

Dear Governor Kathy Hochul and Mayor Eric Adams,

We, the undersigned human rights organizations, write to bring to your immediate attention a deeply concerning inclusion of an anti-Muslim float at India Day Parade scheduled for August 18, 2024, in the heart of New York City.

This event, organized by the far-right Hindu group Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), in collaboration with the Indian consulate, alongside Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) and the Federation of Indian Associations (FIA)¹, poses a grave threat to the values of inclusivity and tolerance that New York City and the state of New York proudly uphold.

The VHPA, an offshoot of India's Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), has been designated as a "militant religious organization" by the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) World Factbook.² Georgetown University's Bridge Initiative also identifies VHPA as an Islamophobic group.³ Savera, a research project run by a coalition of civil rights groups, identifies the VHPA as "as a key part of a global far-right ecosystem" due to its "collaborations with other supremacist organizations and ideologies [and] their attacks on US civil society organizations".⁴ Moreover, BAPS is under active FBI investigation for forced labor and exploitation of low-caste laborers from India.⁵ These organizations plan to use the 42nd Annual India Day Parade to propagate hate and instill fear among American Muslims by featuring a divisive float of the Ram Temple, a symbol of violence, historical injustice and religious intolerance.

The Ram Temple stands on the ruins of the historic Babri Mosque, which was demolished on December 6, 1992, by a mob of over 150,000 Hindu zealots.⁶ The demolition sparked widespread riots across India, resulting in the deaths of thousands, predominantly Muslims. In November 2019, the Supreme Court of India controversially awarded the site to Hindus for the construction of the temple, thereby legitimizing an egregious act of violence against a Muslim place of worship. Despite this, the court acknowledged the

¹ <https://fianynjct.org/bi-weekly/flipbook/DIASPORA-BI-WEEKLY-Wednesday-July-10-2024-Issue-119.html>

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<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/cia-names-vhp-bajrang-dal-as-religious-militant-organisations-in-world-factbook-5218249/>

³ <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-vishwa-hindu-parishad-of-america-vhpa/>

⁴ <https://www.wearesavera.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Global-VHPs-Trail-of-Violence-v2.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/10/nyregion/baps-hindu-forced-labor.html>

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<https://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/07/world/hindu-militants-destroy-mosque-setting-off-a-new-crisis-in-india.html>

criminality of the mosque's destruction, noting it as an “egregious violation of the rule of law.”⁷

The inauguration of the Ram Temple in January 2024 by India’s Hindu supremacist Prime Minister Narendra Modi has further exacerbated religious tensions⁸ in the country, resulting in widespread violence at the hands of what the Washington Post called “triumphant Hindu mobs”⁹ and attacks on multiple other places of worship.

The proposed float for the parade is a blatant attempt to glorify the illegal demolition of the historical Babri Mosque and celebrate ongoing violence and terror against 200 million Indian Muslims. This is not merely a cultural display but a vulgar celebration of anti-Muslim hate, bigotry, and religious supremacy.

In August 2022, similar far-right Hindu groups transformed the India Day parade in Edison, New Jersey, into a hate event by displaying a bulldozer, symbolizing the demolition of Muslim homes in India, alongside pictures of Prime Minister Modi and other Hindu supremacist leaders.¹⁰ This incident was condemned by U.S. Senators Cory Booker and Bob Menendez¹¹ and investigated by the Middlesex County Prosecutor’s Office and Edison Police Department as a “bias incident.”

Allowing such a hateful and bigoted celebration in NYC is an affront to American values and to harmony and peaceful coexistence among our diverse communities. It emboldens Hindu extremists to advance their supremacist agenda in the United States and glorifies acts of violence injustice and discrimination against Muslims. We implore you to take immediate and decisive measures to prevent the inclusion of a polarizing and divisive float in the parade. It is imperative to protect our diverse communities from such divisive and inflammatory actions and ensure that New York remains a safe and welcoming place for all its residents.

Sincerely,

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<https://www.livelaw.in/top-stories/babri-mosque-demolition-an-egregious-violation-of-the-rule-of-law-wrong-committed-must-be-remedied-sc-read-judgment-149643>

⁸ <https://time.com/6564148/ayodhya-ram-temple-modi-india/>

⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/01/25/india-ayodhya-hindu-nationalism-attacks/>

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/25/nyregion/bulldozer-indian-parade-new-jersey.html>

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<https://www.booker.senate.gov/news/press/booker-menendez-staff-meet-with-iamc-cair-nj-and-indian-american-groups-following-india-day-parade-incident>

Please sign on to this letter with your organization here:

“As an organization of progressive Hindu-Americans, Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR) unequivocally denounces the inclusion of the Ram Mandir tableau in this years ‘India Day’ Parade. The Mandir’s commemoration in January marked the finish line of a decades-long hate campaign led by India’s right-wing Hindu forces who helped destroy the Babri Masjid and aim to reshape the nation as a Hindu ‘Rashtra’, or ethnoreligious state. This float’s presence represents these groups’ desire to conflate Hindu nationalist ideology with Indian identity, but India is a secular state born out of a decolonial movement whose strength has always resided in its diversity. We demand the float be removed immediately.”

Indian American Muslim Council

Council on American-Islamic Relations

Council on American-Islamic Relations - New York

Hindus for Human Rights

The Federation of Indian American Churches of North America (FIACONA)

New York State Council of Churches

Genocide Watch

Muslim Public Affairs Council

Association of Indian Muslims of America

Center for Pluralism

India’s Civil Watch International

American Muslim Institution

Crescent School

Islamic Circle of North America

The Sikh Coalition

Dalit Solidarity Forum

Great Truth

Justice For All

Asian Children's Education Fellowship

CAIR-NJ

Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus

Ambedkar King Study Circle