

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

for the Persecuted Church

Persecuted: Not Abandoned



Republic of India

India

FACTS

GEOGRAPHY

Area: 3, 166, 000 sq km.

Geographically and politically India dominates south Asia and the Indian Ocean.

Population: 1, 147,995,898

GOVERNMENT

India is a Federal Republic. New Delhi is the capital city.

On the morning of Oct 25, 2009 four men entered the Assembly of God church building in Old Hubli, Karnataka during a worship service and started taking notes and photographing the worshippers.

When the pastor's wife, Radha David (42), asked the men to sit quietly and listen to the sermon, they immediately left. A few minutes later, a group of approximately 50 Hindu militants stormed into the church. They threatened the believers and dragged Pastor K.M. David Raj (47) outside. The militants then collected the Bibles, Christian literature and banners and burned them in front of the church building. Police arrived on scene and brought Pastor Raj, Radha, and three other believers to the police station. At last report, the five remained in police custody.

With over one billion people, India is the most populous functioning democracy in the world. Since achieving independence in 1947, India has officially been a secular nation with guarantees of constitutional freedoms of speech and religion that the government typically works to uphold. From the mid-1990s on, however, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been a regular contender for power. Christians face continued opposition due to the deterioration of freedoms under the influence of militant Hinduism or Hindutva.

The caste system is deeply entrenched in Indian society. Until the middle of the 20th century, “the untouchables” were for centuries regarded as the refuse of society. In 1950, they began to be referred to as “Dalits” and were given a “Scheduled Caste” status. While most upper caste opinions remain the same to this day, the 1950 law guarantees a certain quota of Dalits in specific societal institutions. However, Dalit converts to other religions lose their Scheduled Caste status, thus denying them basic human rights in many cases.

Reports of violence against believers, village churches being destroyed and church leaders being threatened by local Hindus continue to be a daily reality in India. Other persecution faced by Christians is more subtle, as converts to Christianity are often cast out of their families, denied inheritance rights and face poverty and ostracism.

In August 2008, widespread and unprecedented mob violence against Christians erupted in Orissa state following the assassination of World

Hindu Council (VHP) leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati. Although Maoists claimed responsibility for the leader's murder, Hindu militants continued to use it as a pretext to attack Christians throughout the state, burning Christians' homes, shops, churches and killing believers. Militants throughout the country were emboldened by the violence and launched attacks on believers in over 12 states. Thousands of Christians were forced to flee their homes for government relief camps, where militants used violence and intimidation in an attempt to force them to deny Christ and convert to Hinduism.

PRAYER POINTS:

Pray that militant influences in the government will continue to decrease and that freedom of religion will be recognized throughout India.

Pray for protection for pastors, evangelists and other Christian workers as they share the Good News of Jesus.

Pray that those who turn to Christ will find the means to have their needs met

Pray that those who seek to hinder the work of the Church in India will see the love and grace of Jesus in the lives of Indian Christians.

Pray that the Indian Church will grow in prayerfulness, casteless solidarity, wisdom, grace and perseverance in the face of suffering

Pray that these believers will keep their eyes on Jesus, persevere in their faith, and not grow weary or lose heart (Hebrews 10:32-39, Hebrews 12:1-3).