



Annual Report

A report on activities of the aicc in 2008

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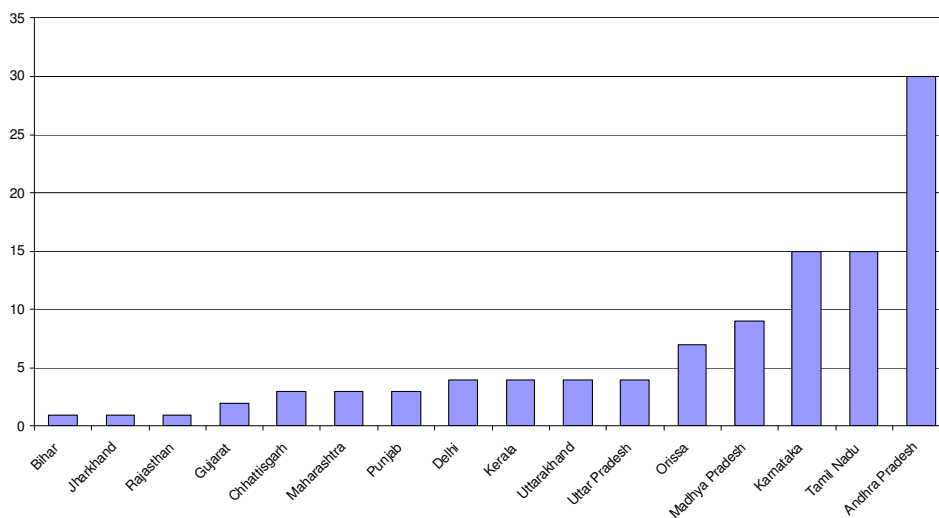
The All India Christian Council, birthed in 1998, exists to protect and serve the interests of the Christian community, minorities, and the oppressed castes. The aicc is a coalition of thousands of Indian denominations, organizations, federations and lay leaders. Find in-depth information at www.christiancouncil.in.

2008 Summary & Review

The aicc pursued justice for victims of anti-Christian violence in Orissa, Karnataka, and elsewhere this year. We also continued many proactive efforts to protect and serve Dalit-Bahujans. Here are some of the highlights.

The aicc documented 106 attacks on Christians. These figures *do not include* most of the violence in Orissa and Karnataka states. The highest number of reported attacks occurred in Andhra Pradesh followed by Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. High totals in Andhra could be due to a highly developed network by aicc. In 2007, attacks occurred in fewer states but at the same levels – if you don't include violence in Orissa and Karnataka.

2008 Attacks by State

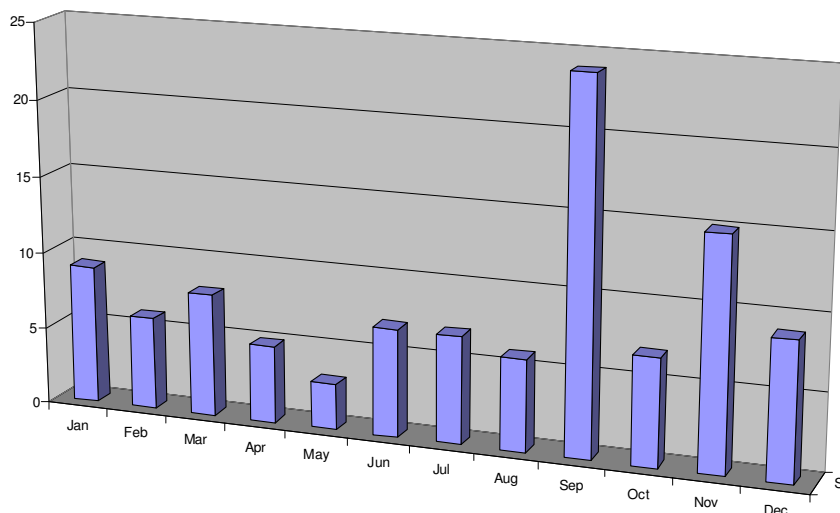


NewsNote: India Today said a CPI (M-L) fact-finding team quoted **Orissa officials admitting up to 500 Christians killed** in one district. If true, this would beat, on average, the 1,000 official deaths in the entire state of Gujarat during four months of attacks on Muslims.

For more, see <http://indianchristians.in/news/content/view/2555/45/>

An average of 9 attacks were reported each month, and it is likely dozens of others went unreported. Incidents included beatings of Christian pastors, the burning of churches, vandalizing Christian homes, and harassment of missionaries. The aicc provided monetary aide for legal and medical bills of victims, interceded with police and courts, built relationships between different religious leaders in communities, and conducted publicity campaigns so that Christians worldwide could pray more effectively.

