

Violence spreads in Orissa

Holy See calls " restore of an atmosphere of dialogue and mutual respect "



According to the information received from Archbishop Raphael Cheenath of Bhubaneswar-Cuttack Archdiocese, 12 people have been killed, 41 churches and chapels have been attacked and nearly 400 houses of Christians destroyed since last Monday in spiraling religious violence.

Authorities imposed a curfew in nine towns of Orissa's rural Kandhamal district in an effort to end two days of violence in which a Christian orphanage was also torched by suspected Hindu mobs angry over the murder of their leader.

Orissa officials said at least four people, including a woman, were killed in Kandhamal's Barakhama village when Hindus and Christians clashed. Lay woman was caught in the fire in the orphanage, who was previously recognized as a nun.

"Police broke up the two groups and brought the situation under control," said Satyabrata Sahoo, a top administrative official said.

Local TV stations showed an angry mob vandalising a church, throwing away furniture and setting it on fire. Villagers blocked roads with logs and boulders to stop police from entering the trouble spots.

Police said Hindus attacked Christians and set their homes on fire in Kandhamal's Patingia and Matingia villages. A church was also damaged in the same district."A mob tried to torch a school bus but police chased them away," Pradeep Kapoor, police inspector general, told Reuters.

HOLY SEE CALLS FOR END OF VIOLENCE

“In regard to the tragic news of violence against faithful and institutions of the Catholic Church coming from India, the Holy See, while expressing solidarity with the local Churches and religious Congregations affected, condemns these actions that deny the dignity and freedom of people and compromise peaceful civil cohabitation”, reads a statement released today by the Holy See press office, referring to the violence underway for days in the north-eastern Indian State of Orissa. “At the same time, it appeals to all to ensure, with a sense of responsibility, an end to all dominance and restore an atmosphere of dialogue and mutual respect”.

There have been attacks on Christians in Orissa and other parts of India in previous years. In 1999, a Hindu mob killed Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two children by burning them in their car in Orissa.

Christians in eastern India have condemned this week's killing of the Hindu leader.

When contacted, Archbishop Raphael Cheenath of Bhubaneswar-Cuttack Archdiocese said: "In December, the attack on the Christian community was confined to Kandhamal district, but it has now spread to all districts. The attackers are systematically targeting the Christians. As compared to the December attacks of last year when they targeted the Church property and buildings, they are targeting our priests, nuns and others working in the churches. Most of the priests and nuns have gone in hiding in fear of their lives."

"Had the government apprehended the criminals, who carried out the attacks in December, it would have deterred them from carrying out similar attacks this time. I'm dejected about the inaction of the government," he added.

CBCI CONDEMNS ATTACK ON CHRISTIANS IN ORISSA, APPEALS FOR SOCIAL HARMONY IN THE STATE

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) condemns the unwarranted attacks on Christian institutions in Orissa on July 8, 2008. Even before the wounds caused by the unprecedented communal disturbances and vandalizing of Christian institutions in December, 2007 got healed, fresh attacks on Christian community and its institutions have been unleashed recently by the extremist elements in Kandhamal, Orissa.

The fanatic criminals attacked the Jesuit residence in Tumudibandh Block of Kandhamal District. They devastated the institution and its belongings such as sacred statues, household articles and other valuables. They also attacked the Bhagvan Ashram, an orphanage run by a Christian, Mr. Satpati.

The CBCI deeply regrets that during the past few decades, Orissa's history has been marred by periodic communal violence and that no effective and lasting steps have been taken till date by the State Government to restrain communal elements. Consequently, the communal forces are emboldened to commit further crimes on Christian community.

The CBCI appeals to the State and the Central Governments to curb the anti-social activities of fundamentalists and their associates. The Christian community in the State has been repeatedly made victim of hatred and violence but the Administration has not strongly intervened in defense of the people who are targeted. It gives a strong impression that the attacks on the Christian community have been well planned and systematically executed.

The Orissa State Government is a constitutionally elected Government and therefore it has the obligation to treat all its people irrespective of their religion equally and protect their legitimate rights. We believe strongly that maintaining law and order should become a top priority for the State Government and it should create an atmosphere where people can live without fear. In a State where communal polarization has been on the increase, social harmony is very much the need of the hour and the Government along with the

enlightened citizens and people of goodwill should endeavor to create a just, fair and democratic society.

Most Rev. Stanislaus Fernandes
Secretary General, CBCI & Archbishop of Gandhinagar.