

WORLD & NATION

Attacks concern India's bishops

NEW DELHI, India (CNS) — Indian bishops expressed concern over recent attacks on missionaries by Hindu fundamentalist groups, but asked church members for a Christian response.

A statement of the standing committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India said that while the attacks appeared sporadic, they show the "systematic way the fundamentalist forces have been operating."

Church sources say that since January, six people have been killed in more than 100 cases of violent attacks against Christians throughout the nation, for which pro-Hindu groups have been blamed. All six deaths were in Orissa, an eastern state, reported UCA News, an Asian church news agency based in Thailand.

The latest was the murder of Father Arul Doss, who was beaten and stabbed with arrows Sept. 2 in a tribal village in Orissa.

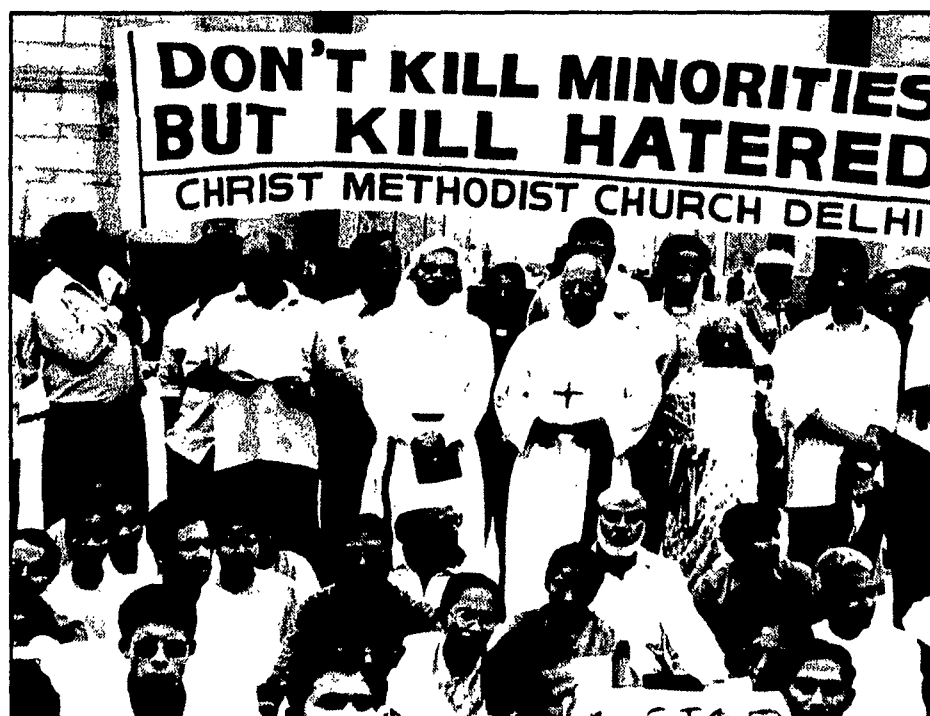
"Our response must be thoroughly Christian," the statement said, reminding people of the Christian values of forgiveness and reconciliation.

"At the same time we consider it our duty to denounce injustice and exploitation, denial of human rights and violence everywhere," said the statement issued after the Sept. 14-15 meeting in Bangalore.

Without naming any group, the statement said fundamentalist forces "spread half-truths and false accusations against us; they sow seeds of hatred in the minds of people; they indulge in a reign of terror, unleashing fear and insecurity."

Noting that the murderers of missionaries are "still at large," the bishops regretted the failure of the state and federal governments to uphold citizens' constitutional rights and called for the arrest of the criminals.

The church leaders said they "deeply appreciate the courage of the people,"



T.C. Malhotra/CNS

Christians demonstrate in New Delhi in mid-September against attacks on religious minorities in the state of Orissa, India. Earlier in the month Father Arul Doss was killed in a remote tribal village by suspected Hindu extremists.

adding that the attacks have strengthened Christians and "brought them closer to one another in unity and solidarity."

The bishops found the need to "dialogue and cooperate with all people of good will to foster mutual respect" and also "to avail of the good will of the vast majority of Hindus and people of other religions."

They suggested the use of media "to dispel suspicion and hatred" and to build neighborhood communities that would "defend themselves against the forces of communalism."

In New Delhi, Archbishop Alan de

Lastic and about 200 nuns, church leaders and activists held a sit-in Sept. 26 on one of the business district's busiest roads to protest the stripping and humiliation of a nun in eastern India.

Three men abducted the 25-year-old member of the Immaculate Heart of Mary congregation Sept. 20. When she resisted rape attempts, the assailants forced her to drink their urine collected in a bottle, said a local bishop.

"In the name of religion she was stripped, humiliated and disgraced," said Archbishop de Lastic. "Today the womanhood of India has been dragged into the mire and insulted."

Sr. Gramick to appeal ban

TIMONIUM, Md. (CNS) — School Sister of Notre Dame Jeannine Gramick said she will seek a reversal of the Vatican ruling barring her from all pastoral ministry with gay and lesbian people, but meanwhile will live with it "as a heavy weight on my heart and soul."

In a statement released Sept. 24, Sister Gramick said she still regards the decision by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as "unjust and harmful," but "I believe it is important to work within church structures to have the CDF decision reconsidered and, hopefully, ultimately reversed."

The doctrinal congregation July 13 publicly notified Sister Gramick and her longtime colleague, Salvatorian Father Robert Nugent, that they were permanently barred "from any pastoral work involving homosexual persons."

It said they advanced "doctrinally unacceptable" positions "regarding the intrinsic evil of homosexual acts and the objective disorder of the homosexual inclination."

It added that the "errors and ambiguities" promoted by the priest and nun "have caused confusion among the Catholic people and have harmed the community of the church."

The day the Vatican ruling was published, Father Nugent objected to aspects of the decision and the procedures leading up to it but said he would abide by it "as a son of the church, a presbyter and a member of a religious congregation with a vow of obedience."

Hindu rationalists plan protest during pope's Nov. visit

PANAJI, India (CNS) — Hindu nationalists are planning to hold a march against conversion to Christianity to coincide with Pope John Paul II's Nov. 5-8 visit to India.

The World Hindu Council, a global network of pro-Hindu groups, is organizing a "chariot march against Catholic atrocities" that will pass through Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan states before arriving in New Delhi Nov. 4, leaders said.

UCA News, an Asian church news agency based in Thailand, said World Hindu Council officials refused to divulge the details, but confirmed that the march would start from Goa, a Catholic stronghold in western India, where Hindus say church leaders used Inquisition-type tactics to suppress the Hindu religion and convert

their ancestors.

"We have not yet decided on the plan. It will be known in a week or two when we hold a press conference," said Madhukar Dixit, a member of the Hindu council's Maharashtra and Goa unit.

Subash Velingkar, Goa unit general secretary of the militant National Volunteers Corps, told UCA News Sept. 23 that his group is "planning a protest march against conversions and the Inquisition, but I do not have the details."

The Hindu council has demanded a public apology from the pope for the Portuguese-led Inquisition that took place from 1560 to the 1800s in Goa, a former Portuguese enclave. However, the pro-Hindu Indian People's Party, known as the BJP, is "not aware of any such plans. The BJP is

not part of any such programs," the party's spokesman in Goa told UCA News.

Velingkar said his group chose Goa to launch the march since the "roots of conversion lie in Old Goa, where the infamous Inquisition began in the 16th century at the behest of the Jesuits."

The Inquisition in Goa initially tried to check Hindu rituals among converts, but was later used as "a weapon to punish anybody," said P.P. Shirodkar, director of the state-run Department of Archives, Archeology and Museum.

Velingkar said Pope John Paul already has declared his intentions to apologize for the Inquisition, which was also held in Spain and Portugal.

In October 1998 the Vatican held a symposium of some 50 international experts to

examine the origin and history of various initiatives that culminated with the Spanish Inquisition in the 1400s.

World Hindu Council officials said they opposed the Indian government's invitation to the pope because he would address the Asian bishops and "chalk out plans to spread Christianity in the region in a decade."

The highlight of Pope John Paul's New Delhi visit is the delivery of his apostolic exhortation that officially closes last year's Synod of Bishops for Asia.

Valentino Fernandes, a Goan Catholic leader, said that "the whole idea of the march is to grab publicity." World media will focus on India during the papal visit, and "the Hindu groups are indulging in publicity gimmicks," he said.

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