

INDIA
POLITICS BY OTHER MEANS:
ATTACKS AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN INDIA

Acknowledgments	2
I. SUMMARY	3
II. RECOMMENDATIONS	5
Recommendations to the Government of India	6
Recommendations to the International Community	7
III. THE CONTEXT OF ANTI-CHRISTIAN VIOLENCE	7
United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Question of Religious Intolerance	8
The National Commission for Minorities	9
The Sangh Parivar	10
RSS Training	12
Conversions	12
Imposing a “moral code”	13
IV. VIOLENCE IN GUJARAT	15
A Campaign of Hate	17
Violence in Dangs District, Southeastern Gujarat	21
Response of the State and Local Administrations	25
V. ATTACKS ACROSS THE COUNTRY	30
Graham Staines and the Wadhwa Commission	31
Madhya Pradesh Rapes	33
VI. LEGAL CONTEXT	34
International Law	35
VII. CONCLUSION	36

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was researched and written by Smita Narula, a researcher for the Asia division of Human Rights Watch. It is based on research conducted in India in April 1999. The report was edited by Patricia Gossman, senior researcher for the Asia division of Human Rights Watch, Sidney Jones, executive director of the Asia division, Wilder Tayler, general counsel, and Cynthia Brown, program director. Production assistance was also provided by Adam Bassine and Elizabeth Weiss, associates for the Asia division of Human Rights Watch, Aparna Ravi, intern, Mike Bochenek, researcher, Alex Frangos, associate, Patrick Minges, publications director, and Fitzroy Hepkins, mail manager.

Human Rights Watch would like to thank the following people and organizations for their generous assistance: Martin Macwan and members of Navsarjan, Gujarat; Parash Chaudary and members of the Center for Social Justice, Gujarat; and John Dayal, national convenor of the United Christian Forum for Human Rights.

We also thank the many people who prefer, for their own well-being that their names not be mentioned—an unfortunate indicator of the volatility surrounding the issue of communal violence in India. We would like to express our gratitude to the many men and women who spoke with us, recounting their personal experiences of hardship and violence. They made this report possible.

Finally, we acknowledge with appreciation the support of the Ford Foundation, which provided funding that has enabled Human Rights Watch to pursue communal violence-related research and advocacy in India.

I. SUMMARY

India's inter-religious violence now extends to Christians, and its underlying causes are the same as those promoting violence against Muslims, Dalits ("untouchables"), and other marginalized groups in the country—political and economic power struggles linked rhetorically to the creation of a Hindu nation. Attacks against Christians, which have increased significantly since the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP) came to power in March 1998, point to a disturbing trend of the assertion of Hindu nationalism by governments in power at the state and central level. They are part of a concerted campaign of right-wing Hindu organizations, collectively known as the *sangh parivar*, to promote and exploit communal tensions to stay in power—a movement that is supported at the local level by militant groups who operate with impunity. The number of Christians being attacked is still relatively small but has increased in the months preceding national parliamentary elections in September and October 1999. Corresponding closely to particular election contests in which Hindu nationalist groups have pursued major strategic goals, the attacks have continued in the periods following electoral victory.

A majority of the reported incidents of violence against Christians in 1998 occurred in Gujarat, the same year that the BJP came to power in the state. In April 1999 Human Rights Watch visited the Dangs district in southeastern Gujarat, site of a ten-day spate of violent and premeditated attacks on Christian communities and institutions between December 25, 1998, and January 3, 1999. Human Rights Watch was able to document patterns there that are representative of anti-Christian violence in many other parts of the country. These include the role of *sangh parivar* organizations and the local media in promoting anti-Christian propaganda, the exploitation of communal differences to mask political and economic motives underlying the attacks, local and state government complicity in the attacks, and the failure of the central government to meet its constitutional and international obligations to protect minorities.

Between January 1998 and February 1999, the Indian Parliament reported a total of 116 incidents of attacks on Christians across the country. Unofficial figures may be higher. Gujarat topped the list of states with ninety-four such incidents. Attacks have also been reported in Maharashtra, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Manipur, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and New Delhi. Attacks on Christians have ranged from violence against the leadership of the church, including the killing of priests and the raping of nuns, to the physical destruction of Christian institutions, including schools, churches, colleges, and cemeteries. Thousands of Christians have also been forced to convert to Hinduism.

Jamuna Bhen, a thirty-year-old agricultural laborer in Dangs district, Gujarat, told Human Rights Watch, "The Hindus removed the ornamentation from our church on December 25 [1998]. They threatened us by saying that they will set the church house on fire. Then they started taking down the roof tiles.... There were one hundred to 200 people who came from other villages. They said, 'We will burn everything.' We begged them not to. We said, 'Don't do this,' and said we will become Hindu."¹ Along with twenty-four other Christians, Jamuna was taken to a hot springs that night to undergo a "reconversion" ritual to Hinduism: "They took us to Unai hot springs, they took twenty-five people and converted us.... They took our photos and gave us photos of Hanuman [a Hindu deity] and gave us a saffron-colored flag. Then they forced us into the water, all twenty-five of us. Then we were brought home. I started feeling sick in my stomach; I had a fever. They said, 'You are now Hindu,' but we remain Christian."²

In a pattern similar to the response to organized violence against lower castes, the tendency is for local officials under pressure to arrest a few members but not the leaders of the groups involved.³ The communities affected represent some of the poorest in the country and include Dalits and members of local tribal communities, many of whom convert to Christianity to escape abuses under India's caste system. In many cases, Christian

¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

² Ibid.

³ See generally Human Rights Watch, *Broken People: Caste Violence Against India's "Untouchables"* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999).

institutions and individuals targeted were singled out for their role in promoting health, literacy, and economic independence among Dalit and tribal community members. A vested interest in keeping these communities in a state of economic dependency is a motivating factor in anti-Christian violence and propaganda.

These recent attacks fall into a pattern of persistent abuse against marginalized communities. They represent a clear failure on the part of both the central and state governments to ensure that such communities enjoy the full protection of their constitutional rights to freedom of religion and equal protection under the law. Despite the existence of comprehensive legislation to address the problem of religious intolerance and communal violence, the government has failed to prosecute offending individuals and organizations; instead, it has in many cases offered tacit support and indirect justification for the attacks.

Christians are not the only minority to be targeted by the sangh parivar. Violence against Sikhs in northern India in 1984 and against India's Muslim community nationwide in 1992 and 1993 also stemmed from the activities and hate propaganda of these groups. Members of the sangh parivar include the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Corps, RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council, VHP), and the VHP's militant youth wing, the Bajrang Dal. In the state of Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena political party has also been implicated. The RSS seeks to promote a Hindu ethos within India and among Indians living abroad. Although an ostensibly cultural organization, RSS cells are involved in supporting political candidates for government, trade unions, and student organizations. The VHP was established in 1964 to unite Hinduism's regional and caste divisions under a single ecumenical umbrella. It is actively involved in Sanskrit education, the organization of Hindu rites and rituals, and the converting of Christians, Muslims, and animists to Hinduism. These organizations, although different in many respects, have all promoted the argument that although India is a democracy, because Hindus constitute the majority of Indians, India should be a Hindu state.

In the words of a sangh parivar activist in Gujarat, "The VHP is for the promotion of religion, the Bajrang Dal is for the protection of Hindus, and the BJP is for politics. The work systems are different, but the aim is the same. We all want *akand bharat*: all nations under India. We want what we had before independence, minus the British. We should have a Hindu nation. Other religions can do whatever they want, but they should not insult Hinduism. We also don't want them to distribute their vote but to give it to the Hindus. Everyone will come together to support against [the] Congress [party]."⁴

Despite this ideological position, the VHP has denied any involvement in the attacks on Christians; instead, it has repeatedly accused Christian missionaries of converting the poor by force, a charge that the Christians have rejected. The Christian community also asserts that the situation has worsened since the Hindu nationalist BJP came to power in Delhi in March 1998. Although Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has publicly dissociated himself from the VHP and given assurances of safety to all Christians, his position has been ambiguous: while officially condemning the killing of Australian missionary Graham Staines in January 1999, for example, the prime minister called for a "national debate on conversions."⁵ Human rights groups criticized the move as legitimizing the motives behind the Staines attack.

The response of other BJP officials has been to echo the VHP and blame the violence on a conversion campaign by the Christian community. A Christian conspiracy, some argue, exists on a global scale. In February 1999, BJP national General Secretary K. N. Govindacharya alleged that the church has set a target to turn at least 51 percent of the world's population to Christianity by the dawn of the twenty-first century. After having converted large populations in Africa, he added, evangelists had now made Asia the prime target.⁶ Govindacharya added that Christian missionaries use "fraud, allurements and fear to bring about religious

⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999. The Congress Party is the main opposition party in the 1999 national parliamentary elections.

⁵ "Cloud of shame shrouds India's Republic Day," Agence France-Presse, January 26, 1999.

⁶ "Nation has benefited from BJP coalition experiment," *The Hindu* (Madras), February 6, 1999.

conversions.”⁷ In response to a question on the reconversions of Christians to Hinduism, Govindacharya asserted that the reconversions were merely a homecoming process.⁸

In Gujarat’s Dangs district, local officials, including police officers, have given outright support to rallies organized by groups that have fomented the violence. State and local officials have also attempted to downplay the destruction of Christian property, dismissing the burning of churches as attacks on mere temporary structures. Though authorities have characterized the violence as spontaneous eruptions or communal clashes between local groups, there is much evidence to suggest that they have been carefully organized by the leadership of extremist Hindu groups.

Local police have not provided adequate protection to villagers in the affected areas, even though there have been early warnings of violence. In some cases, police have refused to register complaints by members of the Christian community, whereas they have registered complaints by others against Christians. Some Christians who have filed charges with the police have been pressured to withdraw their complaints. Officers who have taken action in response to anti-Christian attacks have been threatened with transfers. India’s National Human Rights Commission has taken notice of recurring attacks in various states and has also issued notices to the chief secretaries of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat, and to the Union home secretary seeking immediate and effective measures to prevent such events in the future. The National Commission for Minorities has also submitted several reports to state and central governments recommending prosecutions and accusing the government of willful neglect at all levels.

This report documents the gang rape of four nuns in Madhya Pradesh in September 1998 and the killing of an Australian missionary and his two sons who were trapped in their car and burned alive in the state of Orissa in January 1999. The follow-up to the killings revealed serious irregularities in official treatment of anti-Christian violence. A government-appointed commission of inquiry accused Bajrang Dal activist and BJP member Dara Singh of leading the attack in the Orissa killings. The commission exonerated the Bajrang Dal as such, insisting that Singh acted alone, and blamed the Congress Party-led state government for allowing the murders to take place under its watch. Despite Singh’s numerous television interviews following the attack, police claimed that they were unable to find him.

With India’s national parliamentary elections in September and October 1999, the situation deteriorated recently as the Hindu right sought to form a BJP-led single-party government at the center. On August 26, 1999, Bajrang Dal activist Dara Singh struck again, chopping off the arms of Sheikh Rehman, a Muslim trader, before setting him on fire before a crowd of 400. One week later, Rev. Arul Doss was shot in the chest with an arrow and beaten to death by a group of unidentified assailants. Just days before the national parliamentary elections, both attacks took place within twenty miles of the Graham Staines killing in the state of Orissa, and each one coincided with a major Hindu festival.⁹ The BJP charged the Congress-led state government with criminal negligence, while Congress sought to blame the incidents on the policies and activities of sangh parivar organizations. While communal tensions in the state were exploited by political parties on all sides, as of this writing, the main perpetrators of the attacks were still at large.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

The government of India should demonstrate its commitment to protecting the rights of minorities by implementing the following recommendations at the earliest possible date. In compliance with the Indian constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, it should ensure that all citizens may equally enjoy freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, propagate, and adopt religion. In

⁷ “Police launch manhunt for tribal Christians’ killers in India,” Agence France-Presse, February 8, 1999.

⁸ “Confirming the hidden agenda?” *The Hindu*, February 7, 1999.

⁹ Marion Lloyd, “Fear and violence stalk Christians and Muslims in India,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 8, 1999.

particular, it should commit to taking steps to prevent further violence and prosecute both state and private actors responsible for attacks on religious minorities.

Recommendations to the Government of India

- Provide adequate police protection to Christians and other minority communities in violence-affected areas, including, where necessary, an increase in the number of police stations and outposts in each district.
- Require that police register all cases of communal attacks, regardless of the religious background of the complainant, and enforce this regulation through frequent reviews of registers by a magistrate or other competent judicial authority and the establishment of a civilian review board mandated to investigate complaints. Police who violate the regulation should be dismissed.
- Investigate and prosecute state officials complicit in attacks on minorities. Police who are found to be complicit should be dismissed.
- End impunity for past campaigns of violence against minorities. That is, prosecute and punish all those found responsible for murder, rape, assault, and destruction of property during the post-Ayodhya violence of December 1992 and January 1993. Police responsible for excessive use of force should be prosecuted; those who having the power and duty to stop the violence but did not intervene should be punished accordingly. Victims and family members should be paid compensation.
- Implement the recommendations made by the National Commission for Minorities in its reports on attacks on Christians in various states.
- Make public the recommendations of the Wadhwa Commission and prosecute those found responsible for the 1999 attacks in Orissa.
- Ensure speedy review and publication of findings by commissions of inquiry appointed by the state to investigate abuses against minorities.
- Strengthen the capacity of the National Human Rights Commission, the National Commission for Minorities, and the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to operate branch offices in all states with enough financial resources and powers to initiate prosecution of cases.
- Prohibit surveys by district administrations to assess the activities and whereabouts of minority community members and leaders.
- Launch a nationwide public awareness campaign regarding the dangers of communal violence. This campaign should explain in simple terms what actions are legally prohibited, what recourse is available to minorities, and what the procedures are for filing a First Information Report (FIR: the first report, recorded by the police, of a crime). It should also include a program of public service announcements in all states aimed at sensitizing the population against any form of religious extremism and creating awareness of minority rights.
- Implement the recommendations made by the U.N. special rapporteur on the question of religious intolerance in his report on his December 1996 visit to India. In particular, the following recommendations should be implemented:
 1. Increase awareness of the existence and dangers of extremism because, despite the fact that it is confined to a minority, its influence on the masses through political parties, places of worship, schools and even seats of power, could well destroy community and religious harmony in India.

2. The Representation of the Peoples Act, 1951, should be scrupulously implemented and that in addition it should be speedily supplemented by a new act debarring political parties from the post-election use of religion for political ends.
3. Places of worship should be used exclusively for religious, and not political, purposes. As places for prayer and meditation, they should be protected against tension and partisan struggle. The State should therefore ensure that places of worship remain neutral ground and are sheltered from political currents and ideological and partisan controversy.
4. Education can play a vital role in preventing intolerance, discrimination, hate and violence (including violence motivated by extremism) by creating and disseminating a culture of tolerance among the masses and the most disadvantaged segments of the population. It can make a decisive contribution to the assimilation of values based on human rights by the use of school curricula and textbooks reflecting principles of tolerance and non-discrimination.

