



October 5, 2018

To,
Justice H. L. Dattu
Hon'bl Chairperson,
National Human Rights Commission,
Manav Adhikar Bhawan,
Block-C, GPO Complex,
INA, New Delhi – 110023

Dear Sir,

We at Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP) stand in support of the letter submitted by several citizens' organisations—Saajha Sanskriti Manch, Kashi Qaumi Ekta Manch, Nagarik Prayas Manch, Insaaf Manch, Rashtriya Inquilabi Dalit Adivasi Manch (RIDAM), and Asian Bridge—to the Police Commissioner, SSP, and the District Magistrate in Varanasi. This letter was submitted after a mob of Hindu extremists allegedly vandalised the 200-year-old St. Thomas Church in the city over alleged attempted religious conversions.

The letter from the citizens' groups alleges that on Tuesday, October 2, which was Gandhi Jayanti and, ironically, the International Day of Non-Violence, some 40-50 people belonging to the Hindu Yuva Shakti Sangathan reached the St. Thomas Church in Godaulia's Girajaghar area. The letter alleges that the mob broke the gate's locks and vandalised the church, raised slogans, and broke a notice board placed next to the church door. The church's priest has filed a complaint regarding this at the Dashashwamed police station.

The letter continues, saying that some people on Facebook on social media are spreading messages threatening the Christian community, and threatening to attack the church. It notes that people are fabricating rumours regarding religious conversions, leading to an atmosphere of fear in the Christian community. The letter states that Varanasi has been historically known for its Ganga-Jamuna Tehzeeb, and says that recent years, anti-social elements have been attempting to break the city's unity. It also highlights that the church, which is open only on Sundays, hosts people from all faiths who come to pay their respects, indicating mutual harmony, and that the church is widely respected throughout the region.

The letter says that the groups are seeking immediate action in this matter, and that arrests be made and a case be registered, so that peace may prevail in Varanasi. The groups are also seeking that security be arranged for the church, and other religious places in the city.

CJP's sister organisation, Sabrang, took note of these events in [two separate](#) pieces, highlighting inflammatory posts on Facebook. Pravin Dubey, an office-bearer of the Hindu Yuva Shakti Sangathan, [noted gleefully](#) on Facebook on October 2, "Priest of the

Gaudolia church, today the Hindu Yuva Shakti made you flee". Dubey also shared a [video](#) of another post-holder, Yogi Aloknath, in which the latter said, "*Hindu mar raha hain, dushman badh raha hain* (Hindus are dying and the enemy is growing)". More [inflammatory posts](#) with brazenly threatening language can be found on one Rakesh Chhetri's profile.

CJP is reiterating our support for Varanasi's local citizens' groups who have spoken out against this hate-filled attack and language:

1. CJP calls on the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to take cognisance of these events, and intervene if required so that peace may be preserved in Varanasi. Moreover, we are highlighting that while the attack on the church may have passed, the inflammatory Facebook posts continue to remain intact and visible for all to see on the platform. It is widely known that social media platforms are not always efficient and proactive when addressing hate. We urge the NHRC to examine these posts, and take action against Facebook so that such inflammatory speech may be curbed.

2. CJP calls on Facebook to take immediate notice of this matter, given that it is Facebook's platform that is being used to proliferate rumours and spread fear, and take action against those who engage in such activity. CJP takes note of the fact that, when testifying before the United States Senate in April 2018, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg [addressed the issue of hate speech](#), acknowledging that Facebook "didn't do enough to prevent" its own tools "from being used for harm," saying this "goes for fake news, for foreign interference in elections, and hate speech, as well as developers and data privacy." While the US Senate specifically questioned Zuckerberg on the explosion of hate speech targeting the Rohingya in Myanmar, it is clear that hate speech is a problem for Facebook in India as well, and needs to be tackled strongly and continuously.

3. Lastly, CJP urges the local administration to take serious note of this issue, and take immediate action against those responsible, including those spreading inflammatory content on social media. We strongly believe that there can be no peace without justice, and so it is vital to ensure that justice is served in this matter so that peace prevails in Varanasi. It must also be noted that this is not the first time the Christian community has been targeted in Uttar Pradesh. On September 27, 2018, The Citizen reported on a [series of reported attacks targeting Christians in the state](#), saying, "The small, few hundred strong Christian population of Jaunpur in eastern Uttar Pradesh has over the past fortnight reportedly come under concerted attack from right wing fundamentalist groups operating with the connivance of local police." The Citizen has compiled [a timeline of the alleged incidents](#).

Your Sincerely



Teesta Setalvad, Secretary

Please find attached, as supporting documents:

1. The Hindi letter from citizens' organisations that was submitted to the police.
2. Screenshots of relevant Facebook posts containing inflammatory language

Copy

1. Ankhi Das, Public Policy Director, Facebook (India, South & Central Asia), DLF One Horizon Center, Sector 43, Gurugram, Haryana 122022
2. Om Prakash Singh, Director-General, Uttar Pradesh Police, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh