



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Challenges & Opportunities: The Advancement of Human Rights in India

Witnesses

Panel I



John Sifton is the Asia Advocacy Director for Human Rights Watch and works on South and Southeast Asia. Previously, he was the director of One World Research, a public interest research and investigation firm. Before joining One World Research, Sifton spent six years at Human Rights Watch, first as a researcher in the Asia division, focusing on Afghanistan and Pakistan, then as the senior researcher on terrorism and counterterrorism. In 2000 and 2001, Sifton worked for the International Rescue Committee, primarily in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and in 1999 he worked at a refugee advocacy organization in Albania and Kosovo. He holds a law degree from New York University and a bachelor's degree from St. John's College, Annapolis.



Ajit Sahi is a human rights and civil liberties activist and journalist from India with three decades of experience. He has campaigned extensively against a deliberate targeting by Indian police of innocent citizens in fake terror cases, as well as for the rights of India's marginalized social minorities, including the low-caste Dalits and tribal people. Sahi has also been a public speaker on civil rights and social justice, having spoken at conferences in India as well as in the U.S. Sahi has worked as an investigative reporter with Tehelka, India's

leading newsmagazine, exposing the false terror cases as well as the persecution of central India's tribal people by state agencies on the pretext combating an armed insurgency. He covered the Arab Spring in Cairo in February 2011, and has traveled to Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, Pakistan and Iran, among others, for firsthand experience of the ground situation in those places. Sahi has been a regular contributor to BBC Hindi and appears as on TV as a current affairs commentator. Sahi has also worked with the United Nations Millennium Campaign as a communication coordinator for South Asia building advocacy communication to pressure governments to implement the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).



T. Kumar is the Amnesty International USA's International Advocacy Director. He has served as a human rights monitor around the world and was the Director of several refugee camps and refugee ships. He also served as a consultant to the Quaker United Nations Office and was a Professor at the Washington College of Law. He has monitored several elections around the world with President Carter and with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). He also served as a Judge of elections in Philadelphia. Kumar was a political prisoner for over five years in his native Sri Lanka. Amnesty International adopted him as a Prisoner of Conscience and initiated a worldwide campaign for his release. He started his legal studies in prison and eventually became an Attorney-at-Law and devoted his entire practice to defend political prisoners and advance human rights.

Panel II



Jeff King is the President of International Christian Concern (ICC), an organization that exists to relieve the suffering of the worldwide persecuted church and help it grow in strength and breadth by providing effective assistance, advocacy and awareness.

Mr. King has served as President of ICC since the fall of 2002, and has travelled to almost 60 countries investigating persecution and delivering aid to those suffering for their religious beliefs. He and his organization have also received media coverage and contributed to news outlets around the world such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Fox News, BBC, Washington Post, and the Sunday Times. In addition, Mr. King has authored the book "Islam Uncensored," a book of

his personal views with numerous experts on Islam, including an ex-CIA director, a radical Islamist leader, and the son of one of the founders of Hamas.

Mr. King graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in finance. Upon the completion of his degree, he began his career in corporate and mortgage banking. In 1992 King joined the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ International. He worked with The Co-Mission, a coalition of ministries and churches whose goal was to reach Russia after the Soviet Union disbanded.



Musaddique Thange is currently Communications Director for the Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC), an advocacy organization dedicated to safeguarding India's pluralist and tolerant ethos. As Communications Director for IAMC, Thange has been actively involved in working with IAMC's coalition partners to create awareness about issues of human rights and religious freedom in India. Over the course of the last 24 years, Thange has been engaged in interfaith efforts in India, the country of his birth, as well as in the US, where he has lived for 15 years. An eye-witness to sectarian violence in India in the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Thange has consistently spoken out against extremism and religious intolerance. He has advocated for safeguarding India's diverse, multi-faith society through grassroots efforts to foster dialogue and understanding between people of different faiths.



Martina E. Vandenberg is the Founder and President of the Human Trafficking Pro Bono Legal Center. Vandenberg has spent nearly two decades fighting human trafficking, forced labor, rape as a war crime, and violence against women. Vandenberg has represented victims of human trafficking pro bono in immigration, criminal, and civil cases. She has testified before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law, the Helsinki Commission, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and the House Armed Services Committee.

A former Human Rights Watch researcher, she spearheaded investigations into human rights violations in the Russian Federation, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Uzbekistan, Kosovo, Israel, and Ukraine, and authored the first published report documenting human trafficking in Israel.

Vandenberg established The Human Trafficking Pro Bono Legal Center in 2012 with generous support from the Open Society Foundations (OSF) Fellowship Program. She received the 2006 Albert E. Jenner, Jr. Pro Bono Award for her successful representation of trafficking victims in United States federal courts and her advocacy before Congress.

A Rhodes Scholar and Truman Scholar, Vandenberg has also taught as adjunct faculty at the American University Washington College of Law.



Raj Cherukonda is a Dalit activist and entrepreneur with Dalit movements in India and around the world. Inspired by the vision of Dr. Ambedkar he is the current president of the Ambedkar Association of North America. Through this work he has connected Dalits in the diaspora with vital anti-caste discrimination movements in India. Additionally as an entrepreneur he is the founder and managing trustee to Cherukonda Institute which hopes to provide IT skills to disadvantaged and disabled people worldwide. Through both of these organization he has helped to provide vital training,

funding and professional development, to emerging Dalit leaders in India and through its diasporic networks. You can learn more about ANNA at www.aanausa.org and Cherukonda Institute at www.cherukonda.com

Raj Cherukonda will be speaking on behalf of the Dalit American Federation. This federation represents the many Dalit American organizations based in the United States. This include Ambedkar Association of North America, Ambedkar International Center, Ambedkar International Mission, Ambedkar Association of California, and the Dalit American Women's Association.