

# INDIA 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience and the right of all individuals to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion; mandates a secular state; requires the state to treat all religions impartially; and prohibits discrimination based on religion. It also states citizens must practice their faith in a way that does not adversely affect public order, morality, or health. Thirteen of 28 states have laws restricting religious conversions for all faiths. Some of these states also impose penalties specifically against forced religious conversions for the purpose of marriage although historically, some state high courts have dismissed cases brought under these laws.

There were numerous reports during the year of violence by law enforcement authorities against members of religious minorities in multiple states, including plainclothes police in Gujarat publicly flogging four Muslim men accused of injuring Hindu worshippers during a festival in October, and the Madhya Pradesh State government bulldozing Muslim-owned homes and shops following communal violence in Khargone in April. In June, UN special rapporteurs on adequate housing, minority issues, and freedom of religion and belief wrote the government to express their “serious concerns” about the “punitive” demolitions in Khargone, which they stated were “ordered by local governments arbitrarily to punish Muslim minorities and low-income communities.” In October, a report drafted by a citizens committee stated there were “multiple instances of apparent police complicity” in violent actions against protestors, who were mostly Muslim, in the Delhi riots in 2020.

In multiple states, police arrested Christians accused of forcing others to convert. Christian groups said police sometimes aided crowds who disrupted worship services the crowds said were forcibly converting Hindus. In its report covering events during the year, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC) said Christians were “increasingly targeted using these anticonversion laws,” as “allegations of forced conversion, no matter if false, have led many Christians to be attacked, arrested and detained by police.” There were also some reports that police arrested Hindus who attacked those accused of forcing others to convert. In August, there were reports that police arrested

Shiite Muslims in Srinagar, Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, for marching in a procession without a permit to mark the Muslim month of Muharram. The government, citing security reasons, had not allowed such processions for the previous 25 years. Police also arrested Muslims in Dulhepur village, Uttar Pradesh State, for meeting at a house for congregational prayer. Haryana and Karnataka States passed anticonversion laws and began enforcing them against non-Hindus. Himachal Pradesh State also passed an anticonversion law, which Christians challenged in that state's high court. In October, the Supreme Court failed to reach agreement in a review of a Karnataka High Court ruling that upheld a Karnataka government ban on religious garb in educational institutions, including wearing hijabs in an all-girls' school in that state. After the ruling, more than 700 signatories including senior lawyers and rights advocates expressed opposition to the ban in an open letter to the court's chief justice. The Supreme Court referred the matter to a larger bench, which had not yet given its ruling at the end of the year.

On April 26, 108 former senior government officials wrote Prime Minister Narendra Modi stating that government discrimination against religious minorities, "particularly Muslims, in states like Assam, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand," was "undermining" the country's constitution. In its annual report, the NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the government "continued its systematic discrimination and stigmatization of religious and other minorities, particularly Muslims." In June, several parts of the country reported violent protests and acts of arson after spokespersons Nupur Sharma and Naveen Jindal from the country's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) party made televised remarks about the Prophet Muhammad which were widely seen as offensive by Muslims. Muslims killed two Hindus they said supported the remarks, posting a video of one victim being decapitated in Udaipur, a city in the western state of Rajasthan. The BJP suspended Sharma, who was charged with hurting religious sentiment, expelled Jindal, and issued a statement which said it "respects all religions" and "is strongly against any ideology which insults or demeans any sect or religion." The Ministry of External Affairs noted Sharma's comments did not reflect the views of the Indian government. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and government officials from 11 countries condemned the remarks.

Attacks on members of religious minority communities, including killings, assaults, and intimidation, occurred in various states throughout the year. These included incidents of “cow vigilantism” against non-Hindus based on allegations of cow slaughter or trade in beef and incidents in which Muslim men were alleged to have married Hindu women to convert them. There were also attacks on pastors, disruption of Christian and Muslim worship services, and vandalism of churches. By November 26, the NGO United Christian Forum (UCF) said there had been 511 anti-Christian incidents around the country reported to its hotline, compared to 505 in all of 2021, and urged the government to take action in response to these incidents. Most of the incidents were reported in four states: Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Tamil Nadu. On April 6, the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America released its 2022 annual report and documented 761 violent incidents against Christians in the country in 2021, including neighborhood skirmishes, targeted killings, and armed assaults. In January, members of a religious civil society group wrote the president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India to ask that organization to take stronger action with the government to protect Christians in the country. In its letter, the group also said, “The violent acts against the Christian community and Muslim community or any other minority group are in complete violation of the law of the land and the Indian Constitution.” In August, the spokesperson of the Christian NGO Open Doors UK & Ireland said the situation facing Christians and other religious minorities in the country was “unprecedentedly grave.” In September, the Supreme Court directed the Ministry of Home Affairs to collect information from eight states within four months on allegations of attacks against Christians. Terrorist groups Lashkar-e-Taiyaaba and Hizbul Mujahideen killed several civilians and migrant laborers belonging to the minority Hindu and Sikh communities in Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir during the year, a slight decrease from the previous year. The *South Asian Terrorism Portal* said 30 civilians and 30 members of the security forces were killed in 151 incidents in Jammu and Kashmir during the year. The killings forced a number of Hindu families to leave for Hindu-majority districts in Jammu and Kashmir.

There were also cases of communal violence between religious groups. The National Crimes Record Bureau reported 378 instances of communal violence in 2021 (most recent data) compared to 857 in 2020. Religious leaders, academics, political figures, and activists made inflammatory public remarks about religious minorities. Examples included Yati Narasinghanand Saraswati, described as a

Hindu religious extremist, who urged Hindus to “take up arms” against the threat of religious conversion and Muslim rule in the country; BJP state politician Haribhushan Thakur Bachaul, who said that Muslims should be “set ablaze”; P.C. George, a former legislator in Kerala State, who encouraged Hindus and Christians to not eat at restaurants run by Muslims; and former BJP Rajasthan state legislator Gyan Dev Ahuja, who encouraged Hindus to kill Muslims suspected of cow slaughter. Police charged all four for their comments, and their cases were at different levels of investigation and prosecution at year’s end.

U.S. embassy and consulate officials, including the Chargés d’Affaires, engaged with government officials, members of parliament, and politicians from multiple political parties to emphasize the importance of religious freedom and the responsibility of democracies to ensure the rights of religious minorities. Embassy and consulate officials and visiting senior officials from Washington also met with representatives of religious minorities, NGOs, civil society members, academics, and interfaith leaders to discuss the importance of religious freedom and pluralism, the value of interfaith dialogue, and the operating environment for faith-based NGOs. The Assistant Secretary of State and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs engaged with civil society representatives for their perspectives on religious freedom challenges within the country and with government officials to underscore the importance of respecting human rights, including religious freedom.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.4 billion (midyear 2022). According to the 2011 national census, the most recent year for which disaggregated figures are available, Hindus constitute 79.8 percent of the population; Muslims, 14.2 percent; Christians, 2.3 percent; and Sikhs, 1.7 percent. The World Religion Database estimates the larger religious group breakdown in 2020 as Hindus, 72.4 percent; Muslims, 14 percent; Christians, 4.8 percent; and Sikhs, 1.8 percent. From the 2011 census, groups that together constitute fewer than 2 percent of the population include Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians (Parsis), Jews, and Baha’is. In government statistics, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs officially identifies as Hindus more than 104 million members of Scheduled Tribes – Indigenous groups historically outside the caste system who often practice

Indigenous religious beliefs – although an estimated 10 million of those listed as Scheduled Tribe members are Christians according to the 2011 census.

According to government estimates, there are significant Muslim populations in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, Assam, and the Union Territories of Lakshadweep and Jammu and Kashmir. In Lakshadweep and Jammu and Kashmir, Muslims account for 95 percent and 68.3 percent of the population, respectively. Slightly more than 85 percent of Muslims are Sunni, with the remainder mostly Shia. According to media reports during the year, there are an estimated 150,000 Ahmadi Muslims in the country. According to government estimates, Christian populations are distributed throughout the country but in greater concentrations in the northeast as well as in the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. Three northeastern states have majority Christian populations: Nagaland (90 percent), Mizoram (87 percent), and Meghalaya (70 percent). Sikhs constitute 54 percent of the population of Punjab. The Dalai Lama's office states there are significant resettled Tibetan Buddhist communities in Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, and Uttarakhand States, and Delhi. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and media reports, there are approximately 100,000 Tibetan Buddhists in the country. According to media reports, approximately 40,000 Muslim Rohingya refugees from Burma live in the country.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution mandates a secular state and provides for freedom of conscience and the right of all individuals to profess, practice, and propagate religion freely, subject to considerations of public order, morality, and health. It prohibits government discrimination based on religion, including for employment, as well as religiously based restrictions on access to public or private establishments. The constitution states that religious groups have the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes, manage their own affairs in religious matters, and own, acquire, and administer property. It prohibits the use of public funds to support any religion. National and state laws make freedom of religion "subject to public order, morality, and health." The constitution

stipulates that the state shall endeavor to create a uniform civil code applicable to members of all religions across the country.

Federal law empowers the government to ban religious organizations that provoke intercommunal tensions, are involved in terrorism or sedition, or violate laws governing foreign contributions.

Thirteen of the country's 28 states – Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana (as of March), Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka (as of September), Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh – have laws restricting religious conversion. Although none of these laws mentions particular faiths, in practice they are carried out more often against non-Hindus.

All 13 states that have anticonversion laws maintain broadly similar prohibitions against conversion through “force,” “inducement,” or “fraud,” which would include the provision of any gifts, promises of a better life, free education, and other standard charitable activities, and bar individuals from abetting such conversions. The law in those states also require individuals wishing to convert to another religion and clergy intending to officiate at a conversion ceremony to submit formal notification to the state government. The notification procedures require state police to determine if there are objections to the conversion. Any person may object. State governments in Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh have laws specifically imposing penalties against “forced” religious conversions for the purpose of marriage, although historically, some state high courts have dismissed cases brought under this law. Gujarat imposes sentences of between three and 10 years in prison and fines of up to 50,000 rupees (\$600) for forcible or fraudulent religious conversions through marriage.

Violators of anticonversion laws, including missionaries, are subject to fines and other penalties, such as prison sentences of up to three years in Chhattisgarh and up to four years in Madhya Pradesh if converts are children, women, or members of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. Gujarat mandates prior permission from the district magistrate for any form of conversion and punishes “forced” conversions with up to three years of imprisonment and a fine of up to 50,000

rupees (\$600). In Himachal Pradesh, penalties include up to two years' imprisonment, fines of 25,000 rupees (\$300), or both.

Under the laws of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, authorities may prohibit proselytizing near any place of worship, including that of the proselytizers. Punishment for violations may include imprisonment for up to three years and fines of up to 5,000 rupees (\$61). The laws in those states also ban the propagation or practice of any non-Hindu religion in localities designated as "temple towns" because of the number of significant Hindu temples located in those areas. In Karnataka, the new anticonversion law stipulates a punishment of a jail term of three to five years, and a fine of 25,000 rupees (\$300) in the case of proselytizing persons from general categories and a jail term of three to 10 years, and a fine of 50,000 rupees (\$600) for forcibly converting children, women and persons from the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities.

