launch more attacks, Christians tried to stop him, and that led to a clash between the two groups.

“Their entire attention is on driving away Christians from the region,” said Dr. John Dayal, a Christian leader and member of the National Integration Council of the Government of India.

According to John Varghese, regional coordinator of the Philadelphia Fellowship Churches in India (PFCI), several PFCI churches have been destroyed in the villages of the Baliguda sub-division.

At least three Baptist churches were burnt in the villages of Kudupakia, Gosukia and Depakheta. Philadelphia churches belonging to PFCI were set ablaze in the villages of Sirthiguda, Burangia and Budrumaha. In addition, several churches belonging to the Catholic and the Church of North India denominations were set on fire in the same sub-division.

An office of the World Vision of India in the area has also reportedly been vandalized.

The attacks took place despite 20 platoons of police deployed to ease existing tensions.

Local Christians feel that the electronic media, mainly in the vernacular language, fuelled the fire by featuring biased reports.

Unconfirmed reports say Catholic boys, Avinash Nayak, 12, and Silu Senapati, 13, received bullet injuries, said Sudhasundar, adding that while both are believed to be admitted to a hospital, Senapati's condition is said to be critical.

The name of the Christian who has reportedly been killed could not be ascertained.

Christians have urged Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to intervene and protect Christians from further attack.

In a memorandum submitted to the prime minister on December 26, Dr. John Dayal said at least 14 churches, four convents, three houses of priests, and eight hostels had been fully or partially destroyed, besides injuries sustained by numerous Christians in Kandhamal district's Baliguda sub-division.

PS. This was the worst outbreak of religious violence in the state of Orissa where Australian missionary, Graham Staines and his two sons were burnt to death in their station wagon by religious extremists, eight years ago.

You are free to disseminate the following news. We request that you reference ICC (International Christian Concern) and include our web address www.persecution.org. Contact Jeremy Sewall, Policy Analyst, 1-800-ICC (422)-5441, jeremy@persecution.org.

ICC is a Washington-DC based human rights organization that exists to help persecuted Christians worldwide. ICC delivers humanitarian aid, trains and supports persecuted pastors, raises awareness in the US regarding the problem of persecution, and is an advocate for the persecuted on Capitol Hill and the State Department. For additional information or for an interview, contact ICC at 800-422-5441.

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MANGALORE, KARNATAKA INDIA

RUTHLESS ATTACK ON CHILDREN AND OTHER BELIEVERS

DEC 23, 07. Assist News Service reports that about 50 believers from the End Time Full Gospel Church in Mangalore, India, were getting ready for their Sunday worship on December 23, 2007. This church is located on the second floor of building at Alfa Center, Kankanadi, Mangalore, in Karnataka state.

At 9.20 in the morning, about 30 Hindu fundamentalists reached the church on bikes and started destroying the furniture, window panes, and worship equipments. They destroyed Bibles and hymn books. The perpetrators then unleashed a reign of terror by brutally beating the believers including children attending the worship with chairs and sticks.

The following believers were injured. Joshua Mark, 10 years, Alex 14 years, Diekshid, 12 years, Praveen Kumar, 35 years, Ivan, 34 years, Sunil Sathyaveera, 32 years and J.K Ashirwadam 40 years. Most of the believers sustained serious head and back injuries. The injured were initially treated in Wellock government hospital in Mangalore and were later admitted in Colaso Hospital Mangalore for special care.

Fourteen Hindu radicals belonging to a radical Hindu group were later arrested for attacking children and elders attending the Sunday worship. - By James Varghese/ ASSIST News Service / Dec 27, 2007