



GENERAL INCORPORATED ASSOCIATION
ASIA-PACIFIC ASSOCIATION OF
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES



THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

31 May 2024

In behalf of

**The Asia-Pacific Association of Jehovah's Witnesses
And
The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses**

Joint Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee

Subsequent to the Adoption of the List of Issues

141st session (1 July–2 August 2024)

India

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ABOUT THE SUBMITTING ORGANIZATIONS

The Asia-Pacific Association of Jehovah's Witnesses (APAJW) is a general incorporated association registered in Japan, with membership in Australia, Fiji, Guam, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tahiti, Taiwan and Thailand.

The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses (EAJW) is a charity registered in the United Kingdom (No. 1085157), with membership throughout the member States of the Council of Europe.

These associations work together to promote the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in various parts of the world, particularly when Jehovah's Witnesses face violations of such rights. This submission is prepared and submitted jointly.

SUMMARY OF THE SUBMISSION

This submission to the Human Rights Committee (CCPR) on India highlights violations of the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the Covenant) subsequent to the adoption of the list of issues to be taken up in connection with the consideration of the 4th report of India.

Jehovah's Witnesses in India and as a worldwide organization respectfully request the Government of India to:

- (1) Ensure that all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses, are able to manifest their religion peacefully without interference;
- (2) Ensure that Jehovah's Witnesses can meet peacefully for worship without disruption, and that the police will protect their places of worship;
- (3) Take measures to deter and prosecute acts of hatred and violence against peaceful religions such as Jehovah's Witnesses;
- (4) Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Covenant for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Jehovah's Witnesses are a Christian religion with some 8.8 million active adherents internationally and have been in India for more than 118 years. In India they are a sizable community of 57,000 active adherents and 166,000 occasional worshippers, but they make up only 0.004% of the total population and 0.2% of the country's Christians. Jehovah's Witnesses generally enjoy freedom of worship and assembly in India, as guaranteed by articles 18, 19, 21, 22 and 27 of the Covenant and articles 15, 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India. However, they face sporadic incidents of religious intolerance or hatred as targets of religiously motivated attacks and harassment. Such incidents are not always promptly investigated and prosecuted.

II. VIOLATIONS OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE COVENANT

A. Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and expression (articles 18, 19 and 27)

2. The core beliefs and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses include peaceful discussion of their faith with persons who are willing to engage in conversation. This manifestation of religion or belief is protected by articles 18, in particular 18 (1), 19 and 27 of the Covenant. Restrictions on rights guaranteed by articles 18 and 19 are raised at paragraphs 24 and 26 of the list of issues (CCPR/C/IND/QPR/4, 22 August 2019). Jehovah's Witnesses do not coerce others into engaging with them or changing their beliefs.
3. During 2023, Jehovah's Witnesses in India recorded **at least 101 incidents** in which they were harassed while peacefully manifesting their faith in public. This is an increase from 53 of such

recorded incidents in 2022 and 45 in 2021. The first three months of 2024 saw at least 39 incidents of harassment. Some of these included physical violence. Most of the time, the police act to uphold Covenant and constitutional rights, though occasionally they are reluctant to act in defence of these rights. Note the following by way of example:

4. In August 2023, in **Pune, Maharashtra**, three Jehovah's Witnesses (a father and a daughter and one other man) were peacefully sharing their faith from house to house. A group of young men from an activist group stopped them and accused them of converting people. The Witnesses attempted to leave the area, but the men took them to the police station, where the Witnesses, including the young woman, were interrogated by a police inspector. The inspector warned them to stop getting involved in any such activities and did not allow them to leave until late in the evening. The next day, one of the male Witnesses was called to the police station in the evening for further questioning and held until 10:00 p.m. The Witnesses decided not to file a complaint, and the perpetrators were not prosecuted by the police.
5. In September 2023, in **Maliyaduthurai, Tamil Nadu**, three Jehovah's Witnesses (two women and one man) were having a peaceful conversation with a householder on religious matters. The police arrived and took the Witnesses to the police station. At the police station, without ascertaining the facts, an inspector angrily and incorrectly assumed that they were involved in religious conversion. The Witnesses explained the nature of their activity to the police but were allowed to leave only after being warned by the inspector that they should not be seen in the area again. No complaint was filed by the Witnesses. The perpetrators were not prosecuted by the police.
6. In December 2023, in **Sundargarh, Odisha**, three Jehovah's Witnesses spoke to a man about their faith. The man became angry when he learned that they are Christians and asked them to leave. The Witnesses peacefully complied, but the man gathered a mob and followed them. With a steel pipe, he struck and damaged a bicycle belonging to one of the Witnesses. Then he held the pipe against the neck of one of the Witnesses. The mob falsely accused the Witnesses of receiving payment to convert others and demanded money. The incident lasted for some 30 minutes. The police were not involved in this incident.
7. In January 2024, in **Bengaluru, Karnataka**, two female Jehovah's Witnesses were sharing their faith from house to house. A man to whom they spoke accused them of conversion, gathered a group of people and called the police, who took the women to the police station. A police inspector asked them to bring a representative of the organization to the police station. The women explained that it was their personal decision to help people by sharing beneficial information from the Bible and that they were not acting under the direction of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. The husband of one of the women went to the police station, and after listening to him, the police inspector allowed the women to leave. No complaint was filed by the Witnesses, and the perpetrators were not prosecuted by the police.
8. In March 2024, in **Mumbai, Maharashtra**, two Jehovah's Witnesses were peacefully inviting those whom they met to attend a Christian meeting. One man responded by shouting, kicking and beating them, and he made the false accusation that they were converting others. He also threatened to kill the Witnesses if they ever came back. The Witnesses peacefully walked away, but the man continued hitting them with a bamboo stick. The Witnesses took refuge in their nearby place of worship (Kingdom Hall). The man and a number of companions followed them to the property and remained outside for some time. The Witnesses submitted a complaint to

the police, but this was only reluctantly accepted. The police refused to file a first information report (FIR). Instead, they filed a non-cognizable report, which is a simple acknowledgment of the complaint but does not guarantee any action against the perpetrators by the police.

B. Right of peaceful assembly and association (articles 21 and 22)

9. Articles 21 and 22 of the Covenant protect peaceful assembly and association, such as the religious meetings of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Restrictions on the freedoms guaranteed by these articles are raised at paragraphs 26 and 28 of the list of issues.
10. Jehovah’s Witnesses experience sporadic difficulties in meeting for peaceful worship without disruption or interference, and they occasionally suffer police harassment. For example:

11. On Sunday, 29 October 2023, multiple explosions occurred at a regional convention (large religious gatherings) of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Kerala. Eight persons died as a result of their injuries, including a 12-year-old girl, her mother and her brother. A 76-year-old man died, and five days later, his wife succumbed to injuries sustained from the blast. Many more were injured, including some with severe burns. The police and other local authorities responded promptly, and the government of Kerala provided considerable support, promising to care for all medical expenses of the victims. Dr. Veena George, Health Minister of Kerala, met with representatives of Jehovah’s Witnesses and sent information to all hospitals concerned. A number of media outlets contacted Jehovah’s Witnesses to counter misinformation. Many news media reported positive comments made by government officials, including the Chief Minister of Kerala and the Health Minister herself, on the orderliness and good organization at the convention, which prevented the number of casualties from escalating. Nevertheless, those affected were left traumatised by this act of religious hatred, with many having difficulty sleeping. Those injured are dealing with life-changing consequences. Currently, one attendee is still receiving medical care.

12. On 23 April 2024, Dominic Martin was charged under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and the Explosive Substance Act. The charge sheet runs to more than 3,500 pages and includes testimonies from more than 284 witnesses. Mr. K.S. Sudarshan, Deputy Commissioner of Kochi City Police, stated publicly that Dominic Martin acted alone and without accomplices. Mr. Sudarshan also said that investigations will continue, but “the court will conduct the trial based on the charge sheet.”

13. On 2 July 2023, in **Selaqui, Dehradun, Uttarakhand**, during a peaceful religious meeting of Jehovah’s Witnesses, police officers accompanied by a mob invaded the Kingdom Hall. The mob threatened the attendees, and the policemen video-recorded the incident but did not intervene to stop the meeting from being disrupted. Subsequently, Police Subinspector Mohan Singh arrived with additional policemen and questioned those present for worship. Two of the attendees were slapped, and four were taken to the police station for questioning. The police refused to record an official complaint, and Jehovah’s Witnesses have commenced private legal action. The court is collecting statements from the complainant and the witnesses. (The complainant’s statement is finalized; witness statements are still pending.) Once the statements

are recorded, the judge will determine how to proceed: either to file a FIR or to direct the police to investigate further and submit a report to the court.