The federal penal code criminalizes "promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion" and "acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony," including acts causing injury or harm to religious groups and their members. The penal code also prohibits "deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs." Violations of any of these provisions are punishable by imprisonment for up to three years, a fine, or both. If the offense is committed at a place of worship, imprisonment may be for up to five years.

The law requires religious groups that receive foreign funding to register with the Ministry of Home Affairs. Federal law requires NGOs, including religious organizations, that are registered under the law to maintain audit reports on their accounts and a schedule of their activities and to provide these to state government officials upon request. Organizations conducting "cultural, economic, educational, religious, or social programs" that receive foreign funding are required to obtain a license. The central government may also require that licensed organizations obtain prior permission before accepting or transferring foreign funds. The central government may reject a license application or a request to transfer funds if it judges the recipient to be acting against "harmony between religious, racial, social, linguistic, or regional groups, castes, or communities."

NGOs, including religious organizations, may use 20 percent of their funding for administrative purposes and are prohibited from transferring foreign funds to any other organization or individual.

The constitution states any legal reference to Hindus is to be construed to include followers of Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism, meaning they are subject to laws regarding Hindus, such as the Hindu Marriage Act. Subsequent legislation continues to use the word Hindu as a category that includes Sikhs, Buddhists, Baha'is, and Jains, but it identifies the groups as separate religions whose followers are included under the law.

Federal law provides official minority status to six religious groups: Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, Jains, and Buddhists. State governments may grant minority status under state law to religious groups that are minorities in a particular region. Members of recognized minority groups are eligible for government assistance programs. The constitution states that the government is responsible for protecting religious minorities and enabling them to preserve their culture and religious interests.

Personal status laws establish civil codes for members of certain religious communities in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance based on religion, faith, and culture. Hindu, Christian, Parsi, Jewish, and Islamic personal-status laws are legally recognized and judicially enforceable. Personal-status issues that are not defined for a community in a separate law are covered under Hindu personal status laws. These laws, however, do not supersede national and state legislation or constitutional provisions. The government grants autonomy to the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and the Parsi community to define their customary practices. If law boards or community leaders are not able to resolve disputes, cases are referred to the civil courts.

All couples marrying in a civil ceremony, which often includes interfaith couples, are generally required to provide public notice 30 days in advance – including addresses, photographs, and religious affiliation – for public comment, although this requirement varies by state. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, or Jains who marry outside their religions face the possibility of losing their property inheritance rights under the personal status laws of those communities.



The law recognizes the registration of Sikh marriages but does not include divorce provisions for Sikhs. Divorce and other Sikh personal status matters fall under Hindu codes. Under the law, any person, irrespective of religion, may seek a divorce in civil court.

The constitution prohibits religious instruction in government schools. The law permits private religious schools. The law permits some Muslim, Christian, Sindhi (Hindu refugees), Parsi, and Sikh educational institutions that receive government support to set quotas for students belonging to the religious minority in question. For example, Aligarh Muslim University must admit at least 50 percent Muslims. St. Stephen's College in Delhi and St. Xavier's in Mumbai must admit at least 50 percent Christians.

Twenty-five of the 28 states apply partial to full restrictions on bovine slaughter. Penalties vary among states and may vary based on whether the animal is a cow, calf, bull, or ox. The ban mostly affects Muslims and members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes that traditionally consume beef. In most of the states where bovine slaughter is banned, penalties include imprisonment for six months to two years and a fine of 1,000 to 10,000 rupees (\$12-\$121). In Assam, penalties include minimum imprisonment of three years or a fine of between 300,000 and 500,000 rupees (\$3,600-\$6,100) or both, without eligibility for bail prior to trial, for slaughtering, consuming, or transporting cattle. In Karnataka, the slaughter of all cattle, except for buffalo older than 13 years, is illegal, with violators subject to imprisonment of between three and seven years and penalties of between 500,000 and 1,000,000 rupees (\$6,100-\$12,200). Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir penalize cow slaughter with imprisonment of two to 10 years. Gujarat state law mandates a minimum 10-year sentence and a maximum sentence of life in prison for killing cows, selling beef, or illegally transporting cows or beef.

Madhya Pradesh imposes fines of 25,000 to 50,000 rupees (\$300- \$600) and prison sentences of six months to three years for "cow vigilantism," i.e., committing violence in the name of protecting cows. This is the only law of its kind in the country.

The National Commission for Minorities, which includes representatives from the six designated religious minorities and the National Human Rights Commission,

investigates allegations of religious discrimination. The Ministry of Minority Affairs may also conduct investigations. These agencies have no enforcement powers but conduct investigations based on written complaints of criminal or civil violations and submit findings to law enforcement agencies. Eighteen of the country's 28 states and the National Capital Territory of Delhi have state minorities commissions that also investigate allegations of religious discrimination.

The constitution establishes the legal basis for preferential public benefit programs for Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe communities and members of the "other backward classes," a category for groups deemed to be socially and educationally disadvantaged. The constitution specifies that only Hindus, Sikhs, or Buddhists are eligible to be deemed members of a Scheduled Caste. As a result, Christians and Muslims qualify for benefits only if deemed to be members of "backward" classes due to their social and economic status.

The government requires foreign missionaries to obtain a missionary visa.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

### **Government Practices**

There were reports during the year of violence by government authorities against members of religious minorities. On October 4, for example, a video posted to social media showed plainclothes police from Undhela, a village in central Gujarat, publicly flogging four Muslim men accused of throwing stones and injuring worshippers during a Hindu festival, according to media reports and HRW. The Hindu celebrations reportedly occurred near a mosque at the same time as a Muslim ceremony, sparking tensions between the local Hindu and Muslim communities. According to media reports, the village head said, "Yes, I support the BJP and the BJP supports me," and he sought a local permit to organize a Hindu procession that would march past a mosque; the local Muslim residents considered this to be a deliberate provocation. In media interviews, Gujarat Home Minister Harsh Sanghavi initially praised the police for doing a "nice job" in controlling the violence that followed the clashes. On October 7, after video of the police beating incident went viral, Gujarat Director General of Police Ashish

Bhatia announced an inquiry into police behavior and confirmed that seven state police officers were being investigated for misconduct.

Following communal violence in Khargone, Madhya Pradesh, on April 10, police arrested 148 individuals, most of them Muslim, and the state government bulldozed 16 homes and 29 shops largely owned by Muslims accused of inciting the violence, according to BBC News. The state's Minister for Home Affairs, Narottam Mishra, said to local media, "If Muslims carry out such attacks, then they should not expect justice." Media reported that he also said, "The houses where the stones have come from will be turned into a pile of stones themselves." A local official in Khargone stated, "Finding out culprits one by one is a time-taking process, so we looked at all the areas where rioting took place and demolished all the illegal constructions to teach rioters a lesson." A Muslim lawyer told media that the state's government was "disproportionately punishing people of one community without following any due process." The BBC reported that the violence began when large processions of Hindu devotees celebrating Ram Navmi marched past Muslim neighborhoods and mosques, playing music that called for violence against Muslims. Some Muslims and Hindu marchers threw stones at each other, and more violence then spread between the marchers and local residents. Some Muslims said the crowd vandalized their homes and set other structures on fire. Following the clashes, some local Hindu shop owners organized a boycott of Muslim businesses. Then-Minority Affairs Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said the violence was caused by "fringe elements" seeking "to defame India's inclusive culture and commitment".

On June 9, the UN special rapporteurs on adequate housing, minority issues, and freedom of religion and belief wrote the government to express their "serious concerns" about the "punitive" demolitions in Khargone, which they stated were "ordered by local governments arbitrarily to punish Muslim minorities and low-income communities," and carried out "without any consultation, due process, compensation, or advance provision of alternative housing." The special rapporteurs stated that the demolitions "appear to have been carried out as collective punishment against the Muslim community for allegedly being responsible for the violence during the communal clashes preceding these demolitions." They also said that "statements from government officials and ministers indicated the state's intention to use demolitions as a form of punishment." The special rapporteurs said that authorities in Gujarat and North

Delhi had demolished mostly Muslim-owned structures after intercommunal violence in those areas in April. The Supreme Court, however, suspended demolitions in Delhi in the aftermath of the violence.

On June 12, authorities in Uttar Pradesh bulldozed Muslim activist Afreen Fatima's home because it was "illegally built," they said. Advocates stated it was a retaliation for her activism. In response to the rise in bulldozing, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, the Supreme Court said in a statement on June 16 that it could not impose a blanket ban on demolitions throughout the country, although it also said that "demolitions have to be in accordance with the law, they cannot be retaliatory." The court was responding to a petition filed by Muslim group Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind which called for a blanket ban on such demolitions. The group's lawyer told the media, "What is being done [demolitions] is unconstitutional and shocking. It is being done by targeting a community" without advance notice. An attorney and a spokesman for the Uttar Pradesh government said that it had "followed the law" and "only razed homes that were illegally built, irrespective of community." In July, the Supreme Court rejected the Jamiat-e-Ulema-Hind petition, stating that such a blanket ban could restrain municipal authorities from legally acting against unauthorized construction.

During the year, some courts acted on previous cases involving the deaths or detentions of members of religious minorities or violence between religious groups. In February, the Allahabad High Court in Uttar Pradesh ordered the exhumation of the body of a Muslim man who died in police custody in Kasganj in November 2021 and a new postmortem examination of the remains, after the deceased's father filed a petition in the court alleging that his son was murdered by the police. The government had ordered a magisterial inquiry and suspended five policemen for "negligence on duty" in the case. Police said that the man committed suicide; his family said he died after being turned in by local Hindu activists and beaten and physically abused by police because he planned to marry a Hindu woman. The man's father told the *Guardian*, "police murdered my son and then gave me money to say he was depressed and took his own life." The father said he filed the petition to seek "justice". There was no further information available on this case at year's end.

On August 15, the 11 men convicted of raping Muslim Bilkis Bano and murdering 14 members of her family in 2002 were set free in Gujarat after serving 15 years

in prison. The men were part of a Hindu crowd that was accused of assaulting Bano and her family during communal violence that year. They had been serving life sentences for rape and murder. Gujarat officials said that a state government panel approved the application for release based on the men's ages and good behavior, and the fact they had served more than 14 years in prison since their trial in 2008. According to media reports, however, the Gujarat government submitted a document to the Supreme Court revealing that it had sought the federal government's approval for the release under a remission policy, which was granted by the Ministry of Home Affairs in July. The men's release was criticized by opposition parties, activists, and several journalists, who said it discriminated against the country's Muslims. More than 6,000 activists, historians and citizens issued a statement urging the Supreme Court to revoke the early release, describing it as a "grave miscarriage of justice" which contravened federal and Gujarat state guidelines which stated that rape and murder convicts could not be granted remission. Media reported that some Hindu nationalists publicly celebrated their release. In December, the Supreme Court rejected a petition by Bano seeking a review of the release decision. The court held that the Gujarat government was the proper authority to decide upon the matter.

