

# Christians seek federal intervention in anti-Christian attacks

BHUBANESWAR, India - Christian leaders in India have sought intervention from the federal government to end anti-Christian violence which has killed two Christians since the attacks by Hindu radicals began Dec. 24.

Christian organizations in New Delhi appealed to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to “alleviate the fear of the Christian community” in the eastern state of Orissa, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News.

“We would like you to take immediate action so that violence against the peace-loving minority community may be stopped right away and peace restored,” they said in a statement. Archbishop Vincent Concessao of New Delhi, president of the National United Christian Forum, was among Catholic and Protestant leaders who signed the statement.

The Dec. 26 statement came amid reports of Christians fleeing their villages to the jungle, and priests and nuns going into hiding as Hindu radicals stepped up attacks against them.

The attacks began Dec. 24 in Bamunigam and soon spread to other parts of the predominantly tribal Kandhamal district. Bamunigam is a small town about 200 miles southwest of the Orissa state capital of Bhubaneswar.

According to reports, two Christians have been killed and about 30 churches and other church institutions have been attacked. Hindu extremists reportedly used swords, wooden sticks and iron bars in their attacks. They destroyed doors and windows of churches and set them on fire and burned Christian houses and shops.

Christian leaders across India have condemned the attacks and sought action against miscreants in Orissa, which is now ruled by a coalition of a regional party and the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party, the political wing of groups that want to make India a Hindu theocratic state.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India said in a statement to the press that the violence has shocked them. The church is "deeply pained" since this happened Dec. 24 and 25, "a time when we are celebrating the peace and harmony of Christmas," they added.

"These attacks on Christians on the day of Christmas seem to suggest a planned effort to disturb communal peace by some misguided and anti-social elements," the bishops said.

Father Tony Raj, a Jesuit priest working in Orissa, told UCA News Dec. 26 that some of his confreres in the affected areas of Baliguda and Phulabani "are missing and we do not know where they are."

"We managed to talk to some (others). Some are injured," he said. "This is a planned attack. Reports say we are attacked because we converted people forcefully. Where are the conversions? This is all baseless allegations."