

Indian Christians targeted in 140 violent incidents last year

Country/Region: India, South and East Asia

Indian Christians were targeted in 140 major incidents of violence in 2011, including murders, assaults, arson attacks and the destruction of property.

The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) recorded the anti-Christian attacks in its annual persecution report. General Secretary the Rev. Dr Richard Howell said:

The Christian community in India continue to suffer for the sake of their service and witness to Jesus Christ. With 140 major incidents of violence against the community in 2011, the crucial issues of the rights of minorities and freedom of faith are involved. The Church will continue to serve the nation and pray for those who are persecuting.

Many of the incidents involved violence by Hindu extremists who accused local Christians of forcibly converting Hindus. And often the authorities, rather than pursuing the aggressors, took action against the Christian victims.

The southern state of Karnataka was the worst affected with over a third – 49 – of the attacks taking place there.

In one of the incidents, around 20 Hindu extremists disrupted a Sunday service that was taking place in the home of a Christian in Bagalkot, Mudhol, on 21 August. They attacked the congregation and desecrated the communion bread and wine. They beat up the pastor, who received severe injuries to his face and lost a tooth, dragged him out of the house and tied him to a tree. The police were called to the scene and detained the pastor and some other believers; the pastor was later charged.



Indian Christians at prayer

Elsewhere, in Orissa state, three Christians were found dead in suspicious circumstances in separate incidents during the year. Saul Pradhan (45), a church pastor in Kandhamal, was discovered on 11 January; his body bore marks of assault, but the police claimed that he had died as a result of the cold. The family of Michael Digal (43), who went missing and was found dead three days later on 27 July, believe that he was killed because he had testified in a court case related to the anti-Christian attacks in the district in 2008. Then on 6 November, Ganga Pallia (22) was found murdered in Cuttack; he is believed to have been killed by Hindu extremists.

In Dhantulsi, Chhattisgarh state, around 60 Hindu extremists sabotaged a Christian couple's wedding day on 2 July; they barged into the reception and beat several guests including women and children, ruined the food and torched vehicles. The Christians reported the incident to the police, but they refused to take any action and pressured the victims to withdraw their complaint.

On 28 October, a Christian man was sentenced to three years in prison for accidentally pasting a poster advertising an evangelistic mission over another religious poster. This riled local people, who staged a protest and created a road block. The Christian, Burgula Prasad of Khamman district, Andhra Pradesh state, was summoned to the police station, where he apologised for his unintended offence. He was initially released, but a criminal case was later filed against him.

The EFI called on state governments, especially that of Karnataka, to take immediate steps to ensure the protection of Christian minorities. They also asked for false and malicious cases registered against Christians in Karnataka to be dropped.