On September 7, media outlets reported that the Odisha High Court rejected the parole petitions of Dara Singh and three codefendants in the killing of Australian Christian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons in 1999. Dara and 12 others were sentenced in 2003 after being convicted of killing the victims during an attack on the Catholic Church in Jamubani village, Mayurbhanj District, in Odisha in 1999. Dara was serving separate life sentences for the Staines's murders and the killing of Roman Catholic priest Father Arul Doss the same year.

On October 18, the Delhi High Court rejected a bail petition filed by Muslim student Umar Khalid, who was arrested and imprisoned following the 2020 Hindu-Muslim riots in northeast Delhi, in which 35 Muslims and 18 Hindus were killed. Khalid told a lower court in 2020 he had spent time in solitary confinement. Prominent civil society groups demanded his release in 2020, describing Khalid as a "defender of human rights" and a "peace activist. The court said it could find no reasonable grounds to reject the charges that Khalid had been part of a conspiracy to trigger the riots. He was granted interim bail for a week in December but remained in prison at year's end.

On November 21, the Delhi High Court began considering bail pleas by six others arrested during the 2020 riots, including Muslim Khalid Saifi, founder of the NGO United against Hate. Saifi was among those charged under antiterrorism laws of organizing the 2020 protests. According to media reports, by February, Delhi police had arrested 2,456 individuals in connection with the riots and formally charged a total of 1,610 persons, including 798 Hindus and 812 Muslims. Delhi police also said that 318 of the 758 cases opened after the riots remained unsolved.

On February 21, HRW stated that the government's investigation into the 2020 Delhi riots was heavily biased against activists. HRW said Delhi police filed politically motivated charges against 18 activists, 16 of whom were Muslim. The NGO said the government should drop the charges against the 18 and release them immediately. HRW's South Asia Director Meenakshi Ganguly stated, "Indian authorities have been targeting activists for harassment and arrest instead of impartially investigating allegations that BJP leaders incited violence and police officials were complicit in attacks." The HRW report also said only 92 of the 758 cases related to the riots opened by police had reached trial stage as of February. The riots followed peaceful protests around the country against the Citizenship Amendment Act, passed in late 2019, which provided an expedited path to citizenship for Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian migrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh who had entered the country on or before December 31, 2014. Similarly situated Muslims, Jews, members of other faiths, and atheists from these three countries were not included.

In October, a report drafted by a citizens committee composed of former Supreme Court justices, former judges from other high courts, and a former national government official reviewed 752 of the 758 cases and identified weaknesses in police actions that could have prevented or lessened the violence and discrepancies in the police investigations afterwards. The report stated the national and state governments "failed to fulfil their solemn obligation to safeguard lives, property and the rule of law (in handling the riots). More than two years since the violence, glaring issues of accountability remain unaddressed." The report said there were "multiple instances of apparent police complicity" in violent actions against protestors, who were mostly Muslim. The report stated it was "anti-Muslim hate at the root of the previolence build-up [that] carried over into the actual violence." The report concluded, "It is our view

that engineered hate, enabled by the complicity of state actors, culminated in violence towards cementing a firm sectarian divide. In this attempt to alter social relations, Muslim identity and agency stand noticeably diminished.”

On October 11, the Maharashtra state government transferred the investigation of the 2020 killing of three Hindu monks to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The BJP government in Maharashtra stated that police under the previous government had carried out a shoddy investigation and shielded the culprits. In the 2020 incident, a crowd pulled the three monks from a police vehicle and killed them, alleging that they were child kidnappers.

Government authorities took action in response to complaints of forced religious conversions during the year, including arresting Christians accused of forcing others to convert, arresting Hindus who attacked those accused of forcing others to convert, and ordering investigations into cases of possible forced conversions by Christians and Muslims. In some cases, Christian groups said police sometimes aided crowds who disrupted worship services they said were forcibly converting Hindus. Three states also enacted anticonversion legislation.

According to NGO International Christian Concern (ICC), Pastor Ramesh Vasuniya was arrested along with five congregants as he conducted a Sunday service in a house church in Padalya village on January 15. He was charged with forced conversion. Another pastor was arrested with two of his congregants in Bisoli village in the same district, according to the NGO. ICC said that police beat the three arrested in Bisoli, confiscated Bibles and materials from that pastor’s house, and demanded that his wife pay 300,000 rupees (\$3,600) or “never see her husband again.” In September, a court in Madhya Pradesh granted bail to Vasuniya and the others arrested with him.

In its report covering events during the year, the NGO Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC) said Christians had been “increasingly targeted using these anticonversion laws,” as “allegations of forced conversion, no matter if false, have led many Christians to be attacked, arrested and detained by police.” In late January and early February, the NGO said there were 14 instances of anti-Christian violence and 12 cases in which Christians were arrested for allegedly converting Hindus forcibly in Madhya Pradesh. According to the NGO, such attacks continued in March when a pastor in Jodhikapur, Uttar Pradesh, was

forced to remain in his home as a crowd gathered outside while he was leading a prayer meeting. The crowd shouted, “bring the traitor out” and “rid India of Christian priests”. Local police later arrived and arrested the pastor and his wife for “unlawful conversion, criminal intimidation, and intentionally insulting religion.”

In January, Tamil Nadu police arrested Catholic Sister Sahaya Mary, a hostel warden at the Sacred Heart Higher Secondary School in Michaelpatti, Thanjavur District. She was charged with aiding and abetting the suicide of a minor after a teenage student at the hostel killed herself, but local Hindu organizations alleged that forced conversion was the real reason for the girl’s death, and circulated that theory widely on social media, according to press reports. The school administration stated that the report filed by police about the incident did not mention forced conversion. The spokesperson for the diocese of Thanjavur said the allegations of forced conversion were “false and prefabricated” since all Sister Sahaya Mary had done was “give hospitality to a girl in difficulty.” The Thanjavur Principal Sessions Court granted the nun bail, and police released her 18 days after the arrest. The case was pending as of year’s end.

The *Atlantic* reported that police arrived with a crowd that disrupted a Holy Week service in Uttar Pradesh on April 14. The lawyer for the church said police simply arrested the entire congregation without confirming that anyone was being converted. According to A. C. Michael, a former member of the Delhi Minorities Commission and the national coordinator of the United Christian Forum, none of the arrests in this case and others like it had led to convictions for conversion.

On May 26, Goa police arrested Pastor Dominic D’Souza under the state’s Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act for allegedly enticing a person to convert to Christianity in North Goa. The court granted bail the day after the arrest. Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant alleged that the pastor claimed to use “magic” to compel conversion. Investigation into this case was still ongoing at years end.

The NGO ICC said that 30 Christians were jailed on charges of forced conversion in May in the state of Uttar Pradesh alone, including 20 in one week. ICC President Jeff King said, “India’s anticonversion laws are not a means to protect religious



freedom, but rather a mechanism for the government to oppress and punish religious minorities.”

In June, according to media reports, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) asked the superintendent of police of Khunti, Jharkhand to conduct an inquiry following allegations that members of a local Catholic church illegally converted to Christianity 12 individuals from the Munda tribal community, including 10 children, in Kamda Sirkatoli village on May 22. Media reported that the incident was not the first conversion attempt by the church in the area. Villagers said that the 12 had been “taken to the church” to be educated but were then converted.” No further developments were reported concerning the inquiry by year’s end.

On August 8, media outlets reported the arrest of P. Uthaman, a member of the Hindu nationalist Hindu Munnani (Hindu Front), for attacking three Christian preachers at Nanjundapuram, Coimbatore, in Tamil Nadu. Uthaman was released two days later, and the case was closed. The three Christian preachers were wearing shirts with Bible verses and had come to the area to visit a relative; they accused Uthaman of assaulting them for proselytizing. Media also reported that a crowd of Hindu Munnani members protested Uthaman’s arrest outside the police station.

On September 17, a court in Amroha, Uttar Pradesh sentenced a Muslim man to five years in prison under the state’s anticonversion law for abducting a minor and forcing her religious conversion. This was the first conviction under the law since it came into effect in 2020. As of November, according to state officials, Uttar Pradesh police had filed 291 cases and arrested 507 persons under the law since 2020. According to media reports, the victims in 150 of those cases said they were converted forcibly; 59 of the cases involved alleged conversions of children.

On October 13, police in Karnataka arrested a Muslim man, Syed Mueen, under the new Karnataka anticonversion law, for allegedly converting a Hindu woman under the pretext of marrying her. This was the first arrest under the law. Mueen remained in jail at year’s end and police were investigating the case. As of December 30, Karnataka had filed nine cases under the new law, which were at different stages of investigation. Christian community leaders in the state

expressed concerns the law could be misused against Christian missions. In addition, some opposition politicians expressed concern about the law and its broad definition of conversion by “allurement.” A member of the Karnataka legislative assembly said, “Say, I run a hospital. If I provide free treatment to a patient, this law can be misused to say that it was a gift for religious conversion.”

The Irish NGO Church in Chains reported that police arrested nine pastors for conversion activities in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, on November 28. One of the pastors was hosting a wedding reception in his home for his daughter and son-in-law when police arrived, arrested the host, eight others, and the just-married couple on charges of conducting illegal conversions and confiscated Bibles and other Christian materials.

On December 1, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) Hindu nationalist organization released a list of what it said were 400 examples of “love jihad” (a derogatory term referring to Muslim men seeking to marry women from other faiths to convert them to Islam) that had taken place in the country between 2009 and 2022 and called on the national government to outlaw such marriages. VHP Joint General Secretary Surendra Jain said that “love jihad” was the “most heinous, cruel and inhuman of the various forms of jihad.” According to media, Jain stated, “There is a strong need for a strict central law to prevent love jihad and illegal conversions, which create social discontent and threats to national security.”

On March 22, the Haryana state assembly passed an anticonversion bill. The state’s home minister said the law was intended “to prevent religious conversions through force, undue influence or allurement,” according to media reports. The law set penalties of one to five years in prison and a fine of not less than 100,000 rupees (\$1,200) for such religious conversions and three to 10 years’ imprisonment and a fine of not less than 300,000 rupees (\$3,600) if the conversion were carried out through marriage. The law specifies that any marriages found to be carried out for the purpose of religious conversion shall be annulled.

Father Savarimuthu Sankar, spokesman for the Catholic Archdiocese of Delhi, told media, “The bill looks politically motivated because we all know that our constitution provides us the freedom to choose any religion according to our free will. It is our fundamental right.” Sankar also stated, “the anticonversion laws

were enacted in mostly BJP-ruled states to target Christians and Muslims,” according to media reports. Secretary General Mohammad Salim Engineer of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind said that the bill “is just to serve a political agenda. The state government is trying to retain power by impressing upon majority Hindus that their faith and traditions will be endangered if the BJP loses power.” He also said, “The government is trying to divide people in the name of religion, caste, and creed to remain in power and this bill will help them, as they can misuse this bill to harass the minorities group.” Haryana Chief Minister Monohar Lal-Khattar told the media that specific religions were not mentioned in the bill, which was “not designed to discriminate against any religion and only deals with forcible conversions.”

