

Most. Rev. Theodore Mascarenhas SFX
SECRETARY GENERAL

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An Open Appeal to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene to stop hatred in Jharkhand

Honourable Prime Minister,

I am making this appeal to you with much sorrow and anguish but also with hope. You must be aware of the recent happenings in Jharkhand, a State ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party. You might be aware that there is spiralling hatred being created by the Chief Minister belonging to your Party, which if not controlled immediately, could take the State and its people down the streets of violence and hate.

Till now I had refrained from making a comment on the tragic happenings in the State. But last night as I was about to go to bed, I received this frightening, disquieting and scary photo. A Christian youth from Jharkhand had sent it to me with this quotation from Jesus in Hindi, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing".



Burning of effigy of Cardinal Telesphore P. Toppo, Archbishop of Ranchi

As I went to bed, I could not sleep. Yes, perhaps those leading this ideological hatred, targeting the Christian Community do not know what they are doing, where they are leading the people to: on the road of hatred and division. As I tossed in bed, I thought there is one person to whom I could appeal – You, Honourable Prime Minister. Because time and again you have told us "sabh ka sath, sabh ka vikas". If I am not mistaken, it was on this slogan that you personally

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campaigned in Jharkhand for the State elections, which made Mr. Raghubar Das, the Chief Minister of the State.

Jharkhand is a State where despite abject poverty and miserable living conditions, people of all faiths and confessions, Tribals and non-Tribals, Dalits and others have been living in peace with each other. This was till the Chief Minister embarked on a different agenda. He began some months ago with vitriolic attacks against the Christian Community. Then in a first for any Chief Minister he came out with this particular full front page advertisement in the prominent dailies of the State.



Advertisement in Dainik Bhaskar, a prominent Daily

I do not know if you are aware of this advertisement. It contains a spurious quote of Mahatma Gandhi without naming the source, to vilify the Christian Community. The advertisement accuses the Christian Missionaries of converting poor Dalits and Tribals (Vanvasis, a term, we think Mahatma Gandhi never used for Tribals), whom the quote describes as innocent and ignorant. The Tribals and Dalits are described as “simple and mute as cows”.



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All sane minds in Jharkhand and the Tribals at large are aghast at such a description. People are asking whether the State deserves a Chief Minister, who allows an advertisement with his photo and that of “Bappu” reducing the Tribals and Dalits to the level of cows. Many are wondering whether, Mr. Raghubar Das became Chief Minister by getting votes from Tribals and Dalits, because in the words of the advertisement they are “as mute and simple as cows”. Less than two weeks after the advertisement, while the Jharkhandis were still shocked over the hate filled advertisement, the ruling party brought into the State Assembly and passed two important Bills: The Freedom of Religion Bill and the Amendments to Land Acquisition Act 2013, in record time practically without discussion. One wonders whether the hatred filled advertisement and the “Freedom of Religion Bill” were smoke screens for the real act of the amendment to Land Acquisition Act. Is there something more than meets the eye specially since the Governor had earlier refused to sign Amendments to the CNTPT Act. Was the Chief Minister creating a diversionary tactic of mounting hatred.

Dear Prime Minister, the Catholic Church has time and again reiterated that it strongly opposes forced conversions. But, at the same time, it stands by its rights to ‘preach, practice and propagate’ its faith as per Articles 25-28 of the Constitution. Coming back to that advertisement against the Christian community to hastily pass Amendments to the Land Acquisition Bill, which we feel will threaten the livelihood and the very existence of the Tribals, specially when there is still so much unused Government land.

Dear Prime Minister, coming back to that picture which is haunting me. Here is the burning of effigy of probably the most prominent and respected religious leader in Jharkhand. Cardinal Telesphore P. Toppo, as you would be aware, is a non-controversial leader, respected not only in Christian circles but also in civil society and by Tribals and non-Tribals. He is also the ambassador of the *Swatch Bharat Abhiyan*. History shows us that hatred which begins as a tiny spark can engulf into an unstoppable fire. As you know the burning of effigies can very well turn into physical violence.

We are a peace loving community as the whole country knows. Our Missionaries have sacrificed and many have died of Malaria and Tuberculosis at a young age striving to serve the deprived sections of society in remote areas. We have not done it for political or selfish motives. We will continue to work for the neglected sections of society through education, health care and other uplifting activities. We are not doing this to “milk the poverty” to make them Christians – we are doing it because our religion teaches us to serve the poorest of the poor.

Dear Prime Minister, the Church has as usual not responded to the provocations of the Chief Minister. It is not because we are afraid, it is not because we are weak. That the Christians have not responded should not be taken as a sign of weakness. We are not speaking about ourselves, we are speaking about the people of Jharkhand. It is not possible that so much money is spent by the Constitutional authority of the State on front page advertisements sowing hate, when health facilities are so poor that stories of parents carrying children on foot for 10-12 kms. to arrive at the nearest hospital makes news.



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It is not possible that the constitutional authority of a State, actively involves itself in promoting hate as the advertisement does.

Dear Prime Minister, we were touched when on 29 May, 2017, you told the nation, “we Indians are lucky that our ancestors have created such a tradition today. India and its 1.25 billion people can take pride in the fact that people from all communities and faiths are available here.”

We were moved when you told the nation on October 31, 2015, “we have to move forward with the mantra of unity, peace and harmony”.

The whole nation applauded you when on Independence Day this year you gave a clarion call from the ramparts of Red Fort, “in the name of faith, violence cannot be allowed”.

Mr. Raghubar Das and his advisors at least in the past few months have not shown affiliation to the ideology you are proclaiming.

I appeal to you, honourable Prime Minister, with trust and hope to intervene and curb the spread of hate created by the Chief Minister of Jharkhand. Jharkhandis and Jharkhand deserves better. If the Chief Minister is unable to control his ideological hatred, then it is time for him to go. Your party has many leaders who can do a better job on all fronts.

Thank you and God bless you.

Yours Sincerely,

Theodore Mascarenhas

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