

## CONCEPT NOTE

### **13 Years: Observing Kandhamal Day** **THEME: Defending Freedom and Religious Minority Rights**

The diabolic attacks on Christians in Kandhamal, Odisha in two consecutive years 2007 and 2008 was much beyond a matter of shock, shame, pain and grief. The well-planned attack was a forewarning of what was to come within months. Barely after eight days of Independence Day celebration, had India witnessed the organized communal attacks on Christians, the biggest in the history of the country during the last three centuries. What began in Kandhamal did spread immediately into different parts of Odisha and other states.

**The Incidents:** The secular and democratic fabric which laid the foundation for post-independent India was torn to pieces openly by the Hindutva mobs of people who attacked more than “over 395 churches and worship places which belonged to the Adivasi Christians and Dalit Christians, were destroyed. Around 6,500 houses were destroyed. Over 100 people were killed. Over 40 women were raped, molested and humiliated. It disrupted the education of 12000 children. Several educational, social service and health institutions were destroyed and looted. More than 75,000 people have been displaced. Several cases of forced conversion to Hinduism have been reported.

Independent India chose to be a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic. Three-quarters of a century later, there are alarming trends that challenge the very foundations of the Republic our Founding Fathers laid. Global Peace Report 2016 ranks India among the 20 most violent places in the world to live in; even less peaceful country than Burundi. India is the fourth worst in the world in safety for women according to Thomson Reuters Report. India is the fourth worst country in the World for Religious Hostilities among 198 according to Pew Research Study Report in April 2015.

NDTV’s study showed that there has been a 500% increase in the last four years in the use of hateful and divisive language by high-ranking politicians. In this, 90% of the hateful comments were attributed to members of the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA). No one was prosecuted.

It is not the Christian minority alone, but other vulnerable groups bear the brunt of hate crimes. “Amnesty International India documented 721 such incidents between 2015 and 2018. In 2018, itself, it tracked 218 hate crimes, 142 of which were against Dalits, 50 against Muslims, 40 against women, and 8 each against Christians, Adivasi and transgenders”. (*The Hindu*, July 10, 2019).

There are reported cases of 122 violence against Christians, of which only 23 FIRs (First Information Reports) were registered until June 2020. The latest incident involving the murder of a young Christian boy named Somaru Madkani in Odisha, two instances of physical assaults, threats and intimidation by family members and villagers alike and social ostracism. The year 2019 witnessed at least 328 incidents of targeted violence against Christians. The victims of these violent attacks included 275 tribal, 55 Dalits, 164 women and 117 children. Out of these, 131 incidents involved dereliction of duty by law enforcement authorities. The attacks on Christians have increased consistently like 292 in 2018, 240 in 2017, 208 in 2016, 177 in 2015 and 147 in 2014. As a matter of fact, according to the World Watch List of 50 countries, India is the 10th most dangerous country in the world to live in for Christians as against 28th in the year 2014, reports by Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) – India. Christian phobia became a tool to suppress the identity, dignity and justice ensured by the Indian Constitution, to a large number of religious minorities in India.

It is time for us to reflect on what Kandhamal meant for the people of India – Dalits, Adivasis, minorities and other marginalised sections. Kandhamal violence was one of the worst incidents of Christian persecution in Indian history in 2008.

**The Call for Solidarity:** The National Solidarity Forum, a consortium of civil society groups, calls for the national meeting to generate solidarity for those who struggle for justice, keep the memories of Kandhamal alive and work for a society where such violence will not be duplicated again in history: **“Kandhamal Never Again,**

**Never Anywhere**". The organizers intend to promote democratic and pluralistic values as pronounced by the Constitution of India and good practices. Let us join NSF, civil and church based groups to secure just India.

We are sure if all humanitarian forces join hands, we can safeguard peace, justice and harmony in India. We hope to achieve positive results in these trying times and protect the democratic values and diversity laid down in the Indian Constitution so that no such violence takes place in India and elsewhere.

It is imperative for us the Church personnel that we facilitate the community be aware of the real situation and organize meeting of this sort throughout India so that it is not repeated. Over the year the challenges have multiplied.

There are a series of programme planned throughout India on different days:

- 1) **24<sup>th</sup> August 2021: Day long film screening on human rights issues including Kandhamal: coordinator: KP Sasai, Bangalore/Amrudhan, Chennai**
- 2) **25<sup>th</sup> August 2021: 11.00 AM - Public protest at Master Canteen and submission of memorandum: coordinators: Jugal Kishore Ranjit, Dani, Abhiram Mallick, Manoj Nayak**
- 3) **25<sup>th</sup> August 2021: 3.00 to 6.00 PM - National webinar and Human Rights Award presentation: Dr. Ram Puniyani, Mumbai  
Theme: In Defence of Human Rights and Democratic Freedom**
- 4) **27<sup>th</sup> August 2021: 11.00 AM - Physical gathering and submission of memorandum to the District Magistrate at Phulbani and a virtual Zoom meeting 3.00 to 5.00 PM  
Coordinator: Chandrakant Nayak, Prasan Bishoyi, Martin Pradhan**
- 5) **28<sup>th</sup> August 2021: 3.00 PM to 5.00 PM - State level virtual meeting :  
Coordinators: Jugal Kishore Ranjit, Dani, Abhiram Mallick, Manoj Nayak, Gyan Sagar Nayak**

We, the undersigned, invite you for the global webinar: **Defending Freedom and Religious Minority Rights on 30 August 2021 from 3.00 PM to 5.30 PM (Indian time).**

The participants would be priests and religious worldwide with eminent personalities joined as speakers.

**Organizers:**

Sr. Justine Gitanjali Senapati, SJA  
Fr. Augustine Singh  
Sr. Manju Kulapuram, SCSC  
Sr. Sujata Jena, SS.CC.  
Fr. Manoj Nayak