On August 13, Himachal Pradesh passed a freedom of religion bill that modified the existing law by deeming the conversion of two or more persons at a time illegal and increasing the maximum punishment for mass conversion from seven years in prison to 10 years. The law also removes state benefits from any member of the Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes who converts to another religion. The state’s minister for law and parliamentary affairs said to media that the Scheduled Caste community had pressed the government to take stronger action against religious conversions. In an interview with the online news site *Religion Unplugged*, the coordinator of the NGO UCF said, “This [the Himachal Pradesh law] is an attack on our fundamental right; we have the right to propagate our religion. I am not against such laws, but new laws should be brought in when there is a need for it. In India, Christians are not forcing Hindus to convert by any means. There is no evidence of someone being held at gunpoint to convert to Christianity.” Christian rights groups challenged the Himachal Pradesh law in that state’s high court. According to UCF, 42 challenges to religious conversion laws were pending in courts around the country in April.

On September 21, the Karnataka state assembly enacted an anticonversion bill, the Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Act, becoming the first state in the south of the country to do so. The new law prescribed punishment of up to five years’ imprisonment for conversions due to “force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or any fraudulent means including the promise of marriage.” On September 16, Archbishop Peter Machado of Bangalore told media that the Catholic Church filed a challenge against the new law in the state’s high court. In a statement, Machado said that the entire Christian community in the state was

“deeply disturbed and “greatly pained” by the new law. In May, he told media that the Karnataka law was “irrelevant and malicious” and “aimed at dividing the Christians from other religious minorities.” President Sajan K. George of the Global Council of Indian Christians, called the law “draconian.” The court had not taken action on the church’s challenge to the law by year’s end.

On December 20, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis of Maharashtra told the media that the state government would “study” the laws adopted in other states to criminalize “love jihad” with the goal of introducing similar legislation.

In December, the Uttarakhand government amended its existing anticonversion law to make mass conversions a crime punishable with a jail term up to 10 years, and a fine of up to 50,000 rupees (\$600). The law defined “mass conversion” as one involving two or more persons. The amended law also set a jail term of up to 10 years and a fine of up to 25,000 rupees (\$300) for forcibly converting a member of the Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes. Previously, the state’s anticonversion legislation set penalties of one to five years in prison and a fine of 50,000 rupees (\$600) for forced religious conversion.

On April 8, the Supreme Court upheld 2020 amendments to the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA) that were criticized by NGOs, including religious organizations, as constraining civil society by reducing the amount of foreign funding that NGOs could use for administrative purposes and adding onerous oversight and certification requirements. In its decision, the court observed that “receiving foreign funding was not an absolute right.” The court upheld the government’s justification for the amendments and noted that the “strict FCRA regime had become essential due to past experiences of abuse and misutilization of foreign contributions.” Some organizations working on religious programs or advocacy reported difficulties in obtaining registration approval for their activities.

On July 26, Minister of State for Union Home Affairs Nityanand Rai told parliament that the government cancelled the registration certificates of 1,811 associations across the country under the provisions of the FCRA between 2019 and 2021, while 783 applications for renewals were denied. No religious association or related NGO reported its certificate cancelled.

During the year, there were reports of governmental action affecting the religious acts of minority religious groups. On May 24, the Bhadrak district administration in Odisha closed the sole church in Geltua village, invoking Section 144 of the Criminal Code, which bans gatherings of four or more individuals when needed to keep the peace. The authorities acted after Bajrang Dal activists alleged the church was forcibly converting tribal people to Christianity, and local officials said that church activity could inflame local communal tensions. The district sub collector ordered an investigation, declared the church had “breached the peace” between local Christian and non-Christian communities, and ordered the church building closed. It remained closed at year’s end.

The Associated Press (AP) reported that police arrested “dozens” of Shiite Muslims in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir on August 7, as they took part in processions without permits marking the Muslim month of Muharram. The AP said that the Muslims were defying security restrictions in the area, which included a ban on Shiite mourning processions during Muharram that had been in effect for the previous 25 years.

On August 22, the Karnataka High Court dismissed a public interest petition objecting to the Muslim call to prayer broadcast from loudspeakers in mosques around the state. According to media reports, the petitioner, a Hindu in Bengaluru, stated that the call to prayer infringed on the religious freedom of non-Muslims. The court ruled that the call to prayer was as an essential religious practice for Muslims and that such religious practices were protected within the provisions of the constitution. The court directed authorities, however, to ensure that loudspeakers did not violate noise pollution rules.

On August 29, international media reported that police arrested 26 Muslims in Dulhepur village, Uttar Pradesh, for meeting at a house for prayer; the village did not have a mosque. The local police superintendent said “scores of people” assembled at the house “without permission to offer namaz [prayer]” despite being cautioned in the past not to do so, because of neighbors’ objections.

In January, students at an all-girls’ high school in the Udupi District of Karnataka protested the state of Karnataka’s restrictions on wearing religious garb in educational institutions, particularly a ban against wearing hijabs in their school. According to the BBC, school staff said students could wear the hijab on campus,

but not inside classroom; the protesters said they should be allowed to cover their hair in the classroom as well and that the ban was discriminatory. When protests spread to other schools, including some in which Hindu students wore saffron-colored scarfs to oppose the hijabs, the state closed schools for three days, the BBC reported. Students in Kolkata and Chennai also demonstrated in solidarity with the Karnataka protestors. The Karnataka education minister agreed with school authorities, who said that both the scarfs and hijabs should be banned on campuses; he blamed the controversy on “politics” fueled by the Popular Front of India Party seeking to gain seats in the next state election. That party was banned in September for having links to terror groups, according to the government. The BBC said that supporters of the right to wear a hijab petitioned the Karnataka High Court, arguing that choosing what to wear was a fundamental right guaranteed by the constitution and challenging the state’s right to impose a dress code on schools.

On March 15, the Karnataka High Court upheld the state government’s order banning hijabs in the school in Udupi, ruling the state could impose dress requirements on students and stating wearing a hijab was “not an essential part of religious practice.” In light of the Karnataka ruling, VHP leaders said they would press for similar hijab bans in schools in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh States. Gujarat VHP Secretary Ashok Raval said to media, “The hijab is not allowed in the defense forces, police, and government offices, then why the insistence on hijab in schools and colleges? It is an attempt to raise communal tensions.” On October 13, after supporters of the students appealed the Karnataka High Court’s ruling, the Supreme Court issued a split decision. BBC News said one of the two justices reviewing the case agreed that Karnataka could set a dress code banning the hijab, while the other ruled that the lower court ruling was wrong because wearing a hijab was a matter of personal choice. The two justices recommended that a larger bench of the Supreme Court review the issue. The larger bench had not yet issued its ruling at the end of the year. After the split ruling, more than 700 signatories, including senior lawyers and rights advocates, expressed opposition to the hijab ban in an open letter to the Supreme Court’s chief justice.

State governments took actions during the year that affected the use of property by religious groups. On February 15, for example, local authorities removed a statue of Jesus from outside the St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Gokunte village, Kolar District, Karnataka, damaging the statue base in the process.

According to UCA News, the official in charge of the removal said that the statue was built on government land which was reserved as grazing pasture for cattle. He also said the action was in compliance with an order from the Karnataka High Court. Church officials disagreed, saying the High Court had not ruled on the status of the property and that the church had lower court rulings which protected the property, based on a Karnataka law passed in 2021. Church officials also said to media that they were given no advance warning that the statue would be moved and that it had stood outside the church for 30 years. They said the removal was part of the government's "agenda to target minority Christians and Muslims." The spokesman for the Bangalore Diocese said it would pursue additional legal action.

On August 2, according to media reports, municipal authorities demolished a three-year-old mosque at Shamshabad near Hyderabad in Telangana after receiving complaints from the local Hindu community about the building's legal status. The Muslim All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) and the Majlis Bachao Tehreek (MBT) political parties protested the demolition, including by carrying out a sit-in at the municipal government offices, and alleged that the mosque was demolished before the court had considered the dispute. MBT leader Amjedullah Khan told media that this was the sixth mosque demolished in the state since the Telangana Rashtra Samithi Party came to power in 2014. He said the building was demolished at 3:00 in the morning with police assistance. In response to a request from the AIMIM, the Telangana state government ruled the mosque could be reconstructed on the same plot of land.

Some courts around the country issued rulings which affected the properties of religious groups. On July 4, the Madras High Court rejected a petition to prohibit a non-Hindu Tamil Nadu state minister from entering the Adi Kesava Perumal Temple at Thiruvattaru in Kanyakumari District during the Hindu Kumbabishekam festival. The court ruled it was impracticable for authorities to check the religion of visitors to the temple. The court also stated that non-Hindus who believed in the Hindu deities could not be prevented from entering a Hindu temple to offer prayers. According to media reports, the petitioners said that the state official in question, Minister of Information and Technology Mano Thangaraj, had been invited by the state's Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department to visit the temple.

On August 22, the Karnataka state government informed the High Court it would establish a management committee composed of Hindus and Muslims under the Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments Act of 1997 to manage Sri Dattatreya Bababudan Swamy Peetha-Dargah, a disputed cave shrine located at Bababudangiri Hills in Chikkamagaluru District in Karnataka. Both Hindus and Muslims have claimed ownership of the shrine for several years. The decision violated a 2021 ruling by a judge that only the *Sajjada Nasheen* (Sufi Muslim custodian) of the shrine could determine how the shrine would be used.

On August 26, the Kerala High Court ordered the state government to close all unlicensed religious facilities. The court order came on a petition filed by the Muslim Noorul Islam Samskarika Sangam organization, which sought to convert a commercial building into a place of worship. The municipal government denied the request because 36 mosques were situated within a five-kilometer (three-mile) radius of the commercial building. The Muslim group then petitioned the High Court, which agreed with the municipality's denial. According to media reports, the High Court's ruling stated, "If every Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jew, [or] Parsi devotee starts to construct religious places and prayer halls near their residence, the state will face serious consequences, including communal disharmony." The High Court's ruling also said that while the country's constitution "ensures right to maintain religious institutions, it does not mean people can construct religious places everywhere."

In March, the government re-opened the 600-year-old Jamia Mosque in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, which had been closed due to COVID-19 restrictions and the 2019 revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's semi-autonomous status. On April 28, however, local authorities closed the facility for the final Ramadan service, citing concerns about controlling the large crowd expected, according to media. Media also reported that authorities were concerned about possible protests in the mosque following the arrests of 13 Muslims for disrupting Friday prayers on April 8 by shouting anti-government slogans. The mosque re-opened after Ramadan and remained open most other days.

On November 9, the Allahabad High Court dismissed a 2021 petition challenging a special CBI court's September 2020 acquittal of all 32 persons, including senior BJP politicians, charged in the 1992 demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. The court accepted the CBI's claim that the petitioners were neither complainants



nor victims in the original case and hence did not have standing to appeal. The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board announced in December that it would file a petition in the Supreme Court against the acquittals in the CBI court.

In August, local officials in Assam demolished three madrassahs in the Bongaigaon, Barpeta, and Morigaon Districts they said had supported terrorist groups. Police arrested 37 persons, including imams and madrassah teachers, for alleged links to the Ansarullah Bangla Team, an affiliate of Al Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent. Speaking to journalists, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma described the demolished madrassahs as terrorist hubs that had been constructed illegally. In September, media outlets reported that the Assam state government mandated that all of the approximately 3,000 Muslim community-run madrassahs in the state register on a government portal and comply with state regulations. Badruddin Ajmal, a member of parliament and president of the Muslim-majority All India United Democratic Front Party, stated the BJP government and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a groups widely described as Hindu nationalist, were “targeting Muslims.”

In September, the Uttar Pradesh government conducted a survey of approximately 16,000 madrassahs in that state. The government said the survey was intended to collect information on the quality of education provided at the madrassahs, the availability of teachers, and whether facilities met the standards of the NCPCR. Opposition parties and some Muslim organizations claimed the survey was intended to interfere with the operation of private madrassahs. The survey revealed that more than 6,000 private madrassahs in the state were unregistered. The survey also revealed a high drop-out rate among students of madrassahs.

Throughout the year, media reported on plans of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to remove selected topics related to history and social science from textbooks used in grades six to 12. Media reported that under the CBSE plan, the textbooks would not include material covering non-Hindu governments, rulers or persons, such as the Muslim Mughal courts, or instances of violence against non-Hindus, such as the Gujarat riots in 2002. The revised textbooks would include verses from Hindu religious texts. Critics said removing this material would be detrimental to minorities such as Muslims and Dalits. Historian Irfan Habib said that those who revised the textbooks “seemed to have only a

single-minded agenda of implementing (a) regressive and sectarian vision, an exclusivist idea of India.” In December, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan announced that the CBSE’s “corrected” version of the country’s history under the National Education Policy would go into effect in 2023.

The “Prevention of Mob Violence and Mob Lynching Bill,” passed by the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly in December 2021 with the stated aim of reducing lynching and violence related to allegations of cow slaughter in the state, did not come into effect during the year. Rather, the state governor returned the bill to the legislature in March, seeking clarifications from the state government on definition of a “mob” and asking the bill to be “in consonance with the well-defined legal lexicon.” The Jharkhand bill, intended to maintain “peace, communal harmony, and brotherhood” in the state, would, if enacted, become the fourth such law after those in Manipur, Rajasthan, and West Bengal. In March, Jharkhand Parliamentary Affairs Minister Alamgir Alam told the legislative assembly that 51 persons accused of lynching related to cow slaughter or beef sale/consumption in that state between 2016 and 2021 had been sentenced to life in prison and fined a total of 1.99 million rupees (\$25,000), paid as compensation to victims’ families.

There were government actions during the year that some minority religious groups and observers described as damaging. On May 29, the Assam state government announced it would issue official “minority certificates” similar to the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste certificates issued by the national government to six religious communities: Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Sikhs. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the certificates would ensure access to government programs and scholarships for minority group members. The state’s family welfare minister told media that the Assam Minorities Development Board had requested the new certificates. Opposition parties, including the Muslim-majority All India United Democratic Front, criticized the policy as divisive and unnecessary, because the national constitution already specified which groups were given official minority status. According to media reports, some Muslim groups were concerned by the chief minister’s public explanation that minority groups would be redefined in each district, “depending upon the geography, population and threat perception” in the area. The spokesman for the Assam Christian Forum asked media, “Who is the government of Assam to certify me as a Christian?” and “How could the government identify

anyone's religious beliefs simply by their name?" Media reported that some smaller non-Muslim minority communities including Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs welcomed the initiative. The new certificates had not been issued by year's end, as the Assam government worked out the details.

In September, the Maharashtra state government commissioned the Tata Institute of Social Sciences to analyze any educational, economic, and social factors that were impeding the economic development of the Muslim community in the state. In a statement, the government said it intended to use the findings of the Tata Institute study to "increase (Muslim) participation in the important sectors of the economy." The study had not been completed at year's end.

On October 17, the government filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court stating that it would appoint a law commission to study the demand to enact a uniform civil code for people of different religious denominations. The affidavit stated, "citizens of different religious denominations followed their own property and matrimonial laws which posed a threat to the national unity." In November, the government appointed the commission. The constitution stipulates that the state shall endeavor to create a uniform civil code applicable to members of all religions across the country.

Some outside observers stated that government actions targeted religious minorities, and that the government failed to protect religious minorities from attacks. At an international summit February 26-28 organized by 20 global civil rights NGOs, participants discussed the international community's obligation to take steps to prevent hate crimes, including violence and hate speech. One of the organizers of the summit stated, "The international community has a moral obligation to act now to prevent a cataclysmic turn of events in India, where millions of Muslims and other marginalized communities are already living in fear and experiencing the rapidly shrinking space for civil rights and religious freedom."

On April 26, following communal violence in Khargone and other areas of the country, 108 former government officials, including former cabinet secretaries, police officials, and diplomats, wrote Prime Minister Modi. Calling themselves the Constitutional Conduct Group, the former officials said the recent "frenzy of hate-filled destruction" against religious minorities in the country was undermining the

constitution. They said the escalation of “hate violence” against minority communities, particularly Muslims, in states like Assam, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand “has acquired a frightening new dimension,” and the “hate and malevolence directed against Muslims seems to have embedded itself deep in the recesses of the structures, institutions, and processes of governance in the states in which the BJP is in power.” They stated, “The administration of law, instead of being an instrument for maintaining peace and harmony, has become the means by which the minorities can be kept in a state of perpetual fear.” They said Modi’s silence “in the face of this enormous societal threat” was “deafening,” and that he should “call for an end to the politics of hate that governments under your party’s control are so assiduously practicing.”

In June, a panel of international experts under the auspices of the Center for Human Rights, the University of the Free State, and the Amsterdam International Law Clinic released a report which stated that a series of “laws, policies, or conduct” of the central or state governments targeted or affected Muslims disproportionately in violation of international law and called for an independent investigation of these actions. At the report’s launch event, Stephen Rapp, former U.S. Ambassador at Large for Global Criminal Justice and a member of the panel, said “the government of India’s failure to address these issues further dehumanizes India’s Muslims and increases their vulnerability to violence.”

At the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review of India in December, 14 nations recommended that the country take steps including reinforcing efforts to protect the rights of all minorities as enshrined in its constitution; repealing laws used to prevent, discourage, or prosecute religious conversion; ensuring that laws governing freedom of religion are fully enforced, especially for members of religious minorities; investigating all cases of religious violence and discrimination on religious grounds, including against Muslims and other religious minorities; and condemning and addressing hate speech against Muslims and other minorities.

In its annual report, HRW said the government “continued its systematic discrimination and stigmatization of religious and other minorities, particularly Muslims.” The HRW report stated that supporters of the ruling BJP “increasingly

committed violent attacks against targeted groups.” South Asia Director for HRW Meenakshi Ganguly said to media, “The BJP government’s promotion of Hindu majoritarian ideology provokes authorities and supporters to engage in discriminatory and at times violent actions against religious minorities.” HRW also said, “authorities in several BJP-ruled states demolished Muslim homes and properties without legal authorization or due process as summary punishment for protests or alleged crimes.” HRW also stated that authorities “misused” laws forbidding forced religious conversions “to target Christians, especially from Dalit and Adivasi communities”.

During the year, some politicians and government officials made public statements that some religious minority groups viewed as controversial or derogatory. According to media reports, on May 7, BJP state legislator Haribhushan Thakur Bachaul said during an event in Patna, Bihar, that Muslims should be “set ablaze, just as Hindus burn effigies during the Dussehra festival.” In February, Bachaul said that Muslims living in the country should be stripped of voting rights and treated as “second class citizens,” prompting a protest in the Bihar Legislative Assembly by members of the opposition.

On May 14, Home Minister Amit Shah, while addressing a public meeting in Hyderabad, promised to end employment and educational quotas for religious minorities in Telangana if the BJP were voted to power in the state election due in late 2023. In 2017, the Telangana legislature increased quotas for Muslims from 4 percent to 12 percent and for Scheduled Tribes from 6 percent to 10 percent in education and government jobs. Shah said that the additional religion-based reservations actually reduced quotas for Dalits, Scheduled Tribes, and other government-defined “backward” classes, which are established in the constitution.

On May 26, BJP spokespersons Nupur Sharma and Naveen Jindal made televised remarks which Muslims widely believed were derogatory to the Prophet Muhammad. On June 9, protests against their remarks began in several parts of the country. Muslim crowds demonstrated in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, West Bengal, and Telangana States, many gathering after Friday prayers at local mosques, according to media reports. In Ranchi, Jharkhand, media reports said two demonstrators died of bullet injuries on June 10, and 13 other persons, including police personnel, were injured after protests turned

violent and police fired in the air to disperse a crowd throwing stones. Police said they were investigating the deaths. Local authorities imposed a curfew to end the violence. In West Bengal, protests took place through June 12 in Muslim neighborhoods in Howrah, Murshidabad, Kolkata, and Nadia Districts. Media outlets said West Bengal police arrested more than 100 individuals for acts of violence and arson during the protests, while Uttar Pradesh police arrested more than 200. On June 13, clerics of the Bengal Imam Association urged the West Bengal government to prohibit public protests to prevent further violence. Several Muslim majority nations formally protested Sharma and Jindal's statements.

Media reports said the BJP suspended Sharma from her position on June 5, pending further investigation, and expelled Jindal from the party the same day. In a statement, the BJP said it "respects all religions," and "is strongly against any ideology which insults or demeans any sect or religion." The Ministry of External Affairs stated Sharma's views did not represent the views of the government. Media outlets also reported that Muslim groups around the country filed police complaints against Sharma for her comments. Sharma issued an apology for her remarks but was charged on May 28 with hurting religious sentiment. She was not arrested, and a date for her trial had not been set by year's end. In June, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and government officials from 11 countries (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Pakistan, Afghanistan, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Oman, and Maldives) condemned the remarks.

On August 24, Telangana police arrested BJP state legislator T. Raja Singh for remarks about the Prophet Muhammad that were deemed offensive. The lawmaker's comments led to protests among the Muslim community in Hyderabad. In response, the BJP suspended T. Raja Singh from the party. On November 9, the Telangana High Court set aside the preventative detention order against Singh and ordered his release. The court ordered him, however, not to make any provocative speech against any religion, not to post any derogatory or offensive material on social media, and not to host or participate in any celebratory rally or meeting after his release, according to media.

In September, Mohan Bhagwat, the chief of the RSS, met with five prominent members of the Muslim community to listen to their concerns and discuss how to

promote communal harmony between the Muslim and Hindu communities. Bhagwat reportedly committed to continued meetings for the purpose of improving relations between Muslim and Hindu communities. Bhagwat also met with Umer Ahmed Ilyasi, head of the All India Imam Organization, at a Delhi-area madrassah run by that organization. Media reported that some Muslim groups welcomed Bhagwat's engagement, while others described it as "just optics" and preparation for the 2024 parliamentary elections. In 2021, Bhagwat had stated publicly that Hindus and Muslims in the country should not be treated differently because of religion and that killing non-Hindus for cow slaughter was an act against Hinduism.

The government also took some action against other public statements that religious groups said they considered derogatory. Media outlets reported that on January 12, the Supreme Court agreed to review a petition against Pooja Shakun Pandey, a member of the Hindu Mahasabha political party, and other Hindu leaders for remarks they made during a conference in Haridwar, Uttarakhand, in December 2021. Retired judge Anjana Prakash filed the petition, which said the anti-Muslim remarks made at the conference posed "a grave threat not just to the unity and integrity of our country but also endanger the lives of millions of Muslim citizens." According to CNN, a video from the conference showed Pandey saying, "If 100 of us (Hindus) become soldiers and are prepared to kill two million (Muslims), then we will win ... protect India, and make it a Hindu nation." The court was reviewing the petition at year's end.

On January 14, police arrested Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati, who they described as a religious extremist, and charged him with inciting religious violence in remarks at the same conference as Pandey. Narsinghanand had called upon Hindus to "take up weapons" against Muslims and wage a war against "Islamic jihad" for the protection of Hindus and could face five years in prison if convicted. Released on bail in April, he urged a Hindu audience to take up arms if a Muslim were ever elected prime minister. In September, Delhi police charged Narsinghanand again for making inflammatory remarks against Muslims and educational institutions dedicated to Muslims. He was again released on bail, and his trial was underway at year's end.

Also in January, the Catholic News Agency reported that the Madras High Court ruled that Father George Ponnaiah would be tried on hate speech charges for

comments he made in 2021 that were viewed as derogatory to Hindu gods, the Prime Minister, the home minister, and the state government in Tamil Nadu. Ponniah denied that anything he said was designed to hurt religious sentiments and apologized if anything he said hurt someone. There were no updates on his case available at year's end.

On June 27, police arrested journalist Mohammed Zubair, cofounder of the fact-checking website Alt News, for a tweet he posted in 2018 that police said "deliberately insulted Hindus." Police said another social media user filed the complaint against Zubair. AP reported Uttar Pradesh police later charged him with using the term "hatemongers" in describing some Hindu participants at the Haridwar conference in 2021 and with criminal conspiracy, destroying evidence, and receiving foreign funds in other cases. Other journalists, activists and opposition politicians said the arrest was harassment and called for Zubair's immediate release. On July 20, the Supreme Court granted Zubair bail and directed that all the cases against him be combined. On September 5, a local Delhi BJP official filed a police complaint against Zubair, accusing him of "spreading hate" against Sikh cricket player Arshdeep Singh. Zubair's trial was underway at year's end.

On October 21, the Supreme Court ruled on a petition that said there was "total inaction" on the part of the police against incidents of anti-Muslim hate speech in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand in 2021. The court ordered police and authorities in those states to immediately open cases against "hate speech makers" without waiting for formal complaints to be filed against them. The court said such cases should be opened "irrespective of the religion [of the speakers] so that the secular character of the country is preserved." In its statement, the court also said it was "tragic what we have reduced religion to" in the country and that a "climate of hate prevails in the country."

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Attacks on members of religious minority communities, including killings, assaults, and intimidation, occurred throughout the year. These included incidents of "cow vigilantism" against non-Hindus, based on allegations of cow slaughter or trade in beef, and incidents in which Muslim men were alleged to have married Hindu



women to convert them. There were also cases of communal violence between religious groups.

On February 6, a Hindu child, Rupesh Kumar Pandey, was killed during a Hindu-Muslim communal clash in Jharkhand's Hazaribag district. Police filed complaints against 27 individuals and arrested four. According to media reports, Pandey was part of a Hindu procession which was attacked by a Muslim crowd as it passed by them; he was badly beaten and declared dead when taken to the hospital.

On February 18, according to media reports, the burnt and buried body of Muslim Khalil Ahmed alias Rizvi was found near the banks of the Burhi Gandak River in Bihar state. He had been reported missing since February 16. Videos subsequently circulated on social media showed him being beaten by suspected cow vigilantes. Police later arrested three persons, including Hindu activist Krishna Kumar Jha, who told media that he and his accomplices circulated the video to spread awareness about *Hindutva* (Hindu nationalist movement). In a media interview after he was arrested, Jha said, "Stop cow slaughter and reunite India." Bihar police stated the video was shot to create communal tension and that the motive for the murder was a feud over a job, but the victim's brother told Muslim media that the attackers' motives, as cow vigilantes, were clear from the video they posted.

On March 29, a Muslim man was lynched on suspicion of cattle theft in Baramura village, Sepahijala District, Tripura State, according to local media. The victim was identified as Litan Miah, a resident of Tarapukar village in Dhanpur. Police later arrested two persons after the victim's father lodged a complaint and charged both with murder and other crimes. Police told media there was no evidence the victim was involved in cattle theft. On April 2, Tripura police arrested members of a civil society organization, Nagarik Suraksha Majlish, for organizing an unauthorized rally demanding the arrest of culprits involved in the lynching. The rally was stopped before the organization's members could meet the local magistrate and present their demands.

On April 10, a Hindu man, Vinod Chavda, was killed during communal violence in Khambat, Gujarat, after religious processions for the Hindu Ram Navami holiday moved through a predominantly Muslim neighborhood. Police said the clashing groups threw stones at each other and set some structures on fire. According to

media reports, police later arrested 40 individuals involved in the violence and said that it was planned in advance. Gujarat authorities also bulldozed eight Muslim-owned kiosks and shops belonging to the accused, saying they were illegal structures encroaching on the street.

Media reported that on May 2, a group of Hindus lynched two tribal men for allegedly slaughtering a cow in the Seoni district of Madhya Pradesh. A survivor said that the attackers were members of the Hindu nationalist groups Bajrang Dal and Ram Sena. Police arrested 14 persons and launched an investigation.

On May 4, Billipuram Nagaraju, a Dalit man, was killed in Hyderabad for marrying a Muslim woman against her family's wishes, according to media reports. The woman's brother and another relative beat and stabbed the victim to death. Police arrested the assailants and stated the motive for the killing was the victim's religion.

On June 21, two Muslim men killed Hindu pharmacist Umesh Kolhe in Amravati, Maharashtra, after Kolhe shared a social media post that supported suspended BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma's remarks during a televised political debate that were seen as critical of the Prophet Muhammad. The National Investigation Agency took over the investigation from the local police and arrested 11 suspects by September, according to media reports.

On June 28, a Hindu man, Kanhaiya Lal Teli, was attacked in his tailor shop in Udaipur, Rajasthan, by two Muslim men whom police identified as Gaus Mohammad and Riyaz Attari. One stabbed and beheaded Kanhaiya Lal Teli, while the other recorded the incident on his mobile phone; the video was then widely circulated on social media. The two said they killed Lal Teli for his social media posts supporting the remarks by Nupur Sharma. According to the *Washington Post*, in their video, Mohammad said, "We have beheaded the tailor. We are living for our God, and we shall die for him. Listen to me, [Prime Minister] Narendra Modi. You started this fire. We will douse it." Lal Teli's neighbors filed a police report against him earlier in June for posting on social media in support of Sharma. Lal Teli said he had closed his shop for a few days because he believed he was being watched after those social media posts. Authorities set a curfew in Udaipur and temporarily interrupted internet service in areas of Rajasthan to prevent protests about the killing to spread. Local authorities also said they

would punish those who shared the video or photographs of the killing. Police arrested Attari and Mohammad on June 28. On social media, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said the murder was “beyond imagination,” and urged Prime Minister Modi to address the nation and appeal for unity. On June 29, leaders of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind Islamic organization said the murder was “against the law of the land and our religion,” and called on all citizens to “restrain their emotions and maintain peace.”

On August 2, a crowd beat a Muslim man to death and injured two others in Madhya Pradesh for transporting cattle. The crowd suspected that the man was transporting cattle for slaughter, which is outlawed under Madhya Pradesh law. Madhya Pradesh police filed a complaint against 12 unidentified individuals for the attack and a separate complaint against the two survivors for illegally transporting the cattle. Police said the three victims were transporting 28 cows to sell at a fair in Amravati.

In September, media reported a tribal Hindu man was killed in Assam for allegedly trying to marry a Christian woman without converting to Christianity himself. According to media, a group of Christians allegedly dragged Biki Bishal out of his house and gave him the option to convert to Christianity or end the relationship. When Biki rejected the offer to convert, the mob reportedly killed him. Later, his body was found hanging from a tree. The NGO Legal Rights Observatory urged local authorities to take action in the case; police opened an investigation.

Terrorist groups Lashkar-e-Taiba and Hizbul Mujahideen killed several civilians and migrant laborers belonging to the minority Hindu and Sikh communities in Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir during the year. The *South Asian Terrorism Portal* said 30 civilians and 30 members of the security forces were killed in 151 incidents in the territory during the year, a decrease from 2021, when 36 civilians and 45 security forces were killed. According to HRW, the dead included Rahul Bhat, a Pandit (Kashmiri Hindu) who was shot and killed in his government office on May 12. In response, some Pandit government employees in the area went on what they said was an “indefinite strike” because the government had not done enough to keep them safe. Media outlets reported that Pandit teacher Rajni Bala was shot and killed on June 1 by suspected terrorists outside the school where she worked in the Kulgam district. Her death triggered additional protests by Pandits demanding that the government provide better safety for government

employees or move them out of the area. Protestors blocked the highway outside an army camp in Srinagar and also blocked the road to Srinagar airport.

On June 3, the president of the Kashmiri Pandit Sangharsh Samiti, a regional Pandit association, wrote the territory's chief justice, stating, "Every member of the [Hindu] religious minority is under direct threat from the [Muslim] terrorists operating in Kashmir Valley. The Union Territory and the Central administration have failed to secure their lives. The Kashmiri Pandits and Hindus want to leave Kashmir Valley, but the government is not allowing them to leave." Media outlets reported, however, that some Pandit families did not wait for government permission but fled to a Hindu district in Jammu after the killings, fearing for their safety. On August 16, media outlets reported that terrorists shot two Pandits who were working in an orchard, killing one and wounding the other. In October, following the shooting of another Pandit near his home, the Kashmiri Pandit Sangharsh Samiti president told media that more Pandit families had left the area, fearing for their safety.

The Hindu minority community in Jammu and Kashmir launched a prolonged protest against the government for not providing adequate security against targeted killings by terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir.

There were incidents of violence between members of different religious groups during the year. The National Crimes Record Bureau reported 378 instances of communal violence in 2021 (most recent data) compared with 857 in 2020.

For example, Video circulated of a January 7 incident in Jharkhand in which a group of local BJP members assaulted Muslim Zeeshan Khan and forced him to chant Hindu invocations. Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren instructed local authorities to conduct an investigation of the incident.

According to media reports, a crowd attacked a group of six Sikh pilgrims from Punjab in Bihar on January 16 because they refused to donate money for the construction of a Hindu temple. Bihar police later detained five individuals for questioning. Police said the attackers stopped the Sikhs, then pulled the driver from their truck and threw stones at the Sikhs when they refused to donate. Five Sikh individuals were injured in the incident.

On April 12, communal violence broke out in four states (Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal) between Hindus and Muslims during Hindu festivals and the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. The *Washington Post* reported there was also Hindu-Muslim communal violence in Goa and Andhra Pradesh.

On April 16, Hindu-Muslim clashes broke out at Hubballi in Karnataka, incited by a WhatsApp profile status shared by a college student that showed a saffron flag, a Hindu symbol, flying over Mecca. Members of the local Muslim community gathered at the local police station to demand action against the student; the crowd then threw stones at the station and police personnel, according to media reports. Police arrested 134 individuals for the violence and opened six cases against some of the perpetrators.

The same day, a crowd of Hindu activists affiliated with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad nationalist group held a religious procession on the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti, the birth anniversary of the Hindu god Hanuman. According to press reports, the activists took the procession past the mosque in the Jahangirpuri District of Delhi, played loud music, and chanted Hindu invocations outside the building. A Muslim witness told the *Guardian* that a group of Hindus “smashed beer bottles inside the mosque, put up saffron flags there, and chanted Jai Shri Ram [Hail Lord Ram],” which he said led Muslims to start fighting with the Hindus. A Muslim witness told the *Washington Post* that the Hanuman procession takes place every year in the district, “so why did they stop in front of the mosque this year and force us to say, ‘Jai Shri Ram’ (Glory to Lord Ram in Hindu)?” He said, “They’ve gone further and further to provoke us.” Delhi Police Commissioner Rakesh Asthana denied that a saffron flag had been placed in the mosque and said people from both the Hindu and Muslim communities were being investigated. Other observers told media that they had seen Muslims planning in advance for the violence by collecting sticks and stones to use as weapons the day before the incident. The *Guardian* reported that six police officers were injured in the violence; local authorities reported at least 15 persons were injured. Police arrested 85 individuals, and cases against them were at different levels of prosecution at year’s end.

On September 10, communal violence erupted during the Hindu festival Mahavir Akhara in Bihar, when members of a Hindu procession allegedly shouted remarks offensive to Muslims while passing by a mosque. Media reported that the Hindus

and Muslims then threw stones at each other, and the Hindus set a small shop on fire. Police filed charge reports against 25 Muslims and 10 Hindus for the incident and arrested 20. Among those arrested were a man and his eight-year-old grandson who were granted bail after a week in custody.

On December 18, local villagers forced approximately 200 Christians from 70 families to leave their homes in the Narayanpur and Konagaon Districts of Chhattisgarh State. International media said there were 20 “coordinated attacks” on Christians around the state that day. According to the Evangelical Fellowship of India, the villagers said the Christians must renounce their faith or leave the area. When some protested, they were beaten. The fellowship said some Christians were hospitalized because of their injuries, and police refused to take action when the victims filed complaints against their attackers.

In its *World Watch List* report covering 2022, the Christian NGO Open Doors stated that the situation for Christians in the country had not improved in the past year. The NGO said violence remained at an “extreme” level, and Christians still faced “very high or extreme pressure in all spheres of life.” The NGO also stated that “being a pastor is one of the riskiest vocations in (India) today. Hindu extremists target them, their wives, and children with violent attacks to sow fear in the wider Christian community.”

During the year, some organizations asked the government to take more action to protect Christians. In January, members of the Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace, described by media as a religious civil society group, wrote Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Mumbai, the president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India, to ask that the conference take stronger action with the government to protect Christians in the country. According to Catholic media reports, the group’s letter said the church had been “silent” about the 486 incidents of violence against Christians in the country in 2021, which they said was a “gross violation” of their rights. In its letter, the group also said, “The violent acts against the Christian community and Muslim community or any other minority group are in complete violation of the law of the land and the Indian Constitution. If we do not respond to such acts, the secular fabric of India will be lost, causing irreparable damage to the people of India, and an inclusive, democratic, and pluralistic India as envisioned in the preamble of the Indian Constitution could be lost forever.”

In March, Archbishop Machado, the NGO National Solidarity Forum, and the Evangelical Fellowship of India filed a petition with the Supreme Court asking for “the creation of a special investigation team to register criminal cases and prosecute groups responsible for attacking Christians, police protection for Christians who are under a threat of attack by violent mobs, and [an initiative] to identify and prosecute political and social groups responsible for violence against Christians.” The UCF coordinator said to media, “I hope the court takes note of the rising incidents of violence against Christians and directs concerned authorities to initiate criminal investigations and prosecute the criminal offenders in accordance with law. In September, the Supreme Court directed the Ministry of Home Affairs to collect information from eight states within four months on allegations of attacks against Christians.

In June, the UCF said the government should take action in response to what the NGO said was “escalating violence and mistreatment of the Christian community.” The UCF said there had been 207 cases of persecution as of midyear, including physical assaults, false imprisonment, vandalism, forced church closures, harassment, and social ostracization. By November 26, the UCF said there had been 511 anti-Christian incidents around the country reported to its hotline, compared to 505 in all of 2021. Most of the 2022 incidents were reported in four states: Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh. In a press statement in June, the UCF president said, “This data flies in the face of statements by government functionaries and leaders of the ruling party at the center and in the states that there is no persecution and that there are only a few stray incidents by fringe elements.”

On April 6, the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America released its 2022 annual report and documented 761 violent incidents against Christians in 2021, including neighborhood skirmishes, targeted killings, and armed assaults.

There were reports during the year of Hindu groups and organizations taking action against Christians they said were trying to convert others to Christianity and against Muslims, for praying in public. In some incidents, Hindus attacked Christians and disrupted Christian worship services.

On February 25, for example, a crowd attacked Pastor Kelom Kalyan Tete in South Delhi, tying him up, beating him, and forcing him to recite a Hindu chant. Media outlets reported that the crowd suspected the pastor of conducting forced conversions in the area. Tete filed a complaint with police and said the family he was visiting had attended his house church for two years and had converted to Christianity some time earlier.

Also in February, media outlets reported that Azad Prem Singh Damor, a member of the VHP, stated that 300 Scheduled Tribe members who had been “illegally” converted to Christianity through inducements had returned to Hinduism after a three-day function organized by the VHP in a village in Madhya Pradesh. Damor said the inducements included promises of better education, health-care facilities, and bicycles. Media outlets reported that Damor had been campaigning against Christian missionaries in the area for six months. The public relations officer for the local Christian diocese said to media that the VHP were “scaring people that they will lose scheduled tribal status” in order to persuade them to reconvert. The Madhya Pradesh state freedom of religion law allows reconversion to a “parent religion.”

In March, media reported that a group of Bajrang Dal Hindu nationalist activists attacked a Christian man in Hassan, Karnataka, for proselytizing outside a college in the city, and filed a complaint against him and his wife to the police for “inflaming religious sentiment.” According to media, the Hindu group said the man and his wife were trying to convert college students by distributing Christian books and pamphlets to them. A video posted to social media showed a group beating the victim, Manu Dhananjay. Police charged the couple under the penal code and released them on bail.

According to IAMC, in April, VHP and Bajrang Dal Hindu activists in Karnataka demanded the suspension of Christian prison chaplains who the activists said were handing out bibles and trying to convert prisoners in Gadag Jail.

Christian media reported that a group of Bajrang Dal members attacked Pastor Satish Kumar and his family in July, while they were celebrating a child’s birthday with friends. The attackers said the Kumars had forcibly converted individuals to Christianity. Kumar said the group dragged him outside of the house, burned his



Bible, and yelled Hindu chants at him. He also said the attack had left his family “traumatized.”

In October, a group belonging to the VHP stopped a school bus on its way to a Catholic school event in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh and harassed the tribal children onboard, Catholic media reported. According to eyewitnesses, the VHP members said the students were being taken to the school to be forcibly converted to Christianity. The VHP group said the event was being held without proper authorization and summoned the local police. The priest in charge of the event said that all the students involved were Catholic, and that the school had asked permission to host the event. Media outlets reported that police were investigating the incident.

On November 20, according to ICC, a crowd of Hindus disrupted a Sunday service in Koshalnar, Chhattisgarh. The crowd surrounded the church, demanded that the pastor and his brother come out, then beat the two with clubs. The crowd then entered the church and beat some of the parishioners. Media said that nine individuals from the church were hospitalized for their injuries.

In November, UCF stated, “In almost all incidents reported across India [during the year], vigilante mobs comprising religious extremists have been seen to either barge into a prayer gathering or round up individuals that they believe are involved in forcible religious conversions. With impunity, such mobs criminally threaten and/or physically assault people in prayer, before handing them over to the police on allegations of forcible conversions. Often communal sloganeering is witnessed outside police stations, where the police stand as mute spectators. Sadly, this violence against the Christian community is compounded by the failure of the police to investigate and prosecute mobs and perpetrators.”

During the year, there were also reports alleging that Muslim men had deceived Hindu women into marrying them and then pressured the women to convert. On December 31, news website *OpIndia* reported that it had documented 153 such cases of love jihad during the year. In some of these cases, *OpIndia* said Muslim men hid their religious identity from the Hindu women they married then forced them to convert to Islam after marriage. In other cases, according to the site, Muslim men forced Hindu women to marry them, even though the men were

married already. *OpIndia* said the majority of the cases they discovered were in Uttar Pradesh (65), Madhya Pradesh (37) and Jharkhand (12).

On January 9, according to ICC, approximately 200 persons, including Hindu nationalists, attacked a house church in Odagoan village in Chhattisgarh and assaulted Pastor Hemanth Kandapan and members of his congregation. The NGO said that one member of the crowd broke into the service and started beating the pastor, then dragged him outside where the crowd continued to beat him and others. Kandapan and a congregation member were seriously injured and required hospitalization. The crowd alleged the church was carrying out illegal conversions of Hindus to Christianity. According to the NGO, five local Christian families sought shelter in a neighboring village after the crowd warned the community not to hold Christian prayers in the village, or risk being killed. On January 17, according to media reports, members of the VHP forced the Christians from the house church to participate in a religious ceremony where a Christian woman was forcibly converted to Hinduism.

Christian media reported two instances in May of Hindu groups disrupting Christian services in Uttar Pradesh. On May 31, a crowd broke into a pastor's home while he was praying with his family. The crowd beat him and took him to the police, who charged him with "deliberate and malicious acts against another religion". In the second incident, originally reported by the NGO ICC, a group of seven to 10 Hindus disrupted a church service on May 29. An eyewitness said the group members posted a video of them harassing the worshippers, pushing the pastor to the ground and taking his Bible. A house church pastor told ICC, "We are scared to even conduct small group prayers; even that can be framed as forcible conversions." He said, "Our lives are in danger, as (our) Christian identity could put us behind bars." Another Christian leader in Uttar Pradesh said to ICC, "We have arrived at a critical juncture, where practicing the faith of our choice is equated as crime and [we are] punished accordingly."

Also in January, the *Religion Unplugged* news website reported that Sikhs had been offering worship space to Muslims in Gurgoan, Haryana, since 2021 because of a shortage of mosques in that city. The leader of a local Sikh NGO said that Sikhs were now being threatened by Hindu nationalist groups who opposed having additional sites for Muslim worship in the city and that Hindus had disrupted Muslim daily prayers in some locations.

On March 25, officials at Dr. Harisingh Gour Central University in Madhya Pradesh formed a committee to investigate a widely viewed video of a Muslim student praying in a university classroom. Other students complained about the Muslim's prayers and the fact that she wore a hijab to class. In April, media reported the student apologized in writing for the incident. After the video, the university issued a notification to students instructing them to perform religious rituals only at their residences or at designated places of worship, not on university grounds.

During a June 18 conference of the Hindu nationalist umbrella organization Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Rashtra Adhiveshan in Goa, the group passed a resolution to establish a Hindu nation in India by 2025. In other resolutions, the group called for removing the term "secular" from the country's constitution; abolishing the 1991 Places of Worship Act, which would return all religious structures to their pre-independence status and open all of them to potentially conflicting legal claims; banning halal food certification; and enacting a "population control act" to check what the Hindu organizations claimed to be a "vast increase of non-Hindu population in the country."

On July 5, Tripura police issued public warnings in parts of the state's capital, Agartala, after a Hindu group occupied and erected a makeshift temple in land designated for a Muslim cemetery and local Muslims blocked roads in response. The Muslim protestors said the land had been used as a burial ground for a long time and the group erecting the makeshift temple was "trying to disturb the communal harmony between Muslims and Hindus who have been peacefully residing in the area for decades." According to media, the local Muslim community wrote the government in 2019 to urge that the cemetery area be clearly demarcated to avoid disputes, but no action had been taken.

On August 22, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar visited the Vishnupad Hindu Temple in Gaya, which bars entry of non-Hindus, with state Information and Technology Minister Muhammed Israil Mansuri, a Muslim. After the visit, state BJP leaders criticized Kumar for "hurting the sentiments of the Hindu community" by making the visit. Temple authorities demanded an apology from the chief minister and the resignation of Mansuri and held a purification prayer ceremony covered by media to cleanse the temple. Mansur said he was "honored" to have been able to visit the temple.

On September 6, residents bulldozed a madrassah and adjacent residence in Assam after the imam was arrested, alleging “jihadi activities” by Bangladeshi nationals there.

On October 16, according to media, a group of Hindus entered a mosque in Hyderabad, installed an idol, and conducted religious ceremonies there. The Hindu group stated the government had allotted the land where the mosque stood for the construction of a temple to replace a temple that was demolished during a road extension. Following a complaint by mosque trustees, police opened an investigation. Local officials removed the idol and ensured the resumption of mosque activities.

On February 15, a group of Bajrang Dal members set fire to a truck in the Muzaffarpur district of Bihar, accusing the driver of illegally transporting beef. Police said the assailants claimed to be members of Bajrang Dal.

On February 22, local media reported a group of “cow vigilantes” attacked a family in a truck transporting cattle at Karmanghat in Hyderabad. The attackers assaulted the family and pulled them from their vehicle. Police arrested several men from both the Hindu and Muslim communities for the attack and filed cases against them. Police said the Muslim family members were arrested on the charge of transporting calves in violation of the Prevention of Cruelty against Animals Act. On February 28, police arrested six additional alleged attackers on charges related to fomenting communal hatred.

In March, Jharkhand Parliamentary Affairs Minister Alamgir Alam told the state legislative assembly that 46 incidents of mob lynching took place in Jharkhand between 2016 and 2021 (most recent government data). A report by the Jharkhand Janadhikar Manch, a human rights collective, stated that more than 30 tribal Christians and Muslims were lynched or beaten in that state on suspicion of cow slaughter or sale and consumption of beef between 2016 and 2021. According to the All Muslim Youth Association (AMYA), there were 58 lynchings related to cow slaughter in Jharkhand between March 2016 and December 2022, in which 36 persons were killed and 23 seriously injured. Those killed included 16 Muslims, 11 Hindus, five Christians and four Sarna Adivasis; 13 Christians, four Sarna Adivasis, three Muslims and two Hindus were among the wounded.

On December 15, media reported that Hindu nationalist groups urged the Karnataka Legislative Assembly to ban halal certification in that state. The protestors said that some (unnamed) organizations were using the proceeds from their halal certification to fund “anti-national” activities.

In its *Freedom in the World 2022* report, the NGO Freedom House again rated the country as “partly free” due to “discriminatory policies and a rise in persecution affecting the Muslim population.”

In August, the spokesperson in the country for the Christian NGO Open Doors UK & Ireland said the situation facing Christians and other religious minorities in the country was “unprecedentedly grave.” She said, “The gravity of the situation, for Christians and Muslims especially, is at its peak. Every day we receive new prayer requests from friends, for another Christian family attacked, or a pastor arrested on false accusation.” The spokesperson told media, “It is no longer small extremist groups attacking converts, now it is often entire communities attacking and expelling them, beating them or handing them over to the police on false accusations. Extremists are propagating the hatred through social media, instigating mass protests and rallies, rousing hatred and spreading misinformation. These can lead in turn to mob violence.” David Landrum, Director of Advocacy and Public Affairs for the NGO, told media, “Religious minorities across India are standing on a precipice. Their legitimacy, and in some cases, their very presence is threatened if the current wave of violent intolerance goes unchecked.”

In its *World Watch List* report for 2022, the NGO Open Doors stated “Increasing numbers of states [in the country] are implementing anticonversion laws, supposedly to stop Hindus being forcibly converted to other religions, but in reality they are often used as an excuse to harass and intimidate Christians who are just doing things like distributing aid or having a private church meeting. These laws do not seem to protect Christians from being coerced back into Hinduism. Christians increasingly experience social exclusion in their communities, discrimination in the workplace, and have false accusations and rumors spread about them. The Christians most at risk are those who have come to faith from a Hindu background. In some parts of India, many face constant

pressure to return to Hinduism, social exclusion, discrimination at work, physical assaults and are sometimes even killed.”

In one example of actions against Muslims during the year, on January 4, Hyderabad-based rights activist Khalida Parveen filed a police complaint after her photograph and name were posted on the internet along with personal information of other female Muslim activists in other parts of the country. The posts listed the women “for sale” on the *Bulli Bai* (bulli is Hindu slang considered derogatory to Muslim women) app on the open-source platform GitHub. Parveen said the app targeted Muslim women who were outspoken against the government. Parveen had previously called for the arrest of Hindu religious leaders who at a gathering in Haridwar in December 2021 publicly advocated killing Muslim Indians. In January, the BBC reported that police in Hyderabad, Delhi, and Mumbai had registered cases against Bulli Bai after photographs of more than 100 Muslim women appeared on the app, saying they were on “sale”. The accused included developers of the app and related Twitter handles that shared the images and content. The GitHub platform took down the app.

There were also reports during the year of discrimination against Muslims seeking employment. In June, the Ledby Foundation, which focuses on leadership development for Muslims, published a study which illustrated that a Muslim woman with the same qualifications for a job as a Hindu woman likely would receive less than half as many job offers as a Hindu. In September, Anita Kapoor, general secretary of the Urban Domestic Workers’ Union in New Delhi, said to media, “Many [Muslim] workers have to hide their name and identity in order to get a job and avoid [further] discrimination.”

Some public figures made remarks Muslims found offensive during the year. On April 29, P. C. George, a former Congress Party legislator in Kerala, encouraged Hindus and Christians to not eat at restaurants run by Muslims. In a video circulated on social media, Gyan Dev Ahuja, a BJP former member of the Rajasthan state legislature, said, “We have killed five of them so far, be it in Lalwandi, be it Behror, ... I have given a free hand to the workers, kill those (expletive) behind cow slaughter.” According to *Al Jazeera*, police charged Ahuja with promoting religious hatred and enmity and brought him in for questioning on August 22.

There were reports of vandalism at Christian churches and shrines during the year. In one example, on January 23, the staff of the Holy Trinity Cathedral Church in, Tamil Nadu, reported that vandals broke into a nearby Catholic shrine and defaced a statue of Saint Sebastian. The assistant parish priest told media, “We don’t have any history of hostility with anyone, and we are surprised at this development.” Media outlets reported that some Catholics protested peacefully in front of the cathedral to call for police action on the case. On January 27, police arrested two suspects. Police said that the incident appeared to be an act of revenge in response to the death of a girl in the Thanjavur District of the same state earlier in the month, which some Hindu groups said on social media was caused by her “forced conversion.”

On May 14-15, unidentified persons destroyed statues of Mary and Jesus at a shrine in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh. Following complaints and protest marches by the local Christian community, police opened a case. Media outlets reported that the local BJP stated in 2021 that the statues and shrine were erected where a Hindu shrine had stood. The bishop of Guntur stated, “We have a very good rapport with people from other faiths. No such incident was reported in the past, so it is quite shocking for all of us. We have no idea who could be behind the attack, but we condemn it.”

Overnight on August 24-25, unidentified individuals damaged statues of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph at a Catholic church in Daram village in the North Garo Hills District in Meghalaya. Police told media on August 30 that an investigation was underway, but no arrests had been made. The area bishop said that the village was dominated by Christians. He also said this was the first such incident reported in the village, where he said people of different communities “lived happily.”

In early September, unidentified individuals damaged a statue of Mary and Joseph at the Infant Jesus Catholic Church in Patti, Punjab and burned a car outside the church. On September 6, according to Catholic media reports, the Punjab and Haryana High Court ordered government authorities to protect church property in the state. Following the vandalism, local Christian and Sikh leaders said they would cooperate to lower interfaith tensions in the area. At a meeting on September 7, media reported that Catholic bishops invited Sikh leaders to work with them to stop the “conspiracy” they said was causing disharmony between

Christians and Sikhs in the area. The bishops said that the tension was partly due to some self-styled “custodians of the Christian faith” who were posing as officers of the Anglican Church of India, which the bishops said had no legal standing. The local Sikh leader urged the Christian leaders to take “stern action” against the groups encouraging tension.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

During the year, embassy and consulate officials met with government officials to discuss religious freedom and emphasize the importance of interfaith dialogue. Embassy officials, including the Chargés d’Affaires, also engaged with members of parliament and politicians across diverse political ideologies on the importance of religious freedom and the responsibility of democracies to ensure the rights of religious minorities.

In September, the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia met with government officials to encourage positive messaging on pluralism and tolerance and respecting human rights, including religious freedom.

Embassy and consulate officials, and visiting senior officials from Washington, met with leaders from religious minorities, NGOs, civil society members, academics, and interfaith leaders to discuss perspectives concerning the status and experiences of religious minorities. U.S. government officials discussed the importance of religious freedom and pluralism; the value of interfaith dialogue, and the operating environment for faith-based NGOs.

Throughout the year, the Chargés d’Affaires engaged with members of religious communities, including representatives of the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh faiths. In May, the Chargé d’Affaires hosted an iftar with interfaith leaders, the first in-person iftar hosted by an embassy representative since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the event, the Chargé d’Affaires emphasized the country’s religious diversity and heritage and the importance of religious freedom to democracies.

In September, the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia met with interfaith leaders, including Hindus, Christians, Muslim, and Sikhs, to discuss their perspectives. In June, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and



Central Asian Affairs met with civil society leaders and emphasized the importance the U.S. government attaches to human rights, including religious freedom.