



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

India: Recent Human Rights Reporting

Thursday, March 21, 2024

10:00 – 11:30 a.m.

Room H-313, The Capitol

As prepared for delivery

Good morning and welcome to today's Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing on human rights in India. I extend a special welcome to our witnesses and thank them for taking the time to share their expertise with us this morning.

India is an incredibly important country. It ranks 7th in land size and overtook China last year as the world's most populous country.¹ It is highly diverse ethnically, culturally, and religiously. And it is considered the world's largest democracy.

Democrats and Republicans alike recognize India's importance, and have worked to deepen U.S.-Indian ties based on our shared interests, including China. The Biden Administration's launch last year of the ambitious U.S.-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) is a recent example.

But as bilateral ties have deepened, concerns about human rights abuses in India have grown. The U.S. government's own human rights reporting reflects these growing concerns.

The State Department's [most recent human rights report](#), covering 2022, identified significant problems, including restrictions on religious and press freedoms; violence targeted at national, racial, ethnic and religious minorities; harassment of and restrictions on civil society and human rights organizations; corruption; and lack of accountability. The 2023 *Trafficking in*

¹ 1.44 billion as of March 2024. Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/india-population/>

Persons report found that overall anti-trafficking efforts, especially against bonded labor, are still insufficient.

As we will hear today, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has recommended for some time that the State Department designate India as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC).

Many of the problems that most worry human rights observers have been linked to current Prime Minister Narendra Modi's push to reshape India's secular democracy into a Hindu-first nation.

This coming April 19th, India will begin multiphase general elections that will determine the country's political direction for the next five years. Prime Minister Modi is seeking a third term.

I'm one of those people who thinks that friends should tell each other hard truths. India is a friend, and it is truly important to the U.S. that India prosper.

Yet there is a real risk that the tensions inherent in diverse societies could harden into dangerous conflicts and undermine India's bright future, if human rights abuses are not addressed. The recent communal violence between ethnic Hindu and Christian communities in Manipur state is but one example.

Congress must do its part to urge the Indian government to correct course and reconsider policies and laws, including counter-terrorism laws, that are inconsistent with the obligations India has acquired through its ratification of key human rights treaties.²

That is why we are here today. We have an excellent panel of witnesses who will update us on their human rights situation in India based on their most recent reporting, and will offer recommendations for steps Congress could take to incentivize India's compliance with its obligations.

Speaking out, as we are doing today, is important. In that regard I urge my colleagues to cosponsor [H. Res. 542](#) which condemns violations of international religious freedom in India.

But clearly more is needed, and I look forward to the witnesses' ideas.

²India is a state party to ICCPR, CEDAW, CERD, ICESCR, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols on armed conflict and child prostitution, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Source: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=79&Lang=EN

This hearing has attracted significant interest and we are expecting statements for the record from several organizations, including the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Without objection, I move to submit for the record the statements we receive.

I yield to Co-Chair Smith for his opening remarks.