



**A Primer on Human Rights Abuses in India and
A Resolution: [A Response to Christian Persecution in
India](#)**

**Submitted by the New York Conference to the
2025 General Synod of the United Church of Christ (UCC)**

Who authored this resolution?

This resolution was prayerfully crafted and unanimously endorsed by the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ at its annual meeting in June of 2024.

Why did the New York Conference bring this forward?

For over a decade, the New York Conference has cultivated relationships with leaders from the Church of South India through mutual visits, collaboration, and public witness.

In partnership with the New York State Council of Churches, the Conference has joined other Christian, Muslim, Dalit (lower caste), moderate, and progressive Hindu partners, and Adivasi (Indian indigenous people) in advocating against the escalating coercive authoritarianism in India that weaponizes religion to strip rights from religious minorities. In the United States, the Conference and Council have joined faith-based and secular organizations to advocate for Indian minorities who face harassment, discrimination, surveillance, [lawsuits](#), and caste-based injustice from US based religious nationalist extremists including Hindutva operatives.

What does the resolution seek to do?

This resolution echoes a similar action passed by the [United Methodist Church](#) in 2024. It answers the cries of Christians, Muslims, Dalits, and Adivasi Indigenous tribal peoples in India who endure systemic persecution—including denial of citizenship, incarceration, destruction of religious sites, and violence against religious leaders.

The United Church of Christ and other mainline denominations maintain deep ecumenical ties with churches in India, such as the Church of South India and the Church of North India. This resolution aligns with policies adopted by the National Council of Churches (NCC), including [Persecution of the Religious Minorities in India and Beyond](#) and with a policy statement on [The Problem of Religious Nationalism in the US and Globally](#).

Why is this urgent now?

India, the world's largest democracy, is increasingly shaped by the ruling [BJP party's Hindu nationalist agenda](#). This vision undermines the rights of religious minorities and contradicts India's constitutional promises of religious freedom.

[2024 USCIRF update on the plight of religious minorities](#) once again recommended India be named a “Country of Particular Concern” due to severe human rights abuses. Yet the U.S. State Department has failed to act, caving to political and economic pressures.

Examples of State-Sanctioned Religious Persecution in India

- [Citizenship \(Amendment\) Act & National Register of Citizens](#). These policies exclude Muslim refugees from fast-track citizenship, effectively rendering millions stateless and deepening communal divides.
- [Alter the Constitution](#). Political support is building in the Indian legislature to strip the constitution of any embrace of secularism (which embraces pluralism does not primary any one religion over another) and socialism which serves as a counterbalance to casteism and wealth inequality.
- **Destruction of [Churches](#) and [Mosques](#)**. In 2024 alone, Indian authorities have enabled or carried out the demolition of churches and other Christian properties like in Manipur and mosques, and replacing some with Hindu temples.
- [Anti-Conversion Laws](#). Enforced in 12 out of 28 states with a number of states in South and Southwest India considering passage. These laws criminalize the freedom to convert religions and often target Christians and Muslims with fines and imprisonment.
- [Anti-Cow Slaughter Laws](#): Used by vigilante mobs to justify attacks against Muslims, Christians, and Dalits accused of harming cows.
- [Hate Speech, Crack Downs on Freedom of Speech, and Election Violence in India](#)
In the lead-up to the 2024 national elections, political officials actively stoked communal hatred, creating a dangerous environment for religious minorities. Between January and March 2025 alone, 161 violent incidents against Christians were documented—including attacks on worship services, church leaders, and entire congregations. Nearly a third of these attacks—47 incidents—occurred in the state of Chattisgarh alone.

These acts of violence included vigilante brutality, targeted and arbitrary killings, destruction of property, harassment, and intimidation, often under the pretext of preventing forced religious conversions. This violence is also fueled by Hindu Nationalists (such as [Kajal Singhala, also known as Kajal Hindustani](#)) who offer up hate speech against Muslims and Christians in India and then are welcomed by wealthy Hindu donors tied to the Modi government to come to the US to fuel hate and raise money for such activities as the destruction of churches and mosques. In June and July, 2025 Hindustani has been on tour in such cities as [Dallas](#), Raleigh and New York City.

In March 2025, United Nations human rights experts publicly raised alarm about the surge in hate crimes and violence targeting religious minorities, warning of the escalating threat to human rights as India approached national elections.

- **Suppression of Press & Civil Society**: Faith-based development groups, and academics who criticize India’s human rights violations are silenced, surveilled, and denied travel documents.

There is also a [significant crackdown on journalists](#). Many are heavily censored or have lost their jobs while others have been killed, imprisoned or had their homes bulldozed.

- **Denial of Entry, Surveillance and Incarceration of US visitors.** Christian pastor and U.S. citizen, [Bryan Nerren](#) was incarcerated without trial and fined for his missionary work. In 2018, [9 members of New York State Council of Churches](#) delegation to India were interrogated and denied entry at the Chennai airport for being Christian. The Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church was denied entry at the border when she sought to celebrate the 500 anniversary of the Reformation with Lutheran Partners in India. Interrogation is routine at ports of entry. Also, US church and denominational leaders are subject to constant surveillance and are prohibited from participating in any Christian worship and charitable activities. Financial assistance from the US charities is largely banned. Medical staff at hospitals, including those started by the Church of South India, report harassment, firings or closure of their hospitals.

Why might some hesitate to support this resolution?

Churches and ecumenical partners in India face severe consequences if they speak out. Some leaders remain publicly silent out of fear—yet privately support accountability. Others must weigh diplomatic considerations or are constrained by targeted bans on receiving international funding. We must recognize their vulnerability and stand in solidarity even when they cannot speak. We also must recognize that, in many Christian churches, the perspective of upper castes, seeking to appease the government, can be privileged over Dalits which bear the greatest burden of persecution.

What can the United Church of Christ do?

This resolution calls for bold moral leadership. Faith-based, interfaith, and human rights organizations—along with progressive Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Dalits—have long petitioned the U.S. to designate India as a Country of Particular Concern. That designation remains the most impactful action the U.S. can take to confront these abuses.

Sadly, both the Trump and Biden administrations have ignored USCIRF's recommendations. Powerful Hindu nationalist groups in the U.S., such as the Hindu American Foundation, Global Hindu Heritage Foundation, exert enormous political and financial pressure to shield India from international scrutiny. Those who speak out often face threats and defamation from these groups.

Nonetheless, those suffering under the BJP's policies are watching. They are pleading for global solidarity. They are asking us—people of faith—to raise our voices when theirs are silenced.

What will a General Synod resolution accomplish?

It will declare that the United Church of Christ does not look away from denial and fundamental human rights and the causes of religious persecution. It will affirm a commitment to human rights, religious freedom, and the dignity of all people. It will offer moral clarity to U.S. lawmakers, global partners, and faith communities struggling under repression. It creates a basis for congregational, conference and national advocacy work in support of religious freedom and human rights in India.

Above all, it will proclaim to persecuted communities in India and their diaspora allies that they are not forgotten. Their struggle is our struggle.

What is The Religious Nationalisms Project?

The Religious Nationalisms Project (TRNP) is committed to identifying the ways in which governments adopt, twist and weaponize religion against religious minorities. In contrast, TRNP lifts up the authentic practice of all faiths which emphasize love of God and neighbor and a commitment to fostering participatory democracies which allow for freedom of speech and religious practice and care for the most marginalized and oppressed in any society.

TRNP is a ministry of the New York State Council of Churches. You may view this document and view all the links by going to the TRNP section at www.NYSCOC.org. You can also sign for the monthly TRNP newsletter on the website. You can also read [Promises and Accountability](#) produced by Wada Na Todo Abhiyan formed by civil society organizations to hold the Indian government accountable to its national and international commitments

Questions?

The Reverend Neal Christie is Principal of The Religious Nationalisms Project. Reverend Christie is an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church. His email is nealchristieumc@gmail.com or 202-285-4544.

The Reverend Peter Cook, Principal of The Religious Nationalisms Project and Executive Director of New York State Council of Churches. Reverend Cook is ordained clergy in the United Church of Christ. His email is pcook@nyscoc.org or can be contacted at 508-380-8289.