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INDIA CSW urges government to take seriously findings of Orissa anniversary tribunal

On the second anniversary of the anti-Christian violence in Orissa CSW is urging the Indian government to take seriously the findings of a National People's Tribunal which concluded in Delhi yesterday. Its organizers called for international observance of "Kandhamal Day" today to mark the anniversary.

The violence in Orissa was the worst outbreak of communal violence against Christians in the history of post-Independence India and resulted in the deaths of at least 70 people, with over 50,000 being forced to flee their homes.

Chaired by the former chief justice of Delhi High Court, the tribunal has been investigating the circumstances of the original violence and current state of affairs in the Kandhamal district of Orissa. Over three days of hearings the testimonies of both victims and experts have been heard.

Impunity remains a pressing concern in Kandhamal district, with high-profile defendants released on bail pending appeal, such as Manoj Pradhan, who was elected to the Orissa State Legislative Assembly from jail and sentenced to seven years in prison following his conviction in June 2010 for his part in a murder. Fast-track courts introduced to aid the justice process in Kandhamal have thus far acquitted approximately 70 per cent of defendants and reports of frequent witness intimidation and inadequate investigation remain commonplace.

However, CSW welcomes reports that the Indian government's Communal Violence Bill has been withdrawn for redrafting and reiterates its call for the government to heed the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, in the report of her 2008 visit to India, that the legislation "should take into account the concerns of religious minorities".

CSW's National Director Stuart Windsor said, "On Kandhamal Day CSW is renewing its call for justice, fair compensation and reconciliation for those who suffered in the 2008 violence. Even after two years, thousands of Christians continue to live in limbo in the absence of adequate responses to these issues. We do, however, applaud the Indian government's significant decision to redraft its pioneering Communal Violence Bill, in the hope that the first-hand experience of religious minorities and the views of associated civil society organizations will be addressed to prevent similar outbreaks of violence in the future."

Notes to Editors:

1. Further background on the above issues can be found in CSW's report, [Communalism, anti-Christian violence and the law \(2010\)](#).
2. CSW welcomed the conviction of Manoj Pradhan in a [press release](#) on 29 June 2010.