2008 Attacks by Month



NewsNote: The Indian government said there were **855 incidents of “communal violence”** in 2008. This mostly includes Hindu-Muslim clashes. Orissa (178 incidents) was followed by Madhya Pradesh (115) and Uttar Pradesh (104). There were 153 deaths; Orissa was tops followed by Madhya Pradesh and then Maharashtra.

For more, see <http://indianchristians.in/news/content/view/2687/47/>

The highest number of attacks was in September followed by November, but as noted above, this *does not include* any of the attacks in Orissa during January & August-October, and those in Karnataka from August-October.

A **major advocacy accomplishment** was the hosting of **Ms. Asma Jahangir, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief**, during six (of about 20) multi-faith NGO meetings during her three week visit in March. Aicc leaders in Ahmedabad, Trivandrum, Bhubaneswar, Lucknow, and New Delhi facilitated testimony by other non-Christian minority leaders beside a range of Catholic to Pentecostal Christians. The report will be discussed by the UN Human Rights Council in March 2009. The last UN religious freedom report on India was in 1997.

The aicc was pleased at several **legal victories** this year (see sidebar). Since 1999, the aicc Gujarat chapter has won dozens of cases in the High Court. They were also active in using other laws; for example, in an answer to a question filed under the Right to Information Act, Gujarat authorities revealed in July there were only three conversions investigated under the ‘anti-conversion act’ in the last five years and no convictions.

On Feb. 26, 2008, the aicc Orissa chapter filed a case in the Orissa High Court against the order of the Kandhamal District Collector banning distribution of relief by non-government groups. The Orissa High Court temporarily halted the ban on March 18. Aicc’s Orissa chapter also convinced the state government to declare Good Friday a public holiday.

In October, the aicc hired Ms. Lansinglu Rongmei, a New Delhi based advocate, as National Legal Secretary. Lastly, the aicc helped several pastors in Karnataka file a case in the High Court stating that house churches are legitimate places of worship. This effectively stops illegal police surveys and efforts to shut down these gatherings. The court gave a favorable decision on January 8, 2009.

NewsNote: In 2008, the **aicc Gujarat chapter** added to its record of about 90 **legal victories** with a High Court decision in favour of an employee of All India Radio of Ahva Dang who was refused Scheduled Tribe status and cleared a tribal Christian teacher in Narmada District, Gujarat of rape charges.



There were several **problems for religious freedom and the rule of law** in India in 2008. A year after the initial attack, Rajasthan's government refused to prosecute Hindutva activists who attacked Pastor Walter Masih on live television in April 2007. Also, the Gujarat state government approved anti-conversion "rules" on April 1, 2008 which define enforcement of the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act, 2003. Gujarat becomes the 5th state to implement an "anti-conversion" law in addition to Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Orissa. Two additional states approved laws but have not yet enforced them including Rajasthan which passed a new anti-conversion bill in March because a 2006 bill was rejected by the governor. Note that Tamil Nadu passed a law in 2002 but later repealed it.

NewsNote: This year the **government continued to refuse to release the "Misra Commission Report"** delivered to the Prime Minister in May 2007. The report said caste permeates all religions and faith should be de-linked from reservations. In January, a University of Delhi sociologist released a **study sponsored by India's National Commission for Minorities** which also proved that Dalit Christian and Muslims suffer severe socio-economic problems and must be given the same rights as other Dalits.

Lastly, the Supreme Court repeatedly postponed the verdict on a case demanding civil rights for Dalit Christians. It has been combined with a case on Dalit Muslim affirmative action.

Initial **anti-Christian violence in Kandhamal District, Orissa** was unprecedented in the recorded history of India. From Dec. 24, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008:

- 730 homes were lost,
- 105 churches destroyed,
- 9 Christians killed (4 in the initial violence and 5 later died of their wounds),
- several women sexually assaulted and abused,
- and more than 40 businesses damaged.

Aicc organised a multi-faith protest rally of 10,000 people in Bhubaneswar on January 10, 2008. **Aicc relief efforts included** distributing food and household items to 112 families (about 650 people) in five villages near Raikia in March 2008. Traveling aicc teams helped many victims file FIRs (police cases), reimbursed the medical expenses for many injured people, bought hundreds of textbooks for school children who lost everything, provided Bibles for churches which held Easter services, and offered counseling to promote communal harmony. The aicc issued cheques to twenty-seven small business owners, including two Hindus, in May and planned to rebuild several churches. Other aicc activities included:

Besides appeals to India's authorities, **aicc advocacy included** an "Independent Tribunal on Kandhamal Violence" in mid-May which included two retired judges, a retired IPS officer, and an experienced human rights activist; working with Catholic leaders to extend a deadline for filing testimony before the Justice Basudev Panigrahi Commission of Inquiry in Orissa; testifying before the Panigrahi Commission in Bhubaneswar on June 14; submitting statements for a Citizens' Commission held on July 1 in Bhubaneswar headed by a retired judge of the Orissa High Court; asking India's National Commission for Women to



investigate numerous abuses of Dalit Christian women; hosting a fact finding team of two Washington D.C.-based officers from Sojourners, a Christian social justice NGO, and aicc-partner group, the Dalit Freedom Network, from June 21-24. Find a helpful list of links on the 2007 attacks at: <http://indianchristians.in/news/content/view/1947/45>.

