



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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September 29, 2008

The Honorable Richard Boucher
Assistant Secretary of State for
South and Central Asia
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Boucher:

On behalf of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to express my deep concern over the upsurge in violence in India targeting Christians and other minorities. While there have been sporadic but ongoing attacks against Christians in the past, the brutal murder of a priest in Andhra Pradesh on August 16, followed by the spate of attacks in Orissa which began August 23 and has spread to other states, signal a severe escalation in the level of violence as many Christians have been killed and injured and their homes, churches, orphanages, and property destroyed.

The murder of Hindu fundamentalist Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati on August 23 appears to have been the catalyst for these recent attacks against Christians in Orissa. The Catholic Bishops Conference of India condemned this murder, saying they were saddened by the death of Swami Laxmanananda and denying any Christian involvement. Pope Benedict XVI has condemned "with firmness every attack on human life, the sacredness of which demands respect for all," expressed solidarity with the Christian victims of violence, and called for leaders in India to "work together to reestablish among the various communities the peaceful coexistence and harmony that have been a distinctive mark of Indian society." We join the Holy Father in condemning the violence and stand in solidarity with the Church in India.

We strongly urge you, either directly or through the U.S. Embassy, to express the concern of the United States to the Indian government about the continuing attacks against and violations of human rights of Christians and other minorities. We ask you to call upon the Indian government to protect the lives and property of the innocent, to provide humanitarian relief, to restore law and order, and to foster a dialogue that promotes religious tolerance at all levels of society and government. I would welcome hearing your perspectives on this situation.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International Justice
and Peace