14. Starting 20 October 2023, Jehovah’s Witnesses planned to hold three-day regional conventions at the Mahakavi Kalidas venue, **Mumbai, Maharashtra**, and had paid in advance for use of the facility. Shortly before the event, the management received an open letter making a number of unfounded and slanderous allegations, including “disturbing social harmony, disturbing peace [and] a possibility of conversion by showing the lure of money.” (Annex 1) The management insisted that Jehovah’s Witnesses obtain police approval, which was not forthcoming in time, and subsequently called off the programme just one day before the event. The Witnesses were able to book another venue, and all three conventions took place as planned at the new location. The Witnesses have made considerable efforts to obtain a refund of the amount paid to the venue for the cancelled event. The total amount paid is INR 17,95,200 (USD 21,500). The venue management have promised to return the full amount. However, there are currently no trustees of the facility and hence no one to sign the cheque, so the money has not yet been repaid.
15. In November 2023, Jehovah’s Witnesses in **Uthukuli, Tamil Nadu**, had rented a new premise for religious meetings. Previously, they held meetings at a nearby property and had not encountered problems. When meetings were about to start at the new premises, the police received a complaint that the meetings would (a) constitute a public nuisance, (b) raise conversion issues and (c) attract people from outside the area. The police were not satisfied with the oral approval that had been obtained and insisted that the Witnesses obtain written permission for meetings from the District Collector. Despite multiple visits to officials, the matter was not resolved. Finally, the owner cancelled the lease agreement. No complaint was filed by the Witnesses, although they were summoned by the police and statements were taken from them.
16. On Sunday, 17 March 2024, a regular meeting of the Delhi Mayur Vihar Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses, **Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh**, was interrupted by a group of policemen and others. This group entered the hall, and one of the policemen loudly demanded that the meeting be stopped, refusing a request to wait until the conclusion. No one was permitted to enter or leave. The police recorded names and addresses of all who were in attendance, took samples of religious literature and openly ridiculed the contents of the literature. They also took all the documents from the information boards at the hall. The policemen demanded travel documents and authorization from four foreign nationals who were in attendance.
17. The senior officer claimed that official notification of national elections had been declared on 16 March 2024 and that Section 144 (temporary restriction of public gatherings) had been imposed in Ghaziabad. Subsequently, no official publication or notification of this restriction could be located. The officer ordered the Witnesses to meet in private homes henceforth. He also suggested meeting the Assistant Commissioner of Police. People were gradually allowed to leave the hall, but some of the others in the group who were not policemen made videos, in which they alleged: “These people are doing religious conversion here.”
18. Later that evening, two local Witnesses were taken into custody by the police, interrogated and detained overnight. They were actually taken to the Kingdom Hall at approximately 3:00 a.m., at which point the police conducted a further search and seized additional religious literature. A subsequent newspaper report contained numerous inaccuracies but included a statement

from a high-ranking police official indicating that no conversion activities were discovered. Over the next few days, several additional Jehovah’s Witnesses were contacted by the police, with questions about the activities and funding of the local congregation.

19. On 21 March, a representative of Jehovah’s Witnesses met the Ghaziabad Commissioner of Police. The Commissioner referred him to the Station House Officer (SHO) of the Kaushambi police station. He also called the SHO and asked him to handle the matter and treat the Witnesses well. The meeting took place later that day. The police investigated the complaint by the Witnesses and submitted a report stating: “[S]ince there is no evidence of conversion the case is being closed.” The police did not submit any report regarding the issues raised by Jehovah’s Witnesses and are refusing to file a FIR against the perpetrators.
20. Jehovah’s Witnesses annual Memorial of the death of Jesus Christ, their most sacred occasion, was scheduled for the evening of 24 March 2024. On March 18, in **Digboi, Assam**, the police ordered the son of the landlord from whom the congregation rents their Kingdom Hall not to allow the Memorial to be conducted in the hall. The police threatened to use physical force if the event was held. Later the police gave the permission to hold the Memorial, which was held without any issues.
21. In **Thane, Maharashtra**, Jehovah’s Witnesses planned to hold the Memorial in a rented hall. One day before the event, a police constable went to the hall and asked for representatives to go to the police station. A senior inspector demanded that the Witnesses cancel the occasion, claiming that it would create law-and-order problems. The owner of the property subsequently received a call from the police and cancelled the booking. Jehovah’s Witnesses met in small groups and had to connect these groups online in order to observe their Memorial of Jesus’ death.
22. In **Talcher, Orissa**, a sign-language congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses planned to hold the Memorial in a rented hall. Members of the Angul & Dhenkanal District Deaf Association threatened that they would not allow the event to happen. The Witnesses notified the police of the threat and requested protection. On 24 March, members of the deaf association visited the hall and did not allow the programme to begin. The police refused to intervene, and the hall owners asked the Witnesses to cancel the event. Jehovah’s Witnesses filed a complaint against the perpetrators, but the police simply contacted the Witnesses and gave them a personal contact number, asking them to call if there are any issues in future.

III. FOURTH PERIODIC REPORT SUBMITTED BY INDIA

23. The fourth periodic report submitted by India under article 40 of the Covenant pursuant to the optional reporting procedure, received 22 September 2021, (CCPR/C/IND/4), contains a number of relevant statements.
24. Paragraph 18 states: “Article 15 [of the Constitution] prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Articles 15(3), 15(4), 15(5), 15(6) and 16(4), 16(4-A), 16(4-B), 16(6) provide for affirmative action in order to achieve equality. Article 17 not only abolishes but also penalizes untouchability. Non-discrimination and equality irrespective of one’s religious or other identities is also reinforced by explicit recognition of freedom of religion and by specifically protecting interests of linguistic and cultural minorities under Articles 25, 29 and 30 of the Constitution”.

25. Paragraph 128 states: “India is a Secular state, characterised by religious tolerance, equal treatment of all religious groups and respect for all faiths and religions. All religions enjoy the same constitutional protection without favour or discrimination. Secularism is a basic feature of the Constitution of India. The Constitution of India protects freedom of religion and conscience, and the right of all individuals to freely profess, practice and propagate religion subject to considerations of public order, morality and health”.
26. Paragraph 129 states: “[The Indian Penal Code, 1860] punishes offences such as promoting of enmity between different groups on ground of religion, committing a deliberate and malicious act designed to outrage the religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs, and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of national integration and harmony. This is in compliance with Article 20(2) of the Covenant.”
27. Paragraph 131 states: “Various anti-conversion laws impose restrictions, prohibit conversions from one religion to another by the use of force, inducement, allurement, or fraudulent means.” Jehovah's Witnesses are firmly and consistently against the use of any of these coercive means in the propagation of their religious beliefs.
28. Jehovah's Witnesses welcome these commitments on the part of the Government of India but respectfully submit that their experience shows that the commitments are not always effective at a local level.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

29. Jehovah's Witnesses in India and as a worldwide organization express concern about the violations of the rights to religious freedom, expression and association described in this submission. They respectfully request the Government of India to take the necessary steps to:
 - (1) Ensure that all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses, are able to manifest their religion peacefully without interference;
 - (2) Ensure that Jehovah's Witnesses can meet peacefully for worship without disruption and that the police will protect their places of worship;
 - (3) Take measures to deter and prosecute acts of hatred and violence against peaceful religions such as Jehovah's Witnesses;
 - (4) Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Covenant for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.

Marathi



English

zoom

Jagaruk Mulundkar

Dated: 17 October 2023

Per

manager

Mahakavi Kalidas Theater Administration

Complex Administration

Mulund West, Mumbai, Maharashtra

Subject: Regarding the reporting of possible wrongdoing in connection with events organized by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society...

Dear Sir/Madam,

Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society Institute at its famous Mahakavi Kalidas theater and complex auditoriums in Mulund.

Three times of 4 days each i.e. total 12 days program has been organized in the month of October and November.

October 2023 - 18 to 22 October, 26-29 October

November 2023 4 more

days The event is likely to attract thousands of people every day. The large number that gathers can create chaos in our administration and the surrounding area.

According to its confidential report, the Union Home Ministry had earlier taken preventive action against organizations operating under the name Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of India as well as Jehovah Witnesses of India. The said organization was accused of using the money received from foreign aid/subsidy for disturbing social harmony, disturbing peace and proselytizing in India.

In the programs organized by the same organization and lasting for twelve days, there is a possibility of conversion by showing the lure of money and doing programs that will spread superstition in the society. So that the permission granted to the said program in our hall should be revoked as there is a possibility of spoiling the social harmony.

Thank you in anticipation of your cooperation!

Your humble,

Mr. Kaustubh Govind Deshmukh 932293188

CF Chandra Maimani, head (9.)

Bharanmumbai Institute of Sports and Fine Arts
 Priyadarshini Indra Gandhi Ki । संकुल, मुलुंद
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