Recommendations to the International Community

- India's donors and trading partners should pressure the Indian government to implement the recommendations of the Srikrishna Commission on the 1992-1993 Bombay riots, and the recommendations of the National Commission for Minorities on attacks against Christians. They should urge the Indian government to prosecute those responsible for masterminding attacks on minority religious communities.
- India's donors and trading partners should provide funding for preventative measures to ensure that communal outbreaks do not recur. Such measures might include community education programs on communal issues and the establishment of a civilian review board to act as a check on the functioning of the police and other governmental institutions during communal outbreaks.

III. THE CONTEXT OF ANTI-CHRISTIAN VIOLENCE

Amounting to 2.3 percent of the nation's population, Christians nonetheless constitute the third-largest religious group in India after Hindus and Muslims. Though characterized by Hindu nationalist leaders as an alien faith or the religion of India's colonial rulers, Christianity took root in India almost 2,000 years ago when St. Thomas the Apostle evangelized in the south—home today to a majority of India's twenty-three million Christians. In more recent years, missionaries have converted sizable majorities in three small northeastern states: Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Today, close to 70 percent of India's Christians are Catholic.

Attracted by the church's emphasis on social service and equality, many tribals and Dalits ("untouchables") have converted to Christianity in an effort to escape their impoverished state and abusive treatment under India's caste system. Most of the attacks against Christians have taken place in the country's "tribal belt," which runs from the Pakistani border in the west to Burma and Bangladesh in the east. The belt is home to eighty-one million indigenous people, whose ancestors inhabited India before the Aryan invasions of about 2,000 B.C. brought the country its dominant ethnic group.¹⁰ Animists or spirit worshippers by nature, many tribals do not practice Hinduism. Much like Dalits, they traditionally fall outside the Hindu fold. Dalits, a population of nearly 160 million people, continue to suffer from extreme social discrimination, segregation and violence because of their rank at the bottom of India's caste system. Upon converting to Christianity, Dalits lose all privileges previously assigned to them under their scheduled caste status.¹¹

¹⁰ Dexter Filkins, "Christians under fire in India," *Los Angeles Times*, November 12, 1998. See also Minority Rights Group International, "The Adivasis of India," *A Minority Rights Groups International Report*, January 1999.

¹¹ The term "scheduled caste," by which Dalits are also called, refers to a list of socially deprived ("untouchable") castes prepared by the British Government in 1935. The schedule of castes was intended to increase representation of scheduled-caste members in the legislature, in government employment, and in university placement. The term is also used in the

Until recently, Christians enjoyed a relatively peaceful coexistence with their majority Hindu neighbors. In the past several years, however, Christians have become the target of a campaign of violence and propaganda orchestrated by Hindu nationalist groups attempting to stem the tide of defecting low-caste and tribal voters. In 1996, two Catholic priests were killed in Gumla district, Bihar, their skulls crushed. In October 1997, the decapitated body of a third Catholic priest was found in a forest in Bihar.¹² Rev. A. T. Thomas was apparently targeted for aiding Dalits in the area.¹³ Earlier in the month, Father Christudas was forced to parade naked through the town of Dumka after being accused of sexually assaulting one of his students.¹⁴ The string of attacks sent shock waves throughout the country and prompted Christian groups to demand increased protection of Christian communities in a state notorious for its lawlessness and ongoing caste wars. The incidents also foreshadowed the deterioration of Hindu-Christian relations in 1998 and 1999.

According to the Indian Parliament, a total of 116 incidents of attacks on Christians across the country between January 1998 and February 1999. Most of the attacks have taken place in the north and the west where the Christian populations are smaller and Hindu nationalist sentiments are stronger. The increase in violence has paralleled the rise of the Hindu right in India's political arena and the undermining of communal harmony by Hindu extremists, a trend that had been noted by the United Nations special rapporteur on religious intolerance in a 1997 report.

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Question of Religious Intolerance

At the invitation of the Indian government, the United Nations special rapporteur on the question of religious intolerance, Abdelfattah Amor, visited India in December 1996. In the report resulting from his investigation, Amor warned of rising Hindu extremism and the effect it was having on India's secular democratic structure.¹⁵ While investigating the situation of Christians in India, Amor's attention was drawn to "the existence of Hindu extremism, encountered in varying degrees within ultra-nationalist political parties or parties attracted by ultra-nationalism (RSS, VHP and BJP)."¹⁶ Amor found that in some states, "proselytizing activities are sometimes hampered by abusive official interpretations of legislation prohibiting all forced conversion, or by accusations of obtaining conversions by offers of material benefits, and thus of exploiting hardship."¹⁷ The report also cited administrative obstacles encountered by foreign missionaries seeking Indian entry visas, as well as restrictions on transfers of foreign funds destined for Christian institutions in certain states.

At the time of his visit, Amor found that "Hindu extremists occasionally attempt to stir up trouble within Christian institutions,"¹⁸ though the incidents were limited. He noted that Christians had complete freedom to disseminate religious material, including the Bible, and with the exception of a few administrative obstacles, they were able to construct places of worship without restriction. The report went on to state that the situation of Christians was generally satisfactory but added:

Mention must... be made of the activities of the extremist Hindu parties, which are attempting to undermine the communal and religious harmony which exists in India by the political

constitution and various laws. Pauline Kolenda, *Caste in Contemporary India: Beyond Organic Solidarity* (Menlo Park: The Benjamin/Cumming Publishing Co., 1978), p. 128. The term "scheduled tribes" refers to a list of indigenous tribal populations who are entitled to much of the same compensatory treatment as scheduled castes.

¹² "Priest's decapitated body found in jungle," *South China Morning Post*, October 30, 1997.

¹³ "Priest found beheaded," *The Toronto Star*, October 30, 1997.

¹⁴ "Priest's decapitated body...", *South China Morning Post*.

¹⁵ See also Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1999).

¹⁶ Report submitted by Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, Special Rapporteur, in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1996/23, Addendum, Visit to India, E/CN.4/1997/91/Add.1 (February 14, 1997), para. 57.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 58.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 65.

exploitation of religion. Occasionally the militantism of these extremists significantly (although marginally) affects the situation of Christians in the religious field and within society in general. The Special Rapporteur was informed of isolated cases of murders of and attacks on members of religious orders, including nuns in Bihar and Kerala.¹⁹

After the rapporteur's visit in December 1996, the situation deteriorated significantly.

The National Commission for Minorities

In 1998 the National Commission for Minorities conducted numerous investigations into attacks on Christian communities.²⁰ The majority of its investigations took place in the states of Gujarat (see below), Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. Human Rights Watch spoke to Tahir Mahmood, the chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities. He claimed that the commission had been flooded with complaints from all over the country:

Similar atrocities have taken place against Muslim communities in the past fifty years. Now there is a shift of focus to Christians. These are deeply sentimental issues. Stories of coerced conversions of low-caste and tribal Hindus to Christianity are doing much harm. Society has been poisoned and the central government has been a silent spectator.²¹

Although the commission has submitted numerous reports on the incidents investigated, the government has done little to implement the commission's recommendations. As explained by Chairperson Mahmood:

We have sent eighteen special reports to the states. If they concern entire communities or the union territories then they also go to the central government.... Since 1992 our annual reports have not been tabled in Parliament. In 1996, I cleared the arrears, and the reports are now up to date. Soon after the reports were finally tabled, the government fell [in April 1999].... The BJP uses its status as a caretaker government as an excuse not to do anything—unless it is something they want to do; then they say they have all the powers. The government is not barred from taking action in the absence of tabling the reports. They can take action and then report to Parliament. But they will sleep over it.²²

Commenting on the nexus between political parties and communal attacks, the chairperson added:

The BJP talks of distancing itself from guilty bodies, but no action is taken in that direction. These are the very bodies that helped them come to power. How can they dissociate themselves from them?... This is what they said they would do before coming to power. Now they say they are secular. But they cannot stop state governments.... In Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and Gujarat,

¹⁹ Ibid., para. 69.

²⁰ The National Commission for Minorities is an autonomous body with all the powers of a civil court. The National Human Rights Commission, which has conducted its own investigations into the attacks, is a statutory body set up pursuant to the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is a constitutional body set up pursuant to Article 338 of the Indian constitution. It has been entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that the safeguards and protections that have been given to scheduled castes and tribes are implemented by the various implementing agencies.

²¹ Human Rights Watch interview, New Delhi, May 3, 1999.

²² Ibid. In the wake of increasing attacks on Christian institutions in 1998, the National Commission for Minorities has also set up a minority education cell whose "work is increasing day by day." When asked why attacks on Christian institutions were on the rise, the commission chairperson responded, "It is presumed that educational institutions are centers of missionary activity. Also, in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, the Hindu groups are forcing their own traditions onto others in direct violation of Article 28 of the constitution." Article 28 prohibits compulsory religious instruction in any educational institution recognized by the state or in receipt of state funds. See also footnote 58.

even criminals are becoming communally selective thanks to the policies of the central government. There is a nexus between criminality and communalism, and the credit goes exclusively to the policies of the BJP. Someone has to take responsibility. Communalization of politics is not new. Communalization of crimes is a new phenomenon.²³

The Sangh Parivar

The Hindu organizations most responsible for violence against Christians are the VHP, the Bajrang Dal, and the RSS. According to a former RSS member, these groups cannot be divorced from the ruling BJP party: “There is no difference between the BJP and RSS. BJP is the body. RSS is the soul, and the Bajrang Dal is the hands for beating.”²⁴ The RSS was founded in the city of Nagpur in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar with the mission of creating a Hindu state. Since its founding, it has propagated a militant form of Hindu nationalism as the sole basis for national identity in India. According to the RSS, both the leaders of India’s nationalist movement and those of post-independence India failed to create a nation based on Hindu culture.²⁵ More than fifty years later, the RSS still sees itself as the antidote to what it considers the dangerous tendencies of modern-day India: “the erosion of the nation’s integrity in the name of secularism, economic and moral bankruptcy, incessant conversions from the Hindu fold through money-power, ever-increasing trends of secession, thought patterns and education dissonant with the native character of the people, and State-sponsored denigration of anything that goes by the name of Hindu or Hindutwa.”²⁶ Western thought and civilization are perceived as enemies of Hindu culture. Religions such as Islam and Christianity are depicted as alien to India, as they are the religions of foreign invaders—the Mughals and the British.²⁷

The RSS believed that the liberation of the Hindu state required what it termed *sarvangeena unnati*, or all-round development of the nation. The RSS wanted “the entire gamut of social life” to be designed “on the rock bed of Hindu nationalism,”²⁸ a goal that inspired the creation of RSS political, social, and educational wings, a family of organizations that is now referred to collectively as the sangh parivar.²⁹

²³ Human Rights Watch interview, New Delhi, May 3, 1999.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999.

²⁵ The RSS did not play an active role in the nationalist struggle for independence, as it had several ideological differences with the Indian National Congress. Started in 1885, the Indian National Congress was initially a forum for the discussion of political reforms that quickly transformed itself into an all-India nationalist organization. The nationalist struggle concentrated solely on ending British rule in the country, while the RSS believed that restoring Hinduism, and not merely obtaining political independence, should constitute the core of the movement. In the eyes of the RSS, the British and Muslims were its enemies, and it was vehemently opposed to the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan. The RSS was therefore particularly critical of what it termed the Congress leaders’ policy of “appeasement of the Muslims.” Similar criticisms were at the root of Mahatma’s Gandhi’s assassination in 1948 at the hands of Nathuram Godse, a Hindu nationalist and allegedly a former member of the RSS. Following Gandhi’s assassination, the RSS was officially banned in India. After its ban, the RSS began to get more involved in politics. It also began organizing several social welfare activities, in an attempt to remove the impression that it was primarily a paramilitary organization. Its contribution to community service projects in a wide variety of fields was recognized by the Indian government, and the RSS was given permission to participate in the Republic Day parade in 1963. The RSS was banned once again between 1975 and 1977, when a state of emergency was declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Apart from this two-year period, the RSS and its sister organizations have been in the mainstream of Indian politics since the 1960s. Tapio Tamminen, “Hindu Revivalism and the Hindutva Movement,” <http://www.abo.fi/comprel/temenos/temeno32/tamminen.htm>.

²⁶ Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, “Sangh: A Dynamic Powerhouse,” in *Widening Horizons*, <http://www.rss.org/library/books/wideninghorizons/ch2.html>. Hindutwa, Hindutva or Hinduvata refers to a movement for Hindu awakening.

²⁷ Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, “Sangh-Inspired Organisations,” in *Widening Horizons*, <http://www.rss.org/books/wideninghorizons/ch7.html>. Both Islam and Christianity were in fact introduced to India long before Mughal and British rule.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, “Sangh’s March,” in *Widening Horizons*, <http://www.rss.org/library/books/wideninghorizons/ch9.html>. The first of these organizations, the Akhil Bharateeya Vidyarthi

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) was formed in 1964 to cover the social aspects of RSS activities. The VHP organizes and communicates the RSS message to Hindus living outside India and holds conferences for Hindu religious leaders from all over the country. The most publicized of the VHP's activities was its campaign to build a temple to the Hindu god Ram at the site of the Babri Masjid, a mosque in the city of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh. The VHP, along with the other sangh organizations, claimed that the site of the mosque was actually the birthplace of Ram and that a temple at that site had been destroyed in order to build the mosque. On December 6, 1992, the mosque was demolished by members of the VHP, the Bajrang Dal, and RSS-trained cadres. The police did not intervene. The incident sparked violence around the country in which thousands were killed. Since then, the VHP has also organized a program to reconvert those who had been converted from Hinduism to other faiths.

The Bajrang Dal is the militant youth wing of the VHP. It was formed in 1984 during the Babri Masjid conflict, in order to mobilize youth for the Ayodhya campaign.³⁰ A young women's association, the Durga Vahini, was also founded at this time. Unlike other organizations affiliated to the RSS, the Bajrang Dal is not directly controlled by the sangh parivar. With its loose organizational structure, it initially operated under different names in different states. Its activists are believed to be involved in many acts of violence carried out by Hindutva organizations,³¹ including the recent spate of attacks against the Christian community in India.

The Jana Sangh Party was formed in 1951 as the political wing of the RSS. It was later replaced by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1980. The BJP is the largest of the nineteen parties that formed India's coalition government in March 1998. In addition to its important role in national politics, the BJP controls the state legislatures in Maharashtra (in a coalition with the Shiv Sena), Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh. On April 17, 1999, the BJP-led coalition was voted out of office, losing a motion of confidence by one vote.³² The government had lost its majority in Parliament when a major coalition partner withdrew its support on April 14. Because the opposition was unable to come up with an alternative government, the BJP-led coalition was to act as the caretaker government until national parliamentary elections in September and October 1999.

