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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by Jammu and Kashmir Council for Human Rights (JKCHR), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



India – Danger of normalising racism, xenophobia, intolerance and all forms of bigotry

Racism, xenophobia and intolerance have always been prevalent within societies. But recent times have shown a rise in racism, and a growing sense of intolerance across the globe.

The emergence of the far right, as well as growing anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have plagued society, causing tensions between communities. This has become a real cause for concern, as all people have the right to live freely, without fear or intimidation. Everyone has the right to freedom of religion, to practice their respective faith in peace and harmony, without the fear of being judged. But the alarming factor is how governments around the world are brazenly normalising racism, xenophobia, intolerance and all forms of bigotry. The perfect example of this is India under the governance of Narendra Modi.

The people of India recently re-elected Prime Minister Modi for a second term. India – the world’s largest democracy, has always taken pride in its secularism, but today it finds itself in a position where minority groups are being targeted, and fearing for their safety. The ruling party, BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party) has enjoyed close ties with the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) an organisation that has strongly contributed to the rise of Hindu nationalism in India. Most of the BJP ministers belong to the RSS, an organisation that wants to declare India a Hindu Republic, as they are against all minorities. Therefore, it is unsurprising to see religious intolerance on the rise within Indian society today. The 2019 election was run mostly on fear mongering and anti-Muslim sentiment, because it secures the vote bank.

Under Modi’s leadership so far, India has seen Islamophobia being normalised, and strong wave of Hindu nationalism sweep across secular India. And BJP ministers have started the fire with their inflammatory comments and anti-Muslim bigotry. And this has come from key members of the BJP, some even close to the Prime Minister himself. Amit Shah, President of the BJP and friend of the Prime Minister, is on record for calling to purge infiltrators, “except Buddha, Hindus and Sikhs.” Another BJP minister, Ranjeet Bahadur Srivastava is also on record for saying that “the party will bring machines from China to shave 10-12 thousand Muslims and later force them to adopt Hindu religion.” These are not just comments from random individuals. These are prominent BJP ministers of the ruling party for the world’s largest democracy. These types of outrageous remarks should not be dismissed. They reflect what secular India has become today.

As reported by the BBC this year, a Muslim man by the name Shaukat Ali, was publicly beaten in the state of Assam. He was accused of selling beef and in anger, the mob tortured the man and forced him to eat pork. A video of the attack went viral and plastered on social media. This is just one incident of many, but it highlights the intolerance that has been brewing under Modi’s leadership. When ministers use election campaigns to stoke fear and whip up hatred towards other religions, and when the Prime Minister is silent over attacks until he is cornered into issuing a statement, it in a way validates this sort of behaviour, and emboldens those with hateful views and disdain for other religious groups to carry out acts of violence.

Modi’s India today threatens the fabric of the secular India that was once celebrated by India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru tried to curb Hindu nationalism and even ban the RSS. But today the secular India that Nehru envisioned is under real threat. Hindu nationalism is on the rise and it is fully endorsed by those at the top level. It is also important to note that the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is also a lifelong member of the RSS. When the leader of the world’s largest democracy is a member of an organisation that despises other religious groups, that is a cause for great concern.

But the fact that Narendra Modi has returned with yet another landslide victory clearly shows that his vision and the views of his party are being lapped up by the people. It is deeply worrying that voters have stamped their approval on a political party that has marginalised ethnic minorities and dehumanised Muslims. It is interesting to note that Modi’s government failed to live up to expectations of economic growth and development, and yet voted back in. This is a clear indication that fear mongering and hate is selling fast among the people.

The United Nations, in particular the OHCHR, has been actively involved in trying to combat the issue of racism, xenophobia and intolerance for a long time and it should be acknowledged. The Durban Declaration Programme can be cited as a prime example of the commitment to tackle these issues that are faced worldwide. But now the role of the United Nations is needed more than ever. The UN has always been used as a platform for voices that are unheard or people that have been marginalised by society. But today things have changed. The current climate across the globe is gradually becoming toxic, with democratic governments using their minority groups as punching bags and failing to protect them when they are vulnerable.

The OHCHR must engage with leaderships across the globe that are failing marginalised communities. Raising the alarm bells is not enough. More needs to be done because democratically elected governments are getting away with ill treatment of other ethnic minorities and religious groups, and it is getting out of hand. We cannot allow world leaders to get away with any form of bigotry, just because they are hiding behind the veil of democracy. No ethnic minority or religious group should feel under threat in a real democracy. Because democracy is not just about having free, fair and transparent elections. It is also about how the state treats its people.

The UN has always spoken of urgent action needed to end racial discrimination, and this was reinforced following the tragedy that took place in a Christchurch Mosque, New Zealand. The UN urged all states to work towards ending the hate and discrimination that has been growing rapidly in recent times. New Zealand's Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern was swift to respond to the tragedy and was visibly proactive. Prime Minister Ardern's response should be seen as an example of how world leaders should respond to such tragedies. The Human Rights Council should consider inviting the New Zealand Prime Minister, as she has been regarded as a role model across the world, through her natural and genuine effort to tackle the menace of hate and discrimination.

But the real test is for those governments that are themselves guilty of fanning the flames of hate. The UN must also call out states that have themselves pioneered hate and discrimination, and it must find a way to exert pressure on governments that are using ethnic minorities and religious groups to push forward their own political agendas.

If action is not taken now, there is a real danger that this strong tide of hatred and discrimination will cause devastation that will be hard to rebuild from. That is why the UN must keep racism, xenophobia and intolerance on the top of its list of top agendas. This is not just an issue for India alone. This has become a global issue and we are witnessing hatred and discrimination being normalised in societies all over the world. These problems have always plagued our societies. But today it has become a major global threat that we should no longer side-line. The UN must use its role as a bridge between world communities to highlight this serious issue, and to bring it to the attention of everyone.

We need to work together as a global community to tackle all forms of hatred, discrimination and bigotry, so that this world is a much better, happier and safer place for us all to live in. Because if we do not address this serious issue now, its consequences will be faced by future generations.

We should all have the freedom to be who we choose to be, and to freely practice any faith, without having to fear any form of prejudice. This is a basic Human Right, and we must work together to protect it. But if democratically elected governments pose as a threat to this basic Human Right, then we have a real issue at hand which must be called out on all levels and every forum. The UN should also reach out to allies and other countries that are willing to exert pressure on governments that failing to protect this basic Human Right of its minorities. This is a global crisis, therefore we must come together on one platform to defeat it.