

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 25, 2016

Prime Minister Narendra Modi
Prime Minister's Office
152 South Block, Raisina Hill
New Delhi - 110011

Dear Prime Minister Modi,

We write as Members of the United States Congress to reiterate our strong support for the partnership that exists today between India and the United States. Our strong support of this partnership encourages us to relay our grave concerns about the increasing intolerance and violence members of India's religious minority communities experience. We urge your government to take immediate steps to ensure that the fundamental rights of religious minorities are protected and that the perpetrators of violence are held to account.

Of particular concern is the treatment of India's Christian, Muslim and Sikh communities. On June 17th, 2014, more than 50 village councils in the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh adopted a resolution banning all "non-Hindu religious propaganda, prayers, and speeches" in their communities. The Christian minority community has been dramatically affected: the ban effectively has criminalized the practice of Christianity for an estimated 300 Christian families in the region one day after a mob, which included members of the Vishva Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal, seriously injured six Christians in the village of Sirciguda. Since the ban was implemented, Christians in the Bastar District reportedly have been subjected to physical assaults, denial of government services, extortion, threats of forced expulsion, denial of access to food and water, and pressure to convert to Hinduism.

We also are concerned that the nearly country-wide beef ban is increasing tensions and encouraging vigilante violence against the Indian Muslim community. On Monday, November 2nd, a Hindu mob killed Mohammed Hasmat Ali, a married father of three, in Manipur, India, after he was accused of stealing a cow. Mr. Ali reportedly is the fourth Muslim murdered in just six weeks by Hindu mobs angered over allegations of cows being slaughtered or stolen. We understand that the September 28th murder of 52-year-old Mohammed Saif in Uttar Pradesh sparked a national outcry over rising intolerance toward religious minorities which culminated in hundreds of prominent academics, business leaders, and authors protesting.

We want to raise additional concerns about the lack of recognition of Sikhism as a distinct religion, which prevents members of the community from accessing social services and employment and educational preferences available to other religious communities. Sikh community members reportedly are harassed and pressured to reject religious practices and beliefs distinct to Sikhism. On October 14, security forces killed two Sikhs and injured scores of others in Punjab who were protesting peacefully against the desecration of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Sikhism's holy book.

Mr. Prime Minister, we applaud India as a pluralistic society with a long-standing commitment to inclusion and tolerance. We also applaud your statements about religious freedom and communal harmony, including your promise in February 2014 that your government would *"ensure that there is complete freedom of faith...and not allow any religious group, belonging to the majority or the minority, to incite hatred against others."* We urge you to turn these words into action by publicly condemning the ban on non-Hindu faiths in the Bastar District of Chhattisgarh, and the violent assaults and other forms of harassment against religious minorities throughout India. We also urge you to take steps to address the activities of groups, such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and instruct Indian security forces to enforce the rule of law and protect religious minority communities from religiously-motivated harassment and violence.

Such steps would demonstrate your government's commitment to fostering a stable and inclusive society and respecting international obligations on the rights of religious minorities, including religious freedom. We await your response.

Sincerely,




Joseph R. Pitts
U.S. Representative



Roy Blunt
U.S. Senator



Keith Ellison
U.S. Representative



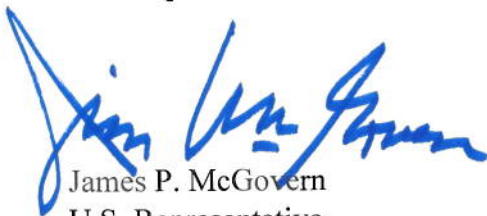
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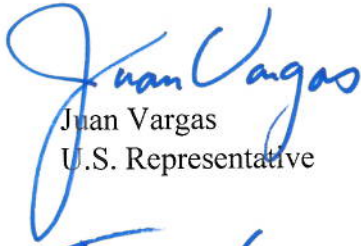
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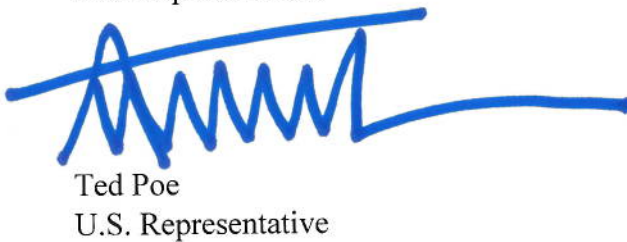

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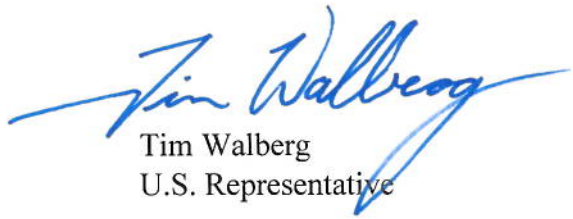

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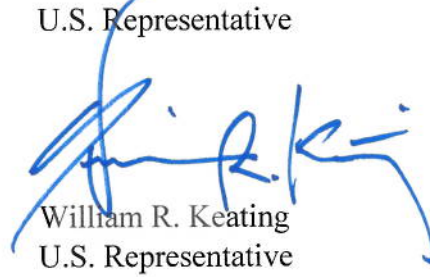
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