Founded by Bal Thackeray on June 19, 1966, the Shiv Sena is a Hindu party based in Maharashtra.³³ Arising out of a campaign against the growing influence of non-Marathi speakers in Bombay, the Shiv Sena became a major force in Indian politics during the 1980s. The Sena is a close ally of the BJP and is part of the ruling central government coalition. An alliance of the Shiv Sena and the BJP, with the Sena as the dominant partner, has also been in power in the state government of Maharashtra since 1995. Leaders of both parties were implicated in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and the ensuing violence in Bombay, the state capital.

BJP president and Home Minister L. K. Advani and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh were among the forty people accused by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for the destruction of the mosque.³⁴ Also on the list were Murli Manohar Joshi, the former chief minister of Maharashtra, and Bal Thackeray, the leader of the Shiv Sena. The CBI charged all of the accused with "criminal conspiracy, intentional destruction

Parishad (ABVP), emerged from a student movement and grew into a Hindu nationalist student organization. To combat the educational system introduced by the British, educational institutions collectively known as Vidya Bharathi were set up throughout the country with the purported aim of inculcating "discipline, patriotic outlook, love for mother tongue, high moral values and Hindu principles" into education. Concerned by the work of Christian missionaries in remote tribal areas, the Bharateeya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (BVKA) was founded in the early 1950s to check proselytizing activities. Ibid.

³⁰ N. K. Singh and U. Mahurkar, "Bajrang Dal: Loonies at Large," *India Today*, February 8, 1999.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "BJP Government loses vote of confidence," *The Tribune* (Chandigarh), April 17, 1999.

³³ <http://www.shivsena.org/profile.html>.

³⁴ CBI is a federal investigative agency that handles cases of corruption and cases of inter-state and other complicated crimes. CBI inquiries are often demanded in cases where local or state investigations are perceived to be biased or impartial.

and defiling of a place of worship, criminal trespass and intimidation of public servants on duty.”³⁵ Advani and Joshi were present in Ayodhya when Hindu militants tore down the mosque.³⁶

The Srikrishna Commission was established in response to the notorious 1992-1993 Bombay riots that claimed the lives of 700 people, mostly Muslims, in the aftermath of the mosque’s destruction. The report’s findings were presented to the government of Maharashtra on February 16, 1998, more than five years after the riots took place. The report determined that the riots were the result of a deliberate and systematic effort to incite violence against Muslims and singled out Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray and Chief Minister Manohar Joshi as responsible. The Shiv Sena-BJP government, however, refused to adopt the commission’s recommendations and instead labeled the report “anti-Hindu.”³⁷

RSS Training

The structure of the sangh parivar is premised on the notion that a strong and unified Hindu society can only be achieved through discipline and organization. The sangh therefore recruits young boys and men for local cells known as *shakhas* and provides them with extensive physical and ideological training for the purpose of creating a group of volunteers full of “Hindu fervor” with military-like discipline.³⁸ Organized on the principle that only a militant and powerful Hindu movement can counter threats from outsiders, the sangh has set up approximately 300,000 shakhas all over the country, each with an estimated fifty to one hundred participants.³⁹ Training typically involves physical-fitness activities as well as the singing of patriotic songs and a discussion of national events and problems. At the end of each session, participants line up in front of the sangh’s saffron flag and recite the prayer *Namaste Sada Vatsale Matrubhoomi* (My salutation to you, loving Motherland).⁴⁰

Apart from the shakhas, the sangh also organizes graded-training camps known as *sangha shiksha vargas* at provincial and national levels at regular intervals. These camps attempt to indoctrinate the *swayamsevaks* (RSS volunteers) with the belief that India is a nation for Hindus alone, the nation’s original inhabitants who have shaped its culture and society. Participants are also told that Hindus have long suffered at the hands of foreign invaders, namely, Muslim rulers and the Christian British.⁴¹

Conversions

Hindu nationalist leaders continually propagate the notion that Christians, despite their small numbers, could outnumber India’s 82-percent Hindu majority early in the next century. Several state governments have threatened to ban Christian conversions altogether, while Hindu nationalists have launched their own “reconversion programs” and have called on the government to expel all missionaries from the country and stop the flow of foreign funding to “proselytizing agencies working under the various humanitarian garbs.”⁴² B. L. Sharma, central secretary of VHP, has charged: “We were slaves for 1,000 years, and now we have opened our eyes.”⁴³ Sharma demanded that the government “throw out these people who are out to convert Hindus and ruin our culture, language and attire.”⁴⁴ Onkar Bhave, also a VHP leader, announced: “We want to stop this

³⁵ “Top BJP leaders accused of razing medieval mosque,” Inter Press Service, October 6, 1993.

³⁶ “New Delhi charges top Hindu politicians with mosque razing,” Agence France-Presse, October 5, 1993.

³⁷ “Srikrishna report indicts Thackeray, Joshi,” *Indian Express* (Bombay), August 7, 1998.

³⁸ “The Institutional Composition of Hindutva,” <http://www.foil.org/politics/hindutva/hindorg.html>. The Forum of Indian Leftists (FOIL) was founded in May 1995 in an effort to unite Indian American groups across North America against the surge of Hindutva forces in India.

³⁹ Tamminen, “Hindu Revivalism....”

⁴⁰ Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, “The Sangh Methodology,” in *Widening Horizons*, <http://www.rss.org/library/books/wideninghorizons/ch5.html>. Saffron is the official color of sangh parivar organizations and is also a color often associated with Hinduism.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² H. V. Seshadri, “Meeting the Threat of Conversion,” in *R.S.S.: A Vision in Action* (October 1998), <http://www.rss.org/library/books/vision/ch3.html>.

⁴³ Filkins, “Christians under fire...,” *Los Angeles Times*.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

conversion business.... They are not propagating religion; it is political slavery.... They want to turn the poor into Christians so together they can say to Hindus, 'Get out of India.' They want to break India into different pieces."⁴⁵

The RSS sees Christian missionaries as posing a threat to Hinduism, particularly in the northeastern part of the country where three tiny states have Christian majorities. The sangh accuses missionaries of being responsible for the insurgencies and separatist movements in the states of this region. It also blames the Indian government's "secular policy" which allowed these missionaries to continue their work even after the British left India in 1947.⁴⁶ Of equal concern to the RSS is the work of missionaries in tribal regions. The tribals, they claim, had always been a part of Hindu culture but had been alienated from the national mainstream by the British. Even after independence, they argue, the government followed the steps of the British and allowed missionaries to work in tribal regions. The RSS considers tribals to be particularly vulnerable to exploitation and conversions by Christian missionaries as they are largely illiterate and come from the weaker sections of society.⁴⁷

In January 1999, members of the VHP reportedly drew up an elaborate plan to counter missionary activity by "reconverting" those who had adopted the Christian faith. The plan, conceived of during a nine-day meeting in Jaipur, Rajasthan, reportedly identified 200 "sensitive districts" in the country where missionary conversions had taken place. The "reconversions" were set to take place over a three-year period.⁴⁸ A month later, during a three-day plenary session, the VHP demanded that the government ban religious conversions in the country. It claimed, however, that reconverting Christians to Hindus could not be equated with religious conversions as they were mere "home-comings" for those who had been induced out of the Hindu fold.⁴⁹ VHP members also pronounced that the burning of churches and prayer halls in Gujarat's Dangs district, further described below, were part of an "international conspiracy" to defame BJP-led governments and to malign the VHP and the Bajrang Dal.⁵⁰

Imposing a "moral code"

The activities of Hindu extremists have touched many aspects of civil society, including sports, arts, economics, and education. On May 2, 1998, as part of an already growing pattern of attacks on art and artists, twenty-six members of the Bajrang Dal allegedly stormed and ransacked the house of M. F. Husain, a Muslim and one of India's most eminent and revered painters. The attack was meant to protest an "obscene" lithograph of Hindu deities Hanuman and Sita drawn by the painter more than twenty years ago. Several priceless paintings were torn down. Those arrested for the attack were released after providing sureties in the amount of Rs. 1,000 (US\$23.81) each.⁵¹ Sena chief Bal Thackeray justified the attack by pronouncing that "[i]f Husain can step into Hindustan, what is wrong if we enter his house?"⁵² In a protest letter addressed to the president, several Indian artists warned, "The offense and abuse signals a dangerous move towards an entirely instrumentalised and

⁴⁵ Kenneth J. Cooper, "In India, More Attacks on Christians; Harassment Is Greatest Where Hindu Nationalist Sentiment Prevails," *The Washington Post*, November 17, 1998.

⁴⁶ Seshadri, "Meeting the Threat...."

⁴⁷ The Bharateeya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (BKVA) was formed to prevent the conversions of these tribals, reconvert those who had been converted to Christianity, and bring all of them "back to Hinduism." The RSS claims that the work of sangh organizations has had a positive impact on the tribals who "realise that their identity is safe within the Hindu fold. By contrast, they are also realising that conversion to Christianity sucks them into a nameless, faceless replica of Western habits and tastes; their age-old values are not only obliterated but despised." Seshadri, "Meeting the Threat...." RSS's aggressive stance in converting people to Hinduism and in preventing conversions of Hindus to Christianity has also been justified with statements such as: "Militancy and intolerance become good traits when they are put to use for helping the innocent and weak in society." Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, "Sangh's March."

⁴⁸ "Massive reconversion drive by RSS body," *The Hindustan Times* (Bangalore), February 5, 1999.

⁴⁹ "VHP puts off temple issue by two years," *The Hindu*, February 6, 1999.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Artists condemn attack on Husain's house," *Rediff on the Net*, May 4, 1998, <http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/may/04mf.htm>

⁵² "Letter by Artists to the Indian President," May 20, 1998, <http://www.mnet.fr/aiindex/sahmat.html>.

recognisably fascist use of culture. An attack on creativity, of which this is an instance, is a precursor to an attempt to regiment society....”⁵³ The letter also labeled as “inflammatory” Thackeray’s justification of the attack, adding that such justifications “criminally manufacture fear rather as crude bombs are manufactured and placed anywhere to create instant havoc.”⁵⁴ This and other attempts to impose a “moral code” on Indian society have led to mounting protests against increasing infringements on freedom of expression and the violent tactics used by Hindutva organizations to enforce extra-legal censorship.⁵⁵

The BJP and its allies have also called for the “Hinduization” of education in India. As one of his first acts after taking office, the BJP minister of education, Murli Manohar Joshi, appointed scholars sympathetic to the Hindutva cause to national academic bodies.⁵⁶ At a national education conference in October 1998, Joshi introduced a proposal to “Hinduize” the school system. The plan’s more controversial points included compulsory courses on “Indian values” from preschool to graduate school, the inclusion of Hindu religious texts into all syllabi, and teacher training in Indian values and culture at all levels. The proposal, drawn up by a group called Vidya Bharati, which functions as the education section of the RSS, was ultimately withdrawn after vociferous objections from several state education ministers.⁵⁷ The Minister of Education for West Bengal stated, “The BJP is attempting to destroy the basic secular fabric of [the] country because they don’t believe in secularism.”⁵⁸

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “Rising Hindu intolerance causing alarm in India,” Agence France-Presse, May 27, 1998; “Poster campaign against intolerance,” *The Hindu* (Bombay), January 4, 1999. In December 1998 the award-winning film *Fire* by Canada-based Indian director Deepa Mehta was recalled from theaters after Shiv Sena activists trashed at least fifteen cinemas where it was playing. The film, which centers around a lesbian love affair between two Indian sisters-in-law, drew sharp criticism from the Shiv Sena which claimed in a written statement that “[i]f women’s physical needs get fulfilled through lesbian acts, the institution of marriage will collapse and reproduction of human beings will stop.” “Canadian film sets India ablaze,” CBC news online, December 4, 1998, http://www.infoculture.cbc.ca/archives/filmtv/filmtv_12041998_fire.html. In several cities, including Delhi and Bombay, Sena activists ripped up posters, smashed furniture and snack counters and warned of similar attacks against cinemas that screened “vulgar” films. The party’s Delhi leader, Jai Bhagwan Goyal, proclaimed that the movie was “a well-planned conspiracy to destroy the Indian culture.” “Officials recertify ‘Fire,’” *Rex Wockner’s weekly International News*, February 22, 1999, <http://www.queer.org.au/listarchive/queerstage/199903/msg0026.html>. Sena leader Bal Thackeray took the opportunity to communalize the issue by stating that the Sena would cease its protests provided that certain scenes were cut and that the names of the women were changed from Radha and Sita (both Hindu names) to Shabana and Saira (both Muslim names). Thackeray also accused Shabana Azmi and Javed Jaffrey (both prominent Muslim actors and members of the film’s caste) of “trying to promote an alien theme of lesbianism in the country where very few are familiar with the subject.” “India - Fire, Pakistani and pandemonium,” *Business Line*, December 15, 1998. In February 1999, the film was recertified by the Indian Censor Board and returned to theaters without any cuts.

⁵⁶ Marion Lloyd, “Hindu Nationalists Campaign to Remake Education in India,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 19, 1999.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. As of February 1999, Vidya Bharati had already set up 14,000 primary and secondary schools and dozens of colleges with a total of 1.8 million students, and sought to expand its networks in areas where Christian missionary activity was particularly strong. RSS also planned to set up a series of Sanskrit-language colleges in an attempt to make the ancient language the common language of all Indians. Vidya Bharati textbooks defend the 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid by presenting archaeological evidence to suggest that the mosque was built atop the ruins of a Hindu temple which marked the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram. Despite the forced withdrawal of the controversial Vidya Bharati proposal, the BJP-led Uttar Pradesh government followed suit soon after the national conference to make compulsory the singing of *Saraswati Vandana* (a Hindu prayer to the goddess Saraswati) and *Vande Mataram* (a patriotic song) by students in its schools. The Uttar Pradesh minister of state for primary education has reportedly been using an RSS model to train education department officers, principals and heads of educational institutions. The learning of the Sanskrit language has also been made mandatory for classes III to VIII. “Saraswati Vandana made mandatory in Uttar Pradesh schools,” *The Hindu*, October 31, 1998.

In Gujarat, the office of the director of primary education issued a directive to all primary schools in the state mandating the daily recitation of *Vande Mataram* before beginning the school session. The mandate was to take effect in June 1998. “Commencing daily educational session with recitation of Vande Mataram in all the Primary Schools of the State,” Office of Director of Primary Education Guj. State, No. 29/Ens/1/98/ch/Guj/7213-83, dated 26/5/96. Also in Gujarat, all municipal schools were instructed to celebrate the festival of Gurupurnima on July 9, 1998. In a circular from the

In January 1999, when Pakistan's cricket team was set to travel to India for a series of test matches, members of the Shiv Sena dug up the pitch at the stadium that was to host the first match, while police officers reportedly stood by, and ransacked the headquarters of the Board of Control for Cricket in Bombay.⁵⁹ The Shiv Sena also threatened violence against any member of the Indian cricket team who did not boycott the series in fulfillment of his "patriotic duty." Shiv Sena followers reportedly dumped pigs' heads outside Chidambaram stadium in Madras as a deliberate insult to the Muslim players from Pakistan.⁶⁰

IV. VIOLENCE IN GUJARAT

A majority of the reported incidents of violence against Christians in 1998 occurred in the western state of Gujarat, the same year that the BJP came to power in the state. The year began with an unprecedented hate campaign by Hindutva groups and culminated with ten days of nonstop violence against Christian tribals and the destruction of churches and Christian institutions in the southeastern districts at the year's end. Human Rights Watch investigated these attacks in Dangs district in southeastern Gujarat. The events were preceded by escalating violence throughout the state in which many police and state officials were implicated.

In February 1998 the heads of the village police attacked a prayer hall in Divan Tembrum village while prayers were taking place, and physically assaulted the worshippers.⁶¹ In April, a crowd of 400 used tractors and iron bars to destroy St. Antony's Catholic Church and several other affiliated structures in different stages of construction in Naroda, a suburb of Ahmedabad city. The crowd smashed icons and stole the contents of the donation box. Witnesses said the crowd included members of the police, the VHP, and the local BJP government. In an interview, the head of the village council, Sumbubhai Maiatbhai, admitted to attending the demolition but claimed that the church was razed because it stood in violation of a local building code. Church officials said they were unaware of any such code violation.⁶²

In June several prayer halls were burned in Ahwa town, Dangs district. On July 8, a Methodist man's corpse was dug up in a Christian cemetery in Kapadvanj and dumped near his church.⁶³ Witnesses said local VHP leaders led this desecration.⁶⁴ Attacks and harassment of Christian-run schools were also on the rise. On July 16, the Shantiniketan High School in Zankhav village, Surat district, was broken into and stoned; its playground was ploughed by a tractor. The school was run by Jesuit priests of the Loyola Education Trust. The following day large numbers of "hooligans" from the neighboring village entered the market place in Zankhav, and violence ensued. Prior to the incident, two local language dailies, the *Gujarat Samachar* and *Sandesh*, had published a series of inflammatory articles charging that the Jesuit priests were engaged in forcible conversions of tribals to

education officer, Primary Education Committee, Ahmedabad, the principals of municipal schools were informed that "Indian civilization treats Guru as equivalent to God" and that "it has been decided to celebrate Gurupurnima at each school on 9/7/98 to bring the teacher and the taught nearer through devotion on his day.... On this day Sarasvati Pooja and Prayers [must] be arranged and students [must be] given blessing by teachers and importance of Gurupurnima should be explained to the students." "Regarding Celebration of Gurupurnima on 9/7/98," Circular No. 41, For Municipal Schools Only, Umakant C. Tripathi, Education Officer, Primary Education Committee Ahmedabad.

Hindutva supporters have also defended their attempts to rewrite history books—including the assertion that the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent was part of a Christian plot to divide and conquer Hindus and Muslims—as a necessary counterweight to what they perceive as centuries of Muslim and Christian domination.

⁵⁹ Suzanne Goldenberg, "Maelstrom of militants," *The Guardian*, January 22, 1999.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Indian Social Institute, *State of Human Rights in India 1998* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1999), p. 53 [hereinafter *State of Human Rights in India*].

⁶² Cooper, "In India, More Attacks on Christians...," *The Washington Post*; *State of Human Rights in India*, p. 54.

⁶³ Cooper, "In India, More Attacks on Christians...," *The Washington Post*; *State of Human Rights in India*, p. 55.

⁶⁴ Filkins, "Christians under fire...," *Los Angeles Times*.

Christianity and that the school was admitting only Christian students.⁶⁵ The same month, suspected VHP and Bajrang Dal activists burned hundreds of copies of the Bible at the I. P. Mission School in Rajkot district.⁶⁶

On August 9, a church in Ahmedabad was demolished by RSS activists. On October 9, the Home Minister of Gujarat, Harin Pandya, threatened evangelist Roger Houstma with legal action if he continued to hold preaching and healing meetings in Gandhinagar. The next day Houstma's meeting in Rajkot was attacked.⁶⁷ On November 11, in Dahunia village in the Dangs district, several Christian tribals, including an ailing woman, were beaten up. Several Christian families in the village were forced to undergo a "conversion" ritual and bathe in Unai hot springs just north of the district. The village *sarpanch* (elected head of the village council) supported the attackers and said that Christians could not draw water from the village well or have their cattle graze with the animals of other villagers. The sarpanch also issued a decree preventing Christians in the village from working in any government or government-aided projects.⁶⁸

The state's chief minister, Keshubhai Patel, and VHP General Secretary Dr. Pravin Togadiya have both denied the involvement of sangh parivar activists in any of the attacks. Togadiya claimed that most of the incidents being blamed on VHP activists were "fits of imagination of a section of the media." "The provocations, if any," he added, "have come from the minorities, and the Hindus might have retaliated."⁶⁹ Chief Minister Patel described the incidents as minor and isolated and, succumbing to VHP demands for immediate action against the "guilty minorities," ordered an inquiry into conversions activities at the missionary school in Rajkot where hundreds of copies of the Bible were burned in July 1998.⁷⁰ In a clear indictment of Christian missionaries, Patel also threatened to ban conversions by "force or inducement."⁷¹ According to a report by the United Christian Forum for Human Rights, an ecumenical organization based in New Delhi:

The constant effort of the state government, the political leadership, the senior administrators and police officers has been to dismiss the violence as minor, to describe the places of worship as "wood and mud structures" and to point out that there have been no deaths among the Christian tribals so far. The constant effort has been to make it seem like a communal clash between two communities.⁷²

Despite numerous arrests, the assaults continued through the end of the year and reached their peak during Christmas week 1998. The Hindu Jagran Manch (HJM), an offshoot of the sangh parivar consisting of people who belong to the Bajrang Dal, VHP and RSS, obtained permission to hold a rally on December 25 in Ahwa town in the Dangs district. Over 4,000 people participated in the rally, shouting anti-Christian slogans while the police stood by and watched. After the rally, the attacks began on Christian places of worship, schools run by missionaries, and shops owned by Christians and Muslims. Between December 25 and January 3, churches and prayer halls were damaged, attacked, or burned down in at least twenty-five different villages in the state. Human Rights Watch investigated the attacks, and further details are documented below.

⁶⁵ *State of Human Rights in India*, p. 56.

⁶⁶ *State of Human Rights in India*, p. 57; Filkins, "Christians under fire..." *Los Angeles Times*.

⁶⁷ *State of Human Rights in India*, p. 59.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ "VHP blames minorities for Gujarat incidents," *The Hindu*, August 3, 1998.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ "Hit ground running: Hypocrisy over Gujarat must be given up," *The Statesman* (Delhi), January 11, 1999.

⁷² "Report of the United Christians for Human Rights/CBCI Fact Finding Team to Gujarat (Dangs, Baroda, Surat, Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar) from 1 January to 6 January 1999," Annexure X in Citizen's Commission on persecution of Christians in Gujarat, *Violence in Gujarat: test case for a larger fundamentalist agenda* ([no city]: National Alliance of Women, 1999), [hereinafter *Violence in Gujarat*]

A Campaign of Hate

Several fact-finding missions to southeastern Gujarat by local and national human rights organizations have attributed the increase in violence to the growing presence and activities of sangh parivar groups in these areas. According to an October 1998 joint report by the Committee to Protect Democratic Rights and the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee:

A well planned strategy is being operated by the Hinduvata forces in Gujarat and it aims at communalising society at the grass root level. Youngsters belonging to the age group of fifteen to twenty-five are being recruited as activists of the Bajrang Dal for this purpose. They are taught to carry out operations covertly and deny any knowledge of those incidents where communal flare-ups do take place.... The VHP has also intensified its activities all over Gujarat. Activities such as the distribution of the idols of Hindu Gods, revival of Hindu festivals, conducting of 'Artis' [prayer ceremonies] etc., are on the increase in recent months.... A well planned program to "Hinduise" the tribals is in full swing in the entire tribal belt of South Gujarat. The founding of the units of the VHP and the BD [Bajrang Dal] in each tribal locality, the regular visits and preaching of Swamis, the construction of temples for tribals, etc. are being pursued vigourously. The attack on Christian churches, disruption of prayer meetings, physical assaults on Christians, etc. are the part and the result of this programme.⁷³

None of the fact-finding missions found any evidence to support the accusation that Christians were converting tribals by force or trickery, accusations that were included in anti-Christian propaganda and distributed to the community at large:

A large number of pamphlets authored by the VHP are also in circulation.... They speak of the assault by minorities on the majority community without substantiating the charges with the sole aim of whipping up communal passions.... Even the police personnel and the administrators whom we talked to admitted that communal flare-ups have become frequent in recent months with the spurt of activities of the VHP and BD [Bajrang Dal]. This spurt in turn coincides with the assumption of power by the BJP at the centre.⁷⁴

The December 1998 attacks were at least a year in the making. On December 25, 1997, exactly a year before the rally in Ahwa town, VHP organized an anti-Christian rally in Pipalwada, a village bordering Dangs district. During the year that followed, a series of rallies organized by VHP, HJM, and the Bajrang Dal were held in Surat, Dangs, Valsad, and Baruch, all districts in southern Gujarat.⁷⁵ The message of the rallies was the same: Hindus need to protect themselves from the deceptive practices of Christian missionaries and "teach them a lesson." Throughout 1998 Christian communities, churches, and missionaries in southern Gujarat came under attack.

Ten days before the rally in Ahwa town, pamphlets promoting the rally and containing anti-Christian propaganda were distributed in Ahwa and neighboring villages. The English translation of a Gujarati pamphlet distributed by HJM in preparation for the rally reads as follows:

⁷³ "Attacks on Religious Minorities in South Gujarat," A Report by the Combined Fact Finding Team of CPDR and APCLC, October 1998, p. 7, [hereinafter "Attacks on Religious Minorities"].

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Black Christmas Day: A Report on the Attacks on the Adivasi Christian Community of Dangs District South Gujarat," *A South Gujarat Tribal Christian Welfare Council report*, December 30, 1998, p. 2, [hereinafter "Black Christmas Day"].

COME TO THE RALLY...

COME TO THE RALLY...

HINDU JAGRAN MANCH, DANGS DISTRICT

The priests of the Christian religion are scared of the awakening of patriotic Hindus and have begun insulting holy people and volunteers of the “Hindu Jagran Manch” through daily papers. This is an insult to the whole of Hindu society. It is indeed the sacred duty (dharma kaam) of the Hindu religion to teach the bold Christian priests a lesson and to put them in their place.

The conspiracy of converting gullible tribals by giving money, goods, black magic and also through threats is unearthed now. Hence, the “Hindu Jagran Manch” is determined to stop the conversions and curb all activities of Christian priests.

For the safety of the nation and the Hindu religion we have organized a massive rally at Ahwa. All Hindus are requested to join the rally in large numbers.

*Signed by Janubhai A. Pawar, President, Hindu Jagran Manch.*⁷⁶

Pamphlets distributed to announce an earlier rally on June 29, 1998, in part read:

Conversion activity by Christian Priests is the most dangerous burning problem at present in Dangs district. Innocent and illiterate tribals are converted through cheating, alluring by offering temptations and other deceiving activities, under the pretext of services, these devils are taking advantage of tribal society and exploit them. In the world, wherever these Christian priests have looted its people and have made them helpless. Lie and deceit are their religion....

Hindus, awake and struggle, continuous with these robbers who snatch away your rights by telling lies and teach these people a lesson....

*Yours, Coordinator, Rameshbhai Chaudhari, Hindu Jagran Manch–Dangs District.*⁷⁷

RSS and HJM fliers in August 1998 proclaimed, “India is a country of Hindus.... Our religion of Rama and Krishna is pious. To convert [or] leave it is a sin.” Another flier by the VHP in Bardoli, Gujarat, warned, “Caution Hindus! Beware of inhuman deeds of Muslims.... Muslims are destroying Hindu Community by slaughter houses, slaughtering cows and making Hindu girls elope. Crime, drugs, terrorism are Muslim’s empire.”⁷⁸ While a flier produced by the Bajrang Dal and VHP in November 1998 described the Bajrang Dal as a “wide organisation of youth,” “working under the Vishva Hindu Parishad,” with the objectives of “protect[ing] mother India,” “rais[ing] a loud voice against people who ignore Hindu Sabha [assembly],” raising people’s awareness against the “trapping of Hindu girls by Muslims and anti-national activities of Christian missionaries,” and working for the “protection of religion and culture.”⁷⁹ A parallel anti-Christian campaign was supported by

⁷⁶ “English translation of the Gujarati pamphlet distributed by Hindu Jagran Manch before 25th Dec. 1998,” in *Violence in Gujarat*, p. 41.

⁷⁷ *Violence in Gujarat*, p. 43.

⁷⁸ In towns outside of Dangs, members of the Muslim community have also come under attack. In several districts, inter-religious marriages between Muslim men and Hindu women are being depicted as incidents of “the abduction of girls.” The government of Gujarat has also announced that it will “probe into all such marriages, that too, only when the bridegrooms are Muslim.” “Attacks on Religious Minorities,” p. 7.

⁷⁹ *Violence in Gujarat*, p. 45. In early September 1999, in an attempt to polarize voters on the eve of national parliamentary elections in Gujarat, the VHP distributed pamphlets in the slum areas of Ahmedabad, the state capital. Among the many attacks on minorities contained in the pamphlets was the charge that Muslim men were trapping Hindu girls into marriage. The pamphlets also noted that the populations of Christians and Muslims in the country since independence have increased at

the vernacular press that printed false reports of Hindu temples being destroyed, cited an increase in the percentage of Christians in the area, printed announcements for upcoming rallies, and repeatedly labeled the Christians as the main instigators of violence in December 1998 and January 1999.⁸⁰

While Hindutva groups have accused Christian missionaries of deceiving illiterate tribals, human rights activists argue that militant groups have long used Dalits and tribals as their foot-soldiers, preying on their social and economic “backwardness” and tempting them with money and alcohol. According to John Dayal, veteran journalist and national convenor of the United Christian Forum for Human Rights: “Dalits and tribals are used as instruments. They are paid, drugged, alcoholized, they are in a stupor.”⁸¹ A local activist, who wishes to remain anonymous, expressed similar sentiments: “Hindu tribals are used to attack Christian tribals, Dalits are used to attack Muslims. High-ranking members of the RSS are never physically involved.”⁸²

Parash Chaudary, an attorney with the Center for Social Justice in Ahwa town, told Human Rights Watch that many of the people distributing the leaflets are unaware of their contents:

The local people’s consciousness is low. They do what they are told and don’t even know what RSS/VHP is. I spoke to Janu Pawar, the local president of HJM, who was distributing a leaflet that claimed that in the Bible Jesus said he was born to kill those who are not Christian. He didn’t even know what the Bible was, so obviously he did not write the leaflet. It came from someone higher up outside of Dangs.⁸³

Nevertheless, local HJM President Pawar seems to command respect from local authorities. As noted by members of the fact-finding team of the Citizens’ Commission, an initiative of the National Alliance of Women’s Organizations to investigate violence in Gujarat: “Obviously he has the backing of the Government as is evident from the way he took us to a Government office to give his views—when the officials at his very sight stood up to receive him and wait outside.”⁸⁴

The same report also found that HJM had distributed pamphlets stating that Christians would soon outnumber Hindus in the district and would ultimately demand an independent state like Nagaland.⁸⁵ These accusations were again unsupported by evidence and further undermined by population statistics: “Out of a total population of about 1.70 lakhs [170,000] the Christian population [does] not exceed 15,000. We also found no evidence whatsoever to imagine remotely that the Christian population was thinking or was even capable of thinking in terms of Nagaland for themselves.”⁸⁶

Vijay Moray, a former RSS member, told Human Rights Watch that the Hindutva campaign had been in the planning in southeastern Gujarat for years:

Two and a half to three years ago I was told that in three years there would be a revolution. I laughed out loud. Then I realized that they had been planning this slowly and intensely for the last three years. We didn’t know about it, only the top-level management did. They had also planned to get the BJP here. “When it’s our government, whatever we say goes,” that sort of thing.... For two years Swami Asheemanand along with HJM went through 311 villages of

a far greater rate than the population of Hindus, and that voters should think twice before handing the country back to a Christian foreigner—namely Italian-born Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi. “VHP unleashes pamphlet attack on Sonia, minorities,” *The Times of India* (Ahmedabad), September 3, 1999.

⁸⁰ “Details of the incidents that have taken place on 25.12.98 (daytime) in Ahwa, Dangs District, S. Gujarat,” *A South Gujarat Tribal Christian Welfare Council Report*, December 29, 1998,

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview, New Delhi, April 24, 1999.

⁸² Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999.

⁸⁴ *Violence in Gujarat*, p. 26.

⁸⁵ Nagaland is a small northeastern state with a Christian majority.

⁸⁶ *Violence in Gujarat*, p. 18.

Dangs and spread propaganda....⁸⁷ The attacks were the first phase. The second phase is the conversion process. Once people were scared, they exploited their fear and started forced conversions. They are still converting. Now I hear that tribals are being taken, not Christians. If someone takes someone for a conversion they get Rs. 500 [US\$11.90] per person from HJM. It is all for money.⁸⁸

Moray also explained the significance of caste to the structure of RSS and other Hindutva groups: “They don’t name caste in their meetings, but inside their whole structure is dominated by Brahmins and other upper-castes.... They say they want a return of Hinduism’s Golden Age when Brahmins ruled and Kshatriyas were their warriors.... Disciplined people become RSS coordinators. People who are interested in politics go to the BJP. People are divided during the training itself. The final objective is to prop up the caste system. To achieve that, RSS will abandon BJP if necessary or any other outfits. Three and a half years ago I realized that the RSS was upper-caste-dominated. I changed my views and got out.”⁸⁹

During his membership, Moray was responsible for recruiting and training new RSS members in Ahwa town, Dangs district, Gujarat, from 1990 to 1995. He described the daily rituals:

It happened from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. daily. There could be fifteen to 150 boys at a time, as young as pre-school children, ages five and six, up to college age and above. We did prayers. We stood in a circle and gave statements. We talked about pre-independence Hindu politicians. We also taught pride to the children. “We are Hindu, we have to protect our nation,” things like that. Then we sang patriotic songs and performed a sun prayer. Then we did training with *lathis* [batons] and training on how to protect the Hindu nation. Outside of the meetings, the trainers would say that the Christians are toeing the American line, that Muslims are toeing the Pakistan line, and that eventually Hindus would be kicked out of their own country. “There is no other Hindu country for us to go to,” they would say.⁹⁰

An increase in the number of Christians in southern Gujarat over the past ten years has also been used by RSS and its allies to support the accusation that tribals are being forcibly converted by Christian missionaries. Human rights activists contend that tribal conversions to Christianity must be placed in a social context. As noted by the Citizens’ Commission report, “The question of conversion cannot be considered without taking into account the background of the people involved—particularly tribals in Dangs living in abject poverty, illiteracy, and with no facility for health care and comfort.”⁹¹ Commenting on Christian conversions in India generally, the report added:

In India, if Christian missionaries have succeeded in converting certain sections of people belonging to Hindu society, this is because of the oppressive caste system that treats millions of human beings worse than animals. Sangh Parivar is not interested in eliminating the caste system as they still talk of Sanatani Hindu faith which still considers birth in any caste as the sole determining factor of social status.⁹²

According to social workers in the region, tribals choose to convert for many reasons. As one social worker put it, “People go to Christianity because they believe they can be cured of disease. They give up drinking and other habits [and thereby] improve their financial position and their domestic relations. They also convert for

⁸⁷ Originally from West Bengal, Swami Asheemanand came to Dangs to set up an ashram and organize conversions to Hinduism. “Conversions: a threat or a bogey?” *The Hindu*, January 17, 1999.

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999. The conversion rate used throughout this report is US\$1 to Rs. 42.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999.

⁹¹ *Violence in Gujarat*, p. 19.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

literacy and education services.”⁹³ Although tribals are animists or spirit worshippers, Hindutva groups have been claiming that when tribals are converted to Christianity, they are being taken away from the Hindu faith. The term “reconversion” is therefore a misnomer:

Since many of the adivasis [tribals] are not Hindu to begin with, though some have been “Hinduised,” there can be no “reconversion” from Christianity to Hinduism.... As the sangh parivar’s ideology treats Hinduism as the original and authentically Indian religion and tradition, for them any conversion from non-Hindu religion to Hinduism is “reconversion.”⁹⁴

Focusing on conversions also deflects attention from other possible motivations underlying the attacks. As is often the case in organized communal incidents, the motivation is political in nature. As John Dayal noted:

Tribals have been pauperized. Forests have been made into reserved forests. Tribals are denied the right to use forest produce. They go to work in the fields of the upper castes; women’s sexual exploitation is endemic. Evangelical empowerment leads to education that tells them that they are equal. They are free. Still they are being exploited, they do not get decent wages, this is how they live despite the constitution. Not only does it rock the boat, it turns it upside down.⁹⁵

A social activist who has lived and worked in Dangs district for the last six years explained some of the possible political motivations underlying increased violence in the area:

The Hindus want to rally the tribals and in order to do so they have to target the Christians. They want to rally them for multiple reasons. The first is to achieve an immediate political objective. The tribal belt of Gujarat has traditionally been a Congress Party base. To break the base and make a BJP entry they played the communal card. The BJP has only six or seven of the twenty-six reserved seats for scheduled-tribe MLAs [members of legislative assembly]. The rest are predominantly Congress. The second objective relates to the RSS plan to establish a Hindu raj [rule]. Non-Hindu communities are treated as second class citizens. Their long-term objective is for all to accept Hindu domination.⁹⁶

The activist also contends that these short- and long-term political objectives have the support of non-tribals in the area, in particular upper-caste Hindus. Over the last several years, tribals have been formulating a movement for self-rule through implementation of the fifth schedule of the constitution in the eastern belt. The fifth schedule calls for autonomous councils in tribal areas that would possess many decision-making powers and would exert control over development funds. Non-tribals whose authority is threatened by the movement are able to use the communal incidents and divisions among tribals on religious grounds to successfully undermine the movement.

Violence in Dangs District, Southeastern Gujarat

Dangs district in southeastern Gujarat on the Maharashtra border is a remote forest area populated predominantly by tribal communities. According to the 1991 census, a total of 144,091 people lived in a total of 311 villages.⁹⁷ The current population is estimated at 170,000. Human Rights Watch visited Dangs in April 1999. According to Reverend Gaikwad, superintendent of the Church of North India in Dangs: “We were established in 1907, the year the Christianity came to Dangs. There have been no incidents since then. When the

⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

⁹⁴ *Violence in Gujarat*, p. 19.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, New Delhi, April 24, 1999.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

⁹⁷ “Report of the United Christians for Human Rights...,” Annexure X in *Violence in Gujarat*.

BJP [state] government appeared [in 1998] we see this violence.”⁹⁸ Gaikwad and other Dangs residents argue that the main casualties of the violence and propaganda have been tribal relationships and tribal culture. The incidents have destroyed work and family relationships—particularly in families with both Christian and Hindu members—while the practice of tribal rites and rituals continues to decline.⁹⁹

The district is currently home to eighteen Christian denominations. With many groups actively involved in proselytizing, the population of tribal Christians in the area increased significantly between the 1981 and the 1991 census.¹⁰⁰ Though Hindutva groups have warned that conversions will only increase and have used this warning as a rallying point for Hindus and non-Christian tribals in Dangs, the district police have no reported incidents of forced conversions to Christianity.¹⁰¹

In December 1998, the Dangs district collector (a local government official) gave permission to HJM to carry out a rally on Christmas day in Ahwa town. Approximately ten days before December 25, pamphlets promoting the rally and containing anti-Christian propaganda began appearing throughout Ahwa town and surrounding villages. Over 4,000 people participated in the rally, mainly from outside Ahwa, shouting anti-Christian slogans as the police stood by and watched. Later in the day, during a meeting at the center of town, the collector was garlanded by rally organizers. Following the meetings, the attacks began on Christian places of worship, schools run by Christian missionaries, and shops owned by Christians and Muslims. The attacks continued into the first week of January 1999 and ultimately led to nationwide protests calling for the dismissal of the BJP-led state government.

On the night of December 24 and early morning on December 25, truckloads of participants from outside Dangs district began arriving in Ahwa town in preparation for the rally. The town’s main road was decorated with saffron flags and banners, prominent sangh parivar symbols, while rally organizers drove through the town in jeeps, shouting anti-Christian slogans and calling on the people of Ahwa to attend the rally.¹⁰² Two days before the rally, an Ahwa town resident, who wishes to remain anonymous, was present at a meeting organized by local VHP President Pradip Patil. According to the resident, Patil was addressing a crowd and encouraging them to participate in the rally. “He was saying that even if they cut up Christians and throw them, nothing can happen to them. ‘The government is ours,’ he said. ‘Don’t worry. Up to Delhi the government is ours. Even if I call [Prime Minister] Vajpayee, he won’t say anything.’ He was getting the people ready for the rally.”¹⁰³

At approximately 11:30 a.m. on December 25 the rally began. For the next several hours, rally participants circled the town, shouting anti-Christian slogans and carrying banners and placards as they passed Christian institutions, many of which were hosting Christmas day festivities. Reverend Gaikwad told Human Rights Watch:

Why they started we do not know. They wanted to harass us, demolish the prayer halls. They [say] that we are forcibly converting people. On December 25, 1998, we were busy with Christmas programs. They purposely did this to harass us. They came from outside villages to gather for the rally, they were given money to participate. Hindu Jagran Manch organized this. The same people who have been forcibly reconverting the Christians... Some were arrested; we do not know what the policy is. Even when the deputy superintendent of police takes action, the state ministers force him not to.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21-22, 1999.

¹⁰⁰ “Conversions: a threat...,” *The Hindu*.

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Deputy Superintendent of Police, M. A. Chawla, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999; Human Rights Watch interview with Sub-divisional Magistrate S. N. Chaudary, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999.

¹⁰² “Black Christmas Day,” p. 4.

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999.

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

At 5:00 p.m. the rally culminated in a meeting on the local school grounds. The Christian community was again made the target of speeches that openly instigated people to engage in violence against members of minority communities. While the meeting was taking place, ten to fifteen tribal Christians, mostly women, were identified in the marketplace by rally participants who began pelting them with stones. Three women and one child were injured.¹⁰⁵ Soon thereafter, Christians began throwing stones at meeting participants. The participants split into two groups. One group headed toward the Church of North India while the other made its way to Deep Darshan High School. On its way to the church, the angry mob destroyed several Christian and Muslim shops, being careful to spare those that carried saffron flags. As the mob approached the church, police, including members of the State Reserve Police Force, began indiscriminately lathi-charging (charging with batons) and firing tear gas at the mob and at Christian by-standers in the crowd. Several Christians were also beaten up by the police even after they entered their own homes.¹⁰⁶

In the meantime, the second group made its way to Deep Darshan, a high school run by Christian missionaries but open to all children. The crowd threw stones, damaging the roof and breaking the windowpanes of the boys' hostel. In a letter addressed to Prime Minister Vajpayee, Sister Carmen Borges, principal of Deep Darshan High School, appealed for government intervention to "help restore peace and amity" in the region. The letter also provided details of the attack:

On the 25th of December, 1998... the Adivasi Boys' Hostel of the Deep Darshan High School was attacked by a mob of about 120 people. They pelted stones on the roof, damaging it and broke the window panes. As this occurred on Christmas day, the hostel inmates (all of them belonging to the tribal community) were away on holiday. The stoning would otherwise have caused serious injuries to our students.... The majority of our students belong to the deprived and marginalised section of the society.¹⁰⁷

Later in the night of December 25, truckloads of rally participants returned to the villages surrounding Ahwa town and began destroying prayer halls and assaulting Christian villagers. The same villagers were then taken to Unai hot springs and forced to undergo a reconversion ritual and become Hindus. In the eyes of the converters, the villagers were being brought back into the Hindu fold. Originally tribals, or animist spirit worshippers, they had never left the Hindu fold to begin with.

Jamuna Bhen, a thirty-year-old agricultural laborer, described the attack on her church in Jaman Vihar village:

The Hindus removed the ornamentation from our church on December 25. They threatened us by saying that they will set the church house on fire. Then they started taking down the roof tiles. This was around 8:00 p.m. There were one hundred to 200 people who came from other villages. They said, "We will burn everything." We begged them not to. We said, "Don't do this," and said we will become Hindu.¹⁰⁸

Like many villagers that night, Jamuna Bhen was taken to Unai hot springs to be "reconverted" to Hinduism.

¹⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with eyewitnesses, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999; "Black Christmas Day," p. 5; "Christmas Day 1998 and Thereafter," Submission Made to the Special Bench of the National Commission of Minorities by the United Christian Forum for Human Rights (Gujarat), January 7, 1999, Annexure I in *Violence in Gujarat*.

¹⁰⁶ "Christmas Day 1998....," Annexure I in *Violence in Gujarat*.

¹⁰⁷ "Memorandum to Honourable Prime Minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee," Annexure VI in *Violence in Gujarat*. On December 26, 1998, activists from the Bajrang Dal also attacked the Navjyot school in Dangs, assaulted the school's principal, and burned a jeep and motorcycle. "Black Christmas Day." Navjyot and Deep Darshan are the only two fully functional schools in the district. Of the 840 students in Deep Darshan, only one hundred are Christian, and of the twenty-four staff members, only seven are Christian. Similarly, only thirty out of 225 students at Navjyot are Christian. Moreover, neither of the schools has ever been involved in conversion activities. *Violence in Gujarat*, pp. 18, 27.

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

They took us to Unai hot springs, they took twenty-five people and converted us.... First we went to a swami. Then they gave us food and took us to the hot springs. They took our photos and gave us photos of Hanuman [a Hindu deity] and gave us a saffron-colored flag. Then they forced us into the water, all twenty-five of us. Then we were brought home. I started feeling sick in my stomach; I had a fever. They said, “You are now Hindu,” but we remain Christian.¹⁰⁹

Kashubhai Gulab, a sixty-year-old tribal of Jamla Pada village, described the attack on his church:

At 11:30 p.m. they came and destroyed our church, they set it on fire. They set fire to the table, chair and clock inside. The drums used for prayer were also destroyed. There were people from seven to eight different villages. Seven hundred to 800 people came in trucks. They came with *trishuls* [tridents], finger weapons, all mythological Hindu weapons.¹¹⁰

According to thirty-five-year-old Anand Bhai Kasubhai, also of Jamla Pada village, the attackers also engaged in looting: “Rs. 1,500 [US\$35.71] was taken from Suman Ignu’s house. They also took six chickens and damaged the roof of the house. But they did not take us for conversion.”¹¹¹

Human Rights Watch also spoke to Gumujbhai, local HJM secretary at the time of the rally, who denied any wrongdoing on the part of rally participants. He claimed that those marching said nothing against Christians. Human Rights Watch, however, heard a tape recording of the rally in which the following slogans were raised (translated from Hindi):

There is a noise in the streets
That the Christians are thieves
Hindus rise
Christians run
Whoever gets in our way
Will be ground into dust.

Hindus are brothers
Praise mother India
Praise Lord Ram
Who will protect our faith?
Bajrang Dal, Bajrang Dal
Praise Lord Hanuman.¹¹²

When asked about the destruction of churches, prayer halls, and schools, Gumujbhai responded, “These are all lies, we did not touch a single church. They broke it themselves to get money from the government. There were no physical assaults. We don’t know who attacked Deep Darshan school. I told everyone not to touch the churches. They [the Christians] wanted new churches and were given money to replace them.... Some of the churches were even burned by Christians in order to place the blame on Hindus.”¹¹³

Gumujbhai also claimed that between December 25, 1998, and the time of the Human Rights Watch interview on April 22, 1999, thousands of people had been converted to Hinduism in Dangs district alone.

Every day in the morning people get converted, around fifty a day. No force is used. We explain that outside Christians come and create problems and that we need to stick together. Like that

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

¹¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

¹¹² Translation by Human Rights Watch.

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999.

they listen. First we go to Unai [hot springs], then to the ashram to do a prayer before Hanuman. Then they get a locket with Hanuman inside to wear around their neck. They also get a photo for their home. It is organized by HJM. At 8:00 a.m. every morning we go, from all over Dangs. They think of themselves as Hindu now.¹¹⁴

Gumujbhai emphasized that none of the conversions were done by force. Several villagers who had gone through the process, however, told Human Rights Watch that they converted out of fear and intimidation. Human Rights Watch also spoke to Janubhai, a resident of Gadvi village, and a former member of HJM:

We used to organize against Christians. That day [of the rally] they did a little more. Christians give insults against Hindu gods. This is not a fight against people but their beliefs. The Congress party uses Christians as vote banks. BJP is a Hindu party, and everyone knows that. BJP knows that they won't get Christian votes. In the last twenty-five to thirty years, [Dangs district] went from 500 to 15,000 Christians. They were all Hindu before that.... Reconversions are now taking place and the new Christians [those who converted in the past year] are getting scared. Just the other day two men came to me and said, "Make us Hindus." I sent them to HJM and they were taken to Unai [hot springs].¹¹⁵

Janubhai, as well as other Hindus and Christians in the area, attributed the increase in "reconversion" activity to the arrival of Swami Asheemanand in Dangs district in early 1998: "Since Swami Asheemanand came to town, four to five thousand conversions have taken place. They convert new Christians. The old Christians are too fixed."¹¹⁶ Swami Asheemanand has also been credited with creating the hot springs conversion ritual.

When asked about the structure of leadership of HJM and its sister organizations, Janubhai responded:

People take leadership in turns, and there is no fixed membership. I'll go back to it if they need me, if the Christians do wrong. There will be problems in the future. Now it has quieted down because they put the brakes on the Christians. VHP and Bajrang Dal continue with their work and will work more during [national parliamentary] elections. Christians will vote for Congress always. We want BJP to win. BJP, VHP, and Bajrang Dal all are one; it is only the type of work that is different.¹¹⁷

When asked about the mandate of the various groups, Janubhai explained:

The VHP is for the promotion of religion, the Bajrang Dal is for the protection of Hindus, and the BJP is for politics. The work systems are different, but the aim is the same. We all want *akand bharat*: all nations under India. We want what we had before independence, minus the British. We should have a Hindu nation. Other religions can do whatever they want but they should not insult Hinduism. We also don't want them to distribute their vote but to give it to the Hindus. Everyone will come together to support against [the] Congress [party].... We have no problems with the police.¹¹⁸

Response of the State and Local Administrations

Between December 25, 1998, and January 3, 1999, in Dangs and neighboring districts, over twenty churches were burned or destroyed, and scores of individuals were physically assaulted, in some cases tied and beaten up and robbed of their belongings while angry mobs invaded and damaged their homes. Rallies continued

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

to take place in several districts for the sole purpose of intimidating and terrorizing Christian community members. According to an article in *The Hindu*, “The disturbances broke out only in [those] tribal-dominated areas where the BJP failed to make inroads in the last few elections, despite setting up a special tribal cell in the party. The division on religious grounds could ensure support to the BJP of the majority community voters among the tribals.”¹¹⁹

The role of the district collector and the deputy superintendent of police (DYSP) has also come under scrutiny. Prior to the rally, the Christian community had submitted four memoranda to the district collector, the chief minister of Gujarat, and the National Commission for Minorities all warning of the potential for violence and destruction should the rally be allowed to take place.

The collector, who was aware of the distribution of anti-Christian literature and the distribution of trishuls (tridents) and other weapons in the area, informed the groups that he had already given permission for the rally but that “appropriate arrangements” for police protection would be made. The collector also stated that the DYSP’s report indicated that there was no danger of violence, despite the fact that several churches in the area had already been burned the previous month.¹²⁰ Despite a heavy police presence, the destruction continued late into the night and continued for the next week. During the meeting that followed the rally, the collector was asked to approach the dais and was garlanded by rally organizers. As part of a placating exercise that accompanied Prime Minister Vajpayee’s visit to the area, the collector was transferred within one month of the rally but only after much of the destruction had already taken place, and after much resistance from the state government.¹²¹

A memorandum detailing attacks on Christians in Dangs was submitted to the president of the Gujarat Minority Board on January 5, 1998. A memorandum was also submitted to the Minorities Commission at Surat on August 11 detailing seventeen instances of attacks on individuals and the destruction of five churches. Gujarat’s Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel was also sent a letter dated November 10, 1998. The Dangs district collector received a similar memorandum on December 4, 1998.¹²² Prior to the events of December 1998 and January 1999, the National Commission for Minorities had already received complaints of 130 incidents of anti-Christian violence in 1997 and 1998.¹²³

Upon learning that HJM planned to organize a rally on December 25, 1998, three Christian organizations submitted memoranda to the district collector on December 18, 21, and 22, respectively, asking him not to give permission for the rally and to ensure adequate police protection for Christmas festivities. A fourth memorandum was submitted on December 24 by the South Gujarat Lok Adhikar Sang, a human rights NGO.¹²⁴ On December 23, the collector called for a meeting with representatives of the Christian community in which he was again informed of increasing attacks in the area and was requested not to let the rally proceed. He told the representatives that he would arrange for adequate police protection on that day.¹²⁵

An article in *The Hindu* on January 12, 1999, scrutinized the steps taken by the state administration prior to and immediately following the rally:

There is no plausible explanation why on the same day the Navsari District Superintendent of Police, Mr. Amarsinh Vasava, a controversial police officer, was given the additional charge of Dangs district to boss over the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Mr. Ranjan Gaekwad, a

¹¹⁹ “PM’s visit puts Keshubhai in the dock,” *The Hindu*, January 12, 1999.

¹²⁰ “Report of the United Christians for Human Rights...,” Annexure X in *Violence in Gujarat*.

¹²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ahwa town residents Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21 - 22, 1999; “Christians offered sops as churches burn,” Inter Press Service, January 17, 1999.

¹²² “Black Christmas Day,” p. 2.

¹²³ “Attacks on Religious Minorities,” p. 1.

¹²⁴ “Black Christmas Day,” p. 3; Human Rights Watch interviews, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

¹²⁵ “Black Christmas Day,” p. 3.

Christian, who the in-charge DSP of Dangs for the last few months. Mr. Vasava, whose name had once figured in an alleged pay-off scandal, was believed to be close to the BJP....

Not only that, the State administration devoted all its energies to underplay the impact of the riots in Dangs. It needlessly tried to defend the Collector, Mr. Bharat Joshi, claiming that denial of permission to the Manch [HJM] to take out the rally on Christmas Day would have caused even more serious violence. It also ignored the allegations that the Collector was present on the dais and remained silent when the Manch leaders made inflammatory speeches.¹²⁶

The same article cited a report by the collector and the DSP to the home secretary and the director general of police. The report did not mention the incidents following the rally and instead blamed the Christians for stoning the rally meeting.¹²⁷ Further evidence of government support was provided in a report by the United Christian Forum for Human Rights:

Many of them [the attackers] were mobile, riding in tempos [trucks] and in one case in a forest jeep. They were also very well informed of the location of churches/places of worship and of the homes of the Christian families. This is not surprising. Throughout the autumn, the local administration, including the civil, police and forest authorities have been trying to survey the Christian presence in the district. The survey still continues.¹²⁸ While in the first phase, no explanation was forthcoming [for] the government exercise, the collector claimed that the second survey was to identify the churches and families in order to protect them.¹²⁹

In the aftermath of the violence, local police refused to register complaints by Christian victims. The United Christian Forum for Human Rights report stated that the police force

went out of its way to ensure that there were counter-complaints by the aggressors and leaders of the mob. Since then, an effort has been deliberately on to establish 'parity' between the Christians and the aggressors both in the number of cases and in the number of protests. The collector and the police superintendent have not been able to explain that even after nearly 30 major cases of violence, the number of aggressors arrested is so small compared to the number of Christians arrested.... Coercion and intimidation still continue. Tribals and others who have filed complaints and FIRs¹³⁰ with the police are being threatened to withdraw their complaints, particularly to withdraw the name of specific Manch [HJM] activists who they have named.¹³¹

The response of the state's Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel has been to blame the incidents on an "international conspiracy."¹³² He claimed that the trouble following the rally in Ahwa town on December 25 started when rally participants were attacked.¹³³ During a two-day BJP state executive meeting held on January 16-17, 1999, the BJP absolved itself of any responsibility for attacks on Christians in Dangs. A resolution adopted at the end of the session accused the Congress party of playing the "Christian card" and criticized the National Commission for Minorities for its "biased views" on the issue. The resolution also highlighted the achievements of the then ten-month old Keshubhai Patel government.¹³⁴

On February 1, 1999, the National Commission for Minorities submitted its final report on attacks on Christians in Gujarat to President K. R. Narayanan. The commission held the sangh parivar-sponsored

¹²⁶ "PM's visit...", *The Hindu*.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ See also "Christians offered sops...", Inter Press Service.

¹²⁹ "Report of the United Christians for Human Rights...", Annexure X in *Violence in Gujarat*.

¹³⁰ First Information Report: the first report, recorded by the police, of a crime.

¹³¹ "Report of the United Christians for Human Rights...", Annexure X in *Violence in Gujarat*.

¹³² "Gujarat Govt sees 'international plot'," *The Hindu*, January 25, 1999.

¹³³ "Christians offered sops...", Inter Press Service.

¹³⁴ "Gujarat BJP washes hands of attacks," *The Statesman*, January 18, 1999.

“reconversion” of tribals under a “homecoming campaign” responsible for the abuses. The commission also blamed the state government for its “inept handling of the situation.”¹³⁵ While submitting the report, NCM Chairperson Tahir Mahmood and other commission members expressed their concern over the growing incidence of violence under an “inspired campaign” for “religious cleansing of the minorities” in Gujarat and Orissa, a campaign that was spreading to other parts of the country. The report also observed that the sangh parivar outfits were being helped by “outsiders” and local “swamis” in organizing their campaigns.¹³⁶

Within a span of seven months, the National Commission for Minorities submitted three reports on the incidents in Gujarat. In an unprecedented move, the commission recommended that the central government initiate action under Article 355 of the Indian constitution, which authorizes the center to direct any state government to faithfully implement select provisions of the constitution and the People’s Representation Act, and to guarantee the rights of minorities and the separation of law and religions.¹³⁷

A special branch of the commission elicited testimony from senior officers in Gujarat, including the chief secretary of the state, as well as members of the Bajrang Dal and the BJP. The commission held that the Gujarat government was guilty of “inadequacy of action or neglect” although it could not determine whether the neglect was deliberate. “Certainly there was neglect and inaction in many cases at the higher level,” Chairperson Mahmood told Human Rights Watch. “At the same time, at the lower level, district-level officers and lower-level officers were actively involved in some incidents. Also we found no evidence of forced conversions to Christianity anywhere.”¹³⁸ The commission has not investigated forced conversions to Hinduism. The state administration accused the commission of carrying out its investigations with a “biased mind” and of working as a “tool” for opposition parties to defame the BJP administration in the state.¹³⁹ Chief Minister Patel charged that the report was “biased and one-sided” and was released before the state had issued its own version of the events.¹⁴⁰

On February 2, 1999, a day after the National Commission for Minorities submitted its report to the president, the office of the Gujarat director general of police (intelligence) issued a memorandum to all district superintendents of police and police commissioners of the Gujarat state police. In the memorandum he solicited district-level information on, *inter alia*, the total population of Christians; the location of Christian missionaries; the amounts and sources of foreign funding they received; the addresses and telephone numbers of the “main leaders”; the number of Hindu-Christian conflict cases registered; the number and types of vehicles and weapon-owning licenses possessed by Christian missionaries; and arrangements that had been made for their security in the wake of increasing Hindu-Christian conflict. The memorandum also asked: “What type of trickery is being used by the Christian Missionaries for their defilement activities? How are they increasing it?” A dossier of all Christians involved in criminal activities and “having criminal attitude” was also requested.¹⁴¹

Soon after the circular was sent, the Gujarat High Court initiated a case against the state government to ascertain the constitutional validity of the directive. Echoing statements made in a responding affidavit by the district superintendent of police, Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel stated that such inquiries were “routine” and that the information was required to provide the necessary security to members of the Christian community.¹⁴²

¹³⁵ “Sangh Parivar behind Gujarat anti-Christian violence,” *The Statesman*, February 2, 1999.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ The People’s Representation Act prohibits the use of religion or religious symbols to promote one’s candidacy or to adversely affect the election of another candidate. Such offenses, which are seen as “corrupt practices” that debase elections, are punishable under law.

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, New Delhi, May 3, 1999.

¹³⁹ “NCM to stick to its recommendations,” *The Hindu*, January 24, 1999.

¹⁴⁰ “Indian state leader rejects ‘biased’ report on anti-Christian violence,” Agence France-Presse, January 22, 1999.

¹⁴¹ “English translation of a Gujarati circular sent by the Director Police (intelligence), Gujarat State,” Annexure II in *Violence in Gujarat*. A similar memorandum was sent requesting information on Muslim organizations, leaders, and Pakistani nationals in each district. *Ibid.*

¹⁴² “Circular on Christians routine: Gujarat CM,” *The Hindu*, February 12, 1999.

According to several villagers, heavy police protection in the area since January 1999 has helped maintain the peace. At the time of Human Rights Watch's visit in April 1999, however, the police protection had already begun to fade. Christian villagers were threatened that once the protection was completely lifted, the attacks would resume. Soni Bhen Gunujia, a twenty-seven-year-old agricultural laborer in Jamanvihir, told Human Rights Watch: "The same people who converted us [from Christianity to Hinduism] now threaten us."¹⁴³ Anand Bhai Kasubhai of Jamla Pada village complained that villagers are still routinely threatened by their Hindu neighbors: "The Hindus tell us to convert or they will destroy the church again. When we go to shops to buy anything, they threaten us. They're always doing that.... They said, 'We will burn you and your houses if you don't convert.'"¹⁴⁴

Kashu Bhai Gulab, also of Jamla Pada village, said: "They say once police protection goes they will kick us out of our homes and burn our houses. There were outside people also, Bajrang Dal people from Surat. They said they would bring the Shiv Sena and cut everyone up when the police goes." Gulab added that Christians were being refused government-sponsored work by the local *panchayat* (village council):

In the panchayat's road construction work they do not hire Christians. They say, "This government is ours, so we will work. It is not your government so you will not get work." There is no field work now because there is no rain, but when it starts they say they will destroy our fields using their cattle.¹⁴⁵

When Human Rights Watch asked a police constable guarding Jamanvihir village about communal tensions in the area, he responded, "There was some struggle between the two. We don't know who started it. We keep changing posts. We don't ask, our job is to see that nothing else happens."¹⁴⁶ The constables did not speak the local dialect and therefore found it difficult to communicate with villagers.

Several villagers had received some funding from the state government to reconstruct their churches. According to the new deputy superintendent of police (DYSP), a series of "administrative reforms" since January 1999 resulted in the "general transfer" of twenty-five DYSPs in the state. The only senior local administration official left who was also present during the rally was the sub-divisional magistrate. He told Human Rights Watch that the administration had received no complaints of forced conversions to Hinduism and that he heard no anti-Christian slogans during the rally.¹⁴⁷ Although he claimed that there were no longer any problems, there were still visible signs of communal tension. On April 10, 1999, eleven days before Human Rights Watch's visit, evangelist Manglu Bhai and six members of his family were severely beaten by members of the Bajrang Dal and subsequently hospitalized. Human Rights Watch spoke to Manglu and his family twelve days after the attack.

It was a preplanned attack. They drank liquor, shut off the electricity, and came here. Twenty-five to thirty people from Borkhal village and adjacent Timangatha, and Payalgodhi villages. They said, "Why did you shut off the electricity?" I said I didn't do anything. They took my sister's son and beat him. He's twenty-three. They blew a whistle and came with sticks and sickles.¹⁴⁸

Manglu's thirty-two year old wife, Situ, added: "They beat me with their hands. They said, 'We will kill you.'" Manglu Bhai explained what he believed to be the motivation for the attack:

Bajrang Dal and VHP people told us on December 25 to become Hindu. Since then they have been harassing us. They said, "We will keep beating you until you become Hindu." We said we

¹⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

¹⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 21, 1999.

¹⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999.

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999.

wouldn't come for conversion. Then they say that it is their government so they won't get arrested, and nothing will happen to them.¹⁴⁹

A constable at the police station told Situ that BJP ministers had contacted the station to warn that "their people" should not be arrested and that Manglu should be arrested instead. "The DSP didn't listen to them, though. They were all BJP ministers. The Bajrang Dal all belong to the BJP."¹⁵⁰

V. ATTACKS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Although the highest number of incidents took place in Gujarat, attacks have also been reported in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Manipur, West Bengal, and New Delhi. Most of the states are not BJP-led, but many in the north and west of India have strong sangh parivar networks. Some of the attacks, including the killing of an Australian missionary and his two sons in Orissa and the gang rape of four nuns in Madhya Pradesh, are described below. While they represent only a portion of the many incidents reported throughout the country, they are included to demonstrate that the events in Gujarat were part of a much broader pattern.¹⁵¹

A series of attacks took place between February 1998 and June 1999 in the state of Maharashtra. On February 14, 1998, a hospital run by the Catholic Hospital Association of India was attacked and ransacked, allegedly by members of the RSS in Latur, Maharashtra. On October 16, a prayer hall gathering in Kumbale village in Nasik was attacked. The prayer house was also destroyed. On December 25, armed activists from the Bajrang Dal accosted about 1,000 people attending a dance at the St. Francis School in Borivill, Bombay. The assailants were arrested and then released. In June 1999, the Shiv Sena launched a renewed series of attacks against Christian mission-run kindergarten schools, allegedly because they were not giving admission to the Shiv Sena activists' children. On June 26, suspected Sena members vandalized the Sacred Heart school in Worli, Bombay.¹⁵²

A similar pattern developed in Uttar Pradesh. On September 23, 1998, the same day four nuns were gang raped in Jhabua district, Madhya Pradesh (see below), nuns in a Clarist convent in Bhagpat were attacked and robbed. The next day, a group of men smashed the front door of the F.C.C. Convent in Bhagpat, desecrated the chapel, assaulted several nuns, and ransacked all their rooms and belongings. On September 26, activists of the Hindu Jagran Manch, the Bajrang Dal and the Rana Tharu Parishad broke into the Union Church in Amaun in Udham Singh Nagar district. They placed an idol of the Hindu god Shiva in the church and conducted prayers for two hours.

In Bihar, Luke Putaniyil of Missionaries of Charity was murdered on March 25, 1998, in Noeada, a town near Patna, the state capital. On May 15, a headmaster of a Catholic school, Brother Modestus Tirkey, was attacked in Ranchi, Bihar, while in August, a Catholic church was demolished in Kobatoli village in Gumla district, the same district where two Catholic priests were murdered in 1996. On July 23, 1998, the Delhi government attempted to close down churches, claiming that the serving of sacramental wines violated liquor laws. On September 26, a statue of St. Bernard was hacked and thrown out of the compound of Jesus and Mary College in New Delhi.

¹⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ The cases are among those documented in the Indian Social Institute's *State of Human Rights in India 1998*, and the "India Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998," in U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1999).

¹⁵² Hemant Babu, "Sena attacks Christian mission-run Mumbai school," India Abroad News Service, June 28, 1999.

Christians in India's southern states also came under attack. In Karnataka, a total of eleven Christian-run schools in Bangalore, Mysore, Hubli, Mandya, and Belari were attacked by Bajrang Dal activists on July 17, 1998. On November 22, the St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India in Kulai was attacked while a prayer service was in progress. The pastor and several worshippers were severely beaten. In Tamil Nadu, a group of Christians in Ayyampalayam in Erode district, were brutally attacked in February 1998, and the Bethany Fellowship Church was destroyed. In April 1998, VHP activists destroyed the Gibson Central Baptist Church in the Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. In Kerala the same month the Little Flower Church was attacked and a crucifix was desecrated.

Graham Staines and the Wadhwa Commission

On January 23, 1999, in Manoharpur village in Keonjhar district, Orissa, a mob of Hindu extremists burned to death an Australian missionary, Graham Stewart Staines, and his two sons, Philip, nine, and Timothy, six, as they slept in their car.¹⁵³ Over one hundred people reportedly poured petroleum on the station wagon and set it on fire. As the family tried to escape, the mob held them back while shouting pro-Bajrang Dal slogans and physically assaulted villagers who tried to come to their rescue. Staines had worked for over thirty years in a leper colony in the state.

Police officials initially arrested forty-nine people in connection with the killing¹⁵⁴ and identified them as members of the Bajrang Dal. Police also claimed that they had a photo of Dara Singh, the leader of the mob and active member of the Bajrang Dal who had been leading a campaign against conversions by Christian missionaries in surrounding areas. The case was handed over from the local police to the crime branch of the state police. It was then transferred to the Central Bureau of Investigation, which began its investigation after a first information report (FIR) was registered with the police on March 29.¹⁵⁵ Seven days after the killings, a judicial commission of inquiry, headed by Supreme Court Justice D. P. Wadhwa, was also set up to probe the circumstances surrounding the incident. The commission, however, blamed the Indian government for failing to provide it with adequate resources for the inquiry and charged that the government was not "serious" about finding the culprits.¹⁵⁶ The commission also criticized the Intelligence Bureau and the intelligence wing of the Orissa police for lacking information on mounting tensions in the area prior to the incident.¹⁵⁷

Investigations by the CBI, the Crime Branch of the Orissa police, and the Wadhwa Commission have all concluded that the conversion of tribals was a motivating factor behind the Staines murders. According to CBI Superintendent of Police Loknath Behera, Dara Singh had encouraged his accomplices to "go and assault the Christian missionaries who have come to Manoharpur, as they are indulging in conversion of innocent tribals into Christianity and spoiling our religion and culture."¹⁵⁸

While the BJP condemned the murders, India's defense minister claimed that the attack was part of an international conspiracy to defame India, while Home Minister L. K. Advani came to the Bajrang Dal's defense by proclaiming that he "knew" these organizations, and that they had "no criminality in them."¹⁵⁹ The Bajrang Dal and related sangh parivar organizations denied any involvement in the killings, though the VHP acknowledged its opposition to conversion activities of Christian missionaries. The president of the Bajrang Dal also alleged that Staines had been engaging in mass conversions rather than social work, and that helping lepers was a mere cover for his proselytizing activities.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ "Australian Missionary, sons burnt alive," *The Hindu*, January 24, 1999.

¹⁵⁴ "49 Arrested for Orissa killings," *IndiaExpress Network*, January 25, 1999, indiaexpress.com/news/national/19990125-0.html.

¹⁵⁵ "CBI chargesheets 18 in Australian missionary killing," *The Hindu*, June 23, 1999.

¹⁵⁶ "Delhi hindering probe into missionary slaying: Commission," Agence France-Presse, March 16, 1999.

¹⁵⁷ "Wadhwa panel unhappy over IB's failure," *The Hindu*, May 22, 1999.

¹⁵⁸ "Conversion may have been behind Staines killing," *The Hindu*, May 21, 1999.

¹⁵⁹ "Action, not Gimmicks! - BJP's Panicky moves do not impress," *The Statesman*, February 1, 1999.

¹⁶⁰ Natasha Mann, "Burning down the mission," *The Scotsman*, April 16, 1999.

Barely a month after the incident, at a meeting held in Bombay on February 21, 1999, members of the Bajrang Dal pledged to “uproot” Christian missionaries from India. Bajrang Dal leader Surendra Jain announced, “We will uproot you and your activities from this land. We will expose you completely,”¹⁶¹ as he accused Christians of attempting to convert all of Hindu-majority India to Christianity. On June 21, 1999, the Wadhwa Commission submitted its 250-page report to the Home Ministry.¹⁶² The commission issued a public statement decrying the incident as “an entirely unjustified act which was a slur on humanity and a blot on civilized society.” Christian groups in India, including the United Christian Forum for Human Rights, demanded that the report be made public “so that the conspiracy behind the murders is unearthed.”¹⁶³ On June 22, the Central Bureau of Investigation charged eighteen persons with the killing of Staines and his sons. Eight of the eighteen accused were in judicial custody while one was released on bail.¹⁶⁴ The remaining nine, including Dara Singh, are still at large.

In its report, the commission stated that Staines had been murdered for conducting “jungle camps” in Orissa and for preaching Christianity to converted tribals. The report defined jungle camps as “a congregation of Christians of a locality and some invitees. The purpose of the camp is said to be interaction among Christians and spiritual renewal. A jungle camp means four days of Bible teaching, prayer and fellowship.”¹⁶⁵ Though some tribals were baptized at these camps, the commission found no evidence of forced conversions. Investigators also found that Staines himself had not been involved in a single conversion.¹⁶⁶ The report also concluded that Dara Singh was directly involved in the killings, but it claimed that he acted alone and fell short of blaming the Bajrang Dal. Opposition parties labeled the report a “whitewash,” while allies of the BJP largely welcomed the findings.¹⁶⁷

Testimony solicited by the commission uncovered that on January 21, two days before the murders, Singh had revealed to his associates his plan to assault the Christian pastors who were converting people at Manoharpur. Eyewitnesses to the incident said that the mob had shouted “Jai Bajrang Dal” and “Dara Singh Zindabad” (“Praise Bajrang Dal” and “Long Live Dara Singh”) after setting fire to the vehicle in which Staines and his sons had been sleeping. Singh had previously been implicated in eleven criminal cases, some against Muslim cattle traders under the pretext of protecting the sacred cow. The commission also found that tensions ran high between Christian and non-Christian communities in Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts for some time prior to the incident.¹⁶⁸

Singh struck again on August 26, 1999 when he led an angry mob to attack the garment shop of Sheikh Rehman, a Muslim trader in the state’s Mayurbhanj district. In the presence of 400 eyewitnesses and in broad daylight, Rehman’s arms were chopped and his body was set on fire.¹⁶⁹ The incident took place a week before the start of national elections. With another massive combing operation underway, Singh continues to evade arrest—despite his numerous television appearances in the months following the Staines murder in January.¹⁷⁰

The BJP and the Congress party have each accused the other of using Rehman’s murder for political ends. In New Delhi the BJP demanded the resignation of Orissa Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang. BJP general secretary Narendra Modi told reporters, “This is the result of the incompetence and laxity of the Congress government in Orissa. Preoccupied with its own internal squabbles, the Gamang government is now busy trying

¹⁶¹ “Hindu militants vow to uproot Christian missionaries from India,” Agence France-Press, February 21, 1999.

¹⁶² “Christian group demands that government release report on missionary’s murder,” Associated Press, June 23, 1999.

¹⁶³ “Grp demands India release report on missionary’s murder,” Dow Jones International News, June 23, 1999.

¹⁶⁴ “CBI chargesheets 18 in Australian missionary killing,” *The Hindu*, June 23, 1999.

¹⁶⁵ Ajith Pillai, “Staines Murder: Documenting a Crime,” *Outlook Online*, July 5, 1999, <http://www.outlookindia.com/previous/070599/frcontent.htm>.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ “Parties differ on findings of Wadhwa panel,” *The Economic Times of India* (Delhi), August 7, 1999.

¹⁶⁸ “Staines Murder...,” *Outlook Online*.

¹⁶⁹ “Missionary killer burns alive Moslem trader in eastern India,” Deutsche Presse-Agentur, August 28, 1999.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

to extract political mileage from its own failure.” The Congress claim that Dara Singh had escaped to Uttar Pradesh “has now been shown to be a lie,” he added. “He was all along in Congress-ruled Orissa. The Congress government is therefore guilty of criminal negligence and willfully misleading the people.”¹⁷¹

One week later, on September 2, 1999, Rev. Arul Doss was killed by a gang of fifteen unidentified assailants. Doss was attacked while resting inside a makeshift church in Anandpur village, Keonjhar district. As he tried to escape, he was hit in the chest with arrows released from a bow and then beaten to death. The church was also burned down.¹⁷² Voting in Orissa for the staggered general elections was scheduled for September 25. Doss had traveled to the remote village to minister to fifteen Christian families who lived there. A statement made by New Delhi-based Concerned Citizens claimed that, “As the electioneering is coming to a close, the forces of hatred and communalism are making their last bid to power by unleashing terror.”¹⁷³ At the time of this writing, no suspects had been identified by the police and no one had been arrested.¹⁷⁴

Madhya Pradesh Rapes

One of the most egregious incidents involved the gang rape of nuns in the state of Madhya Pradesh. At about 2:00 a.m. on September 23, 1998, four nuns who operate a medical clinic in Preetisharan Ashram in Nawapura village, Jhabua district, were gang raped by more than a dozen men.¹⁷⁵ According to Father Lucas, secretary of Indore Diocese, a group of about eighteen or twenty armed men tried to enter the convent by pretending to be the relatives of a sick boy who needed medical attention. When the four nuns refused to open the gate, the men forced their way in and looted cash (about Rs. 20,000 or US\$476 worth) and valuables. They then proceeded to gang rape the four nuns who had taken refuge in a chapel inside the ashram.¹⁷⁶

The district administration claimed that the incident was a random attack by local tribals, some of whom had criminal records. Tribals constitute 84 percent of the population of Jhabua district. The district collector stated that tribals often engaged in looting, theft, and dacoity,¹⁷⁷ and that “there have been cases when they have committed rape. Only very often the rape cases have gone unnoticed.”¹⁷⁸ Others contend that tribals are often made the scapegoat in such cases because of their alleged “criminal inclination.” Christian groups in India have also been reluctant to accept that the gang rape was merely a random attack by tribals and claim that the incident was part of a series of organized attacks against the Christian community throughout the country.¹⁷⁹

The BJP condemned the rapes as “outrageous” and called for the offenders to be punished on a “most immediate basis.”¹⁸⁰ The VHP, however, accused the nuns of trying to convert local Hindus to Christianity, while VHP secretary B. L. Sharma claimed that the incident reflected the “anger of patriotic Hindu youth against the anti-national forces.”¹⁸¹ The BJP did not criticize such inflammatory remarks and instead accused opposition parties of giving the incident communal overtones. Home Minister L. K. Advani made a statement in Parliament that twelve of the twenty-four accused rapists belonged to the Christian community, adding that the statement was based on information obtained from the Madhya Pradesh government. Human rights activist and journalist John Dayal of the United Christian Forum for Human Rights saw the FIR registered in the case and spoke to the DSP

¹⁷¹ “Stunned Orissa grapples with gruesome act,” *The Times of India*, August 29, 1999, <http://www.timesofindia.com/290899/29home1.htm>.

¹⁷² “Police search for killers of Catholic priest in eastern India,” Associated Press Newswires, September 3, 1999.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ “Christian killed in bow and arrow attack in eastern India,” Associated Press Newswires, September 2, 1999.

¹⁷⁵ “Catholics protest against gang-rape of nuns,” *The Statesman*, September 24, 1998.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Dacoity is defined under Section 391 of the Indian Penal Code as robbery committed by five or more persons.

¹⁷⁸ “Catholics protest against gang-rape...,” *The Statesman*.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ “Indian church leaders blame violence on militant Hindu conspiracy,” Agence France-Presse, September 29, 1998.

¹⁸¹ “Hindu militants justify attacks on nuns,” Agence France-Presse, September 29, 1998.

in-charge. He told Human Rights Watch that no one identified by the victims was Christian and that no Christians had been accused:

On day one, they said nothing happened. On day two a surgeon's report was issued saying the nuns had been raped. Baikunt Lal Sharma Prem, a former BJP member of parliament, deputy head of the VHP and head of the Bajrang Dal, said that the nuns were asking for it. On day three, Kanchan Gupta, the editor of *BJP Today* and a BJP spokesperson said, "It's only a rape." On day four, Gupta asked that we not read any religious meaning into it. They were not raped because they were nuns, he implied. Rather they were nuns who were raped. On day five, the superintendent of police [SP] arrested fifteen people and made a case against seventeen. The nuns identified all fifteen, and the SP told them that none of the accused tribals were Christian. One week later, BJP spokespeople quoted police and government sources as saying that twelve of the people were found to be Christian. We wrote to the papers to print a rejoinder, but they refused.¹⁸²

The BJP also blamed the Congress-led Madhya Pradesh government for the crime, and accused the state government of "shying away from a CBI probe of the case."¹⁸³ The National Commission of Minorities recommended a judicial inquiry and a CBI probe into the incident.¹⁸⁴ While the NCM said it was satisfied with the action taken by the state government, and with the progress of the investigation, it pointed out that the local police had delayed the registration of the First Information Report and the medical examination of the nuns. To date, almost half of those accused are still at large.¹⁸⁵

VI. LEGAL CONTEXT

Attacks on Christians, the destruction of Christian institutions, forced conversions to Hinduism and numerous other abuses documented in this report constitute violations of domestic and international law. International human rights law, constitutional provisions, and domestic legislation together impose on the government of India a duty to guarantee certain basic rights to minority populations, to prosecute those who participate in communal violence, and to punish complicit state officials who, having the power and duty to stop the violence, do not intervene.

The preamble of the Indian constitution openly declares India as a "sovereign socialist secular democratic republic" which secures to all citizens "liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship." Though many have debated the meaning of the term secular, in the Indian context it has come to imply equality of rights for all regardless of religion, the exercise of religious freedom and tolerance, and the rejection of discrimination based on religion or belief. Under articles 14, 15, and 16 of the Indian constitution, discrimination on the grounds of religion is prohibited, and all citizens are guaranteed the right to equal treatment before the law and the right to equal protection of the laws. Article 25 guarantees the right to freely practice and propagate religion while articles 26, 28, and 30 ensure the freedom to manage religious affairs, to attend religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions,¹⁸⁶ and the rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions, respectively.

¹⁸² Human Rights Watch interview, New Delhi, April 24, 1999.

¹⁸³ "MP Government shying away from CBI probe into nuns case," *The Hindu*, October 8, 1998.

¹⁸⁴ "NCM for judicial inquiry into rape of nuns," *The Hindu*, October 24, 1998.

¹⁸⁵ "Are tribals being made scapegoat in Jhabua?" *The Hindu*, October 8, 1998.

¹⁸⁶ Article 28 also prohibits religious instruction in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds.

Select provisions of the Indian Penal Code make punishable acts of violence or discrimination based on religion. These include:

- Promoting violent attacks against groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, or language (sec. 153).¹⁸⁷
- Injuring or defiling a place of worship with the intention of insulting the religion (sec. 295)
- Committing deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class, by insulting its religion or religious beliefs (sec. 295A).
- Disturbing religious assemblies (sec. 296).
- Trespassing places of worship or places set apart for the performance of funeral rites with the intention of wounding the feelings of any person, or of insulting the religion of any person (sec. 297).
- Promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, caste or community, etc. (sec. 505(2), see also committing such an offense in a place of worship, sec. 505(3))

Three other laws should also provide protection to religious minorities. The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1988, prevents the misuse of religious places for political and criminal activities. It prohibits, among other things, the use of any premises of any religious institution for any act that promotes or attempts to promote disharmony or feelings of enmity or hatred between different religious, racial, language or regional groups. Violations under the act are punishable with imprisonment for up to five years and with a fine of up to Rs. 10,000 (US\$238).

The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, prohibits the conversion of any place of worship of any religious denomination into a place of worship of a different religious institution and for the maintenance of the religious character of places of worship as it existed on 15 August 1947. Violations under the act are punishable with imprisonment for a term of up to three years and also a fine. A person convicted of an offence under the said act shall be disqualified for being chosen as, and for being, a Member of either House of Parliament or of the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council of a state.

The Representation of the People Act, 1951, prohibits the use of religion or religious symbols to promote one's candidacy or to adversely affect the election of another candidate constitutes a corrupt practice that debases the election and is an offense punishable under the law.

International Law

In addition to its duties under domestic law, India is also party to several international treaties that impose human rights obligations. Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights establishes the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.¹⁸⁸ It provides that:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either

¹⁸⁷ Section 153 of the Indian Penal Code states in Part 1, section c: "whoever organizes any exercise, movement, drill, or other similar activity intending that the participants in such activity shall use or be trained to use criminal force or violence or knowing it to be likely that the participants in such activity will use or be trained to use criminal force or violence, or participates in such activity intending to use or be trained to use criminal force or violence, or knowing it to be likely that the participants in such activity will use or be trained to use criminal force or violence, against any religious, racial, language or regional group or caste or community, and such activity for any reason whatsoever causes or is likely to cause fear or alarm or a feeling of insecurity amongst members of such religious, racial, language or regional group or caste or community shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years or with fine or both..." Section 2 states: "Whoever commits an offence, specified in [section] (1), in any place of worship or in any assembly engaged in the performance of religious worship or religious ceremonies, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to five years and shall also be liable to fine..." Section 148 of the Indian Penal Code provides for three years of imprisonment for "rioting [while] being armed with a deadly weapon or anything which, used as a weapon of offence, is likely to cause death."

¹⁸⁸ India acceded to the convention on April 10, 1979.

individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Articles 2 and 26 bar discrimination on the grounds of religion while Article 27 dictates that “[i]n those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of the their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.”

The right to freedom of religion and prohibitions on discrimination on the grounds of religion are further elaborated upon in the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. Although not a treaty, this declaration, proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1981, provides authoritative guidelines to U.N. member states on ways to eliminate religious intolerance and discrimination. Article 4 of the declaration proclaims that, “All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life,” and that “[a]ll States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.”

VII. CONCLUSION

Following the election of a Hindu nationalist government in India in February 1998, an environment of increasing hostility toward religious minorities has been fostered by elements closely aligned with those in power. The burning of churches and assaults on Christians, including priests and nuns, are not only tolerated but are tacitly supported by the government through anti-conversion rhetoric and a systematic failure to prosecute individuals and leaders responsible for fomenting the violence. As was the case with the Wadhwa Commission report, inquiries often stop short of blaming the groups involved and instead characterize the incidents as the isolated actions of misguided individuals who remain free to attack again.

Though eyewitnesses have identified politicians and local officials as participants in the attacks, the state administration and Hindu nationalist leaders continue to portray the incidents as actions instigated by minority communities. The chief minister of Gujarat and BJP spokesmen have even blamed the violence on an “international conspiracy” to defame the political party. The prime minister has called for a national debate on conversions, while the central and state governments continue to ignore the recommendations of the National Commission for Minorities.

The government’s failure to protect religious minorities also raises serious questions as to its own commitment to abide by constitutional provisions, international law, and domestic legislation that together guarantee minorities the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion. Using Hindu nationalist sentiments to cultivate vote banks also runs counter to the principles of a secular democracy as enshrined in the Indian constitution.

Many attribute the BJP’s dramatic rise to power over the last decade to the pro-Hindu nationalist propaganda surrounding the Ayodhya campaign. Political commentators and historians now claim that the education campaign, attacks on minorities, and widespread Hindu nationalist propaganda are part of a much larger

political campaign to increase BJP representation in the lower house of parliament and to gain a significant enough percentage of the Indian vote to manage the formation of a one-party government. With national parliamentary elections in September and October 1999, one member of HJM in Gujarat indicated that the work of Hindutva groups, and corresponding violence, would only increase.¹⁸⁹ Human rights activists and minority members in communities affected by communal violence warned of similar election-related consequences.

*Human Rights Watch
Asia Division*

Human Rights Watch is dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world.

We stand with victims and activists to bring offenders to justice, to prevent discrimination, to uphold political freedom and to protect people from inhumane conduct in wartime.

We investigate and expose human rights violations and hold abusers accountable.

We challenge governments and those holding power to end abusive practices and respect international human rights law.

We enlist the public and the international community to support the cause of human rights for all.

The staff includes Kenneth Roth, executive director; Michele Alexander, development director; Reed Brody, advocacy director; Carroll Bogert, communications director; Cynthia Brown, program director; Barbara Guglielmo, finance director; Jeri Laber, special advisor; Lotte Leicht, Brussels office director; Patrick Mingos, publications director; Susan Osnos, associate director; Maria Pignataro Nielsen, human resources director; Jemera Rone, counsel; Wilder Tayler, general counsel; and Joanna Weschler, United Nations representative. Jonathan Fanton is the chair of the board. Robert L. Bernstein is the founding chair.

Its Asia division was established in 1985 to monitor and promote the observance of internationally recognized human rights in Asia. Sidney Jones is the executive director; Mike Jendrzeczyk is the Washington director; Patricia Gossman is the senior researcher; Jeannine Guthrie is NGO liaison; Sara Colm, Gary Risser and Smita Narula are researchers; Mickey Spiegel is a consultant; Liz Weiss and Adam Bassine are associates. Andrew J. Nathan is chair of the advisory committee and Orville Schell and Ko-Yung Tung are vice chairs.

Web Site Address: <http://www.hrw.org>

Listserv address: To subscribe to the list, send an e-mail message to majordomo@igc.apc.org with "subscribe hrw-news" in the body of the message (leave the subject line blank).

¹⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Janubhai, Ahwa town, Dangs district, Gujarat, April 22, 1999.