A second wave of anti-Christian attacks in Orissa spread from Kandhamal District to 13 other districts (of 30) in the state. It was sparked by the murder of a controversial swami by unknown assassins on Aug. 23, 2008. Aicc recorded:

- 120 deaths including at least six pastors and one Catholic priest,
- 4,640 homes destroyed,
- 315 villages “ethnically cleansed”,
- 54,000 homeless,
- two women raped (including a nun),
- 149 churches and prayer halls damaged (state government estimated 252),
- thousands injured,
- and 13 schools or colleges vandalised.

NewsNote: The existence of ‘Hindu terror’ was acknowledged by India’s police this year. Most incidents were in Maharashtra starting in 2003. In 2008, there were incidents in places like Thane, Panvel, and Malegaon.

According to an investigation by a major Indian newspaper in June, hard-line nationalist Hindus built a network across Maharashtra & Goa to breed terrorism.

For more, see <http://indianchristians.in/news/content/view/2763/47> and <http://indianchristians.in/news/content/view/2178/47>

Aicc immediately appealed to the President of India, Minister of Home Affairs, Prime Minister, and Sonia Gandhi, leader of the ruling National Congress Party. Aicc led a Citizens Delegation, including Christians and Muslims, to meet India’s President on Sept. 1. It quickly was clear neither the Central nor Orissa government would stop the spiral of violence. Through international partners, aicc directly contacted the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion & Belief, Human Rights Watch, the European Union, the British government, the U.S. Secretary of State, and more. Other advocacy efforts included:

- On Sept. 9-17, Udit Raj, an aicc partner and Dalit Buddhist activist, spoke about anti-Christian violence during meetings associated with the United Nations Human Rights Council session in Geneva.
- On Sept. 14-29, aicc hosted a delegation of two Washington D.C. and one London-based human rights experts which visited Orissa as well as Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, & Delhi.
- On Oct. 23, aicc North India public relations officer met in London with UK Foreign Minister Lord Mark Molloch Brown.
- From Oct. 30-Nov. 4, aicc hosted Baroness Caroline Cox’ visit to Orissa. This resulted in a UK House of Lords debate on Dec. 18, 2008.
- From Dec. 9-12, aicc coordinated the Orissa visit of the official, five-member delegation of the European Union.
- Aicc leaders were widely quoted in news stories including the Wall Street Journal, CNN, New York Times, Reuters, Christianity Today, and BBC as well as India’s media.

Aicc organised or co-sponsored numerous **protest marches** including a 15,000-person rally and blockade of Orissa-bound trains in Vijaywada,



Andhra Pradesh on Sept. 20. Similar aicc-led rallies were held from Chandigarh to Hyderabad to Kolkata. **For relief**, aicc distributed clothing, bedding, and toiletries to 639 families (3,195 people) in relief camps in mid-October. In November, we gave the same to 125 families in private relief camps on the Andhra Pradesh border. From Aug.-Dec. we provided complete care for 16 families sheltered at a private relief camp in Balasore. We distributed Oriya Bibles in late November to 500 families in government relief camps and gave a special meal in December to 520 victims in private relief camps. Aicc is currently distributing a kitchen kit, clothes, and blankets packaged in a tin trunk/box or reusable bag. About 3,000 families will receive assistance. Find a list of helpful links on the wave of attacks which began on August 23 at:

<http://indianchristians.in/news/content/view/2332/45/>

Karnataka saw unprecedented attacks this year. In May 2008, the BJP (known as a Hindu nationalist party) came to power without coalition partners for the first time in a south Indian state. From Aug.-Oct. 2008 the aicc confirmed anti-Christian attacks across 14 (of 29) districts including vandalism of 39 churches and more than 50 Christians injured. Police reacted by beating peaceful protestors, trying to collect church members' contact info from church leaders, and harassing churches to re-register. One fact finding team (aicc General Secretary Abraham Mathai and Bollywood producer Mahesh Bhatt) visited Mangalore on Sept. 16 and another (aicc Secretary General and others) from Oct. 4-5. For the full list of attacks, download report at:

http://indianchristians.in/news/images/resources/pdf/List_of_Attacks_in_Karnataka_Aug_Oct_2008.pdf

Human rights of Dalits continued to gain global awareness this year. Although thousands of crimes against Dalits continue to be reported and there is discrimination throughout society, there was **good news in the courts**. On Feb. 13, a court in Punjab sentenced seven people for the brutal attack in Jan. 2006 on a Dalit activist, Bant Singh Jhabbar. Bant's loss of his arms and a leg, and his subsequent fight against injustice, has made him a Dalit hero. On Sept. 15, a court in Maharashtra said that eight people were guilty of brutally killing four members of a Dalit family in Khairlanji in Sept. 2006. The father, Bhaiyyalal Bhotmange, was the only survivor. On Dec. 19, the Supreme Court sentenced 31 people in the 1985 killings of six Dalits by upper caste landlords in Karamchedu, Andhra Pradesh.

Aicc continued to lead the **struggle against casteism within the Church**. On April 24-25, aicc sponsored a fact finding team including aicc leaders and journalists from *The Week* and *Deccan Herald* to investigate March conflicts between Dalit and upper caste Christians in Eraiyur, Tamil Nadu.

By the end of the year, aicc member organisations were running over **80 high-quality, English-medium schools** with 13,500 students in Dalit communities across India. OMCC (or Operation Mercy India Foundation) also runs large micro-economic groups and a health care initiative.

Newsnote: In May, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights noted major problems for Dalits and outlined changes India must make before the next review in June 2011. Also, the UN Human Rights Council conducted a "Universal Periodic Review" of India.



Other significant proactive events by aicc in 2008 included:

- Annual aicc Conference in Secunderabad included 190 people from 12 states from May 7-8, 2008 and included workshops to teach practical skills to combat attacks by extremist Hindus.
- Launching of aicc state chapters in Northwest states, Bihar and Jharkhand. Aicc now has chapters in 19 states.
- Throughout the year, aicc briefed foreign embassy officers. One result was that the US State Department's annual International Religious Freedom Report, released in September, mentioned aicc eight times.
- Since June 2008, aicc held ten seminars attended by over 3,000 people to teach human rights skills to pastors and build ties with other religious community leaders. The Norwegian Mission to the East partnered with aicc on this project as well as several legal cases.

Newsnote: On Oct. 13, the **aicc Secretary General** was **one of three Christian community leaders to attend the National Integration Council** meeting in New Delhi under the Prime Minister's chairmanship.

Selected **international press coverage** which included quotes of aicc leaders (chronological):

- **Educating India's Untouchable**, *The Guardian* (online only), Jan. 2, 2008, <http://www.guardianweekly.co.uk/?page=editorial&id=455&catID=5>
- **Vatican condemns anti-Christian violence by Hindu extremists in Orissa**, *The Times*, by Rhys Blakely, Aug. 27, 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article4618690.ece>
- **Indian state erupts in violence after Hindu shot**, *CNN*, by Saeed Ahmed, Aug. 27, 2008, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/08/27/india.religion.violence/index.html>
- **Sectarian Riots Flare in India: Hindu Mobs Burn Four Churches In Eastern State**, *Wall Street Journal*, by Niraj Sheth and Krishna Pokharel, Sept. 2, 2008, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122028526442787519.html?mod=rss_whats_news_us&apl=y&r=52855
- **Violence in India Is Fueled by Religious and Economic Divide**, *New York Times*, by Hari Kumar and Heather Timmons, Sept. 3, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/04/world/asia/04christians.html?scp=2&sq=Timmons&st=cse>
- **Christians cower from Hindu backlash in Orissa**, *Reuters*, by Kritivas Mukherjee, Sept. 3, 2008, <http://in.reuters.com/article/topNews/idINIndia-35291320080903?sp=true>
- **Christians Face Hindus' Wrath: Violence in Indian State Tied to Conversions, Economic Strains**, *Washington Post*, by Emily Wax, Sept. 15, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/14/AR2008091402209.html?nav=emailpage>
- **Anti-Christian attacks flare in India: Some see a government hand in the fanatical Hindu anger against a minority and its converts**, *The Christian Science Monitor*, by Mian Ridge, Sept. 24, 2008,



<http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0924/p07s03-wosc.html>

- **India's vengeful Christians turn to murder as Hindus step up their killing campaign**, *The Times*, by Rhys Blakely, Sept. 27, 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article4834245.ece> (Note: the article's title doesn't reflect the news content and we expressed our concern to the reporter and his editors.)
- **Christians denounce attacks by Hindus in India**, *Associated Press*, by Ashok Sharma, Oct. 14, 2008, http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5hUyqvYx_fXohxeJa18rTfLDwm0uAD93QBB600
- **The oppression of 'untouchables' