



Agenda Item: 6 - Adoption of UPR outcome on India

Organisation: Christian Solidarity Worldwide & World Evangelical Alliance

Speaker: Sini Maria Heikkila

21 September 2017

Mr. President,

Christian Solidarity Worldwide together with the World Evangelical Alliance commends India on its engagement with the Universal Periodic Review in May 2017. During the India's UPR, several delegations urged India to protect human rights defenders and raised concerns about violations of freedom of religion or belief.

During the review, the government reiterated that it is committed to ensure a safe environment for human rights defenders. Yet, the space for journalists, writers or other human rights defenders who question Hindu right-wing politics and dissent is quickly deteriorating. The recent murder of editor *Gauri Lankesh*, who spoke against blatant attacks on freedom of expression and minority rights, is indicative of wider crackdown on free speech and thought.

During the UPR, several delegations urged India to retract its anti-conversion laws. The UN Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of religion or belief who previously visited India have been deeply concerned about the effects of these laws, which are procedurally flawed, providing the States sweeping powers to intervene into an individual's choice of religion. Equally, these laws continue to be used to foster harassment, intimidation and violence against religious minorities.

We are deeply concerned by India's failure to review the anti-conversion laws known as "Freedom of Religion Acts" which are already fully enforceable in six States. For instance, Jharkhand State in northern India signed an anti-conversion bill into law on September 5. The new law criminalizes conversion through allurement, force and fraud, but lacks a clear definition of these terms. Conviction carries a prison sentence of up to three years and/or a fine up to fifty thousand rupees.

## General Debate: Agenda Item 4

We call on the government of India to implement its constitutional guarantees granting every citizen the right to profess and practice their religion and to ensure that the voice of dissent against oppression and injustice is protected.

Thank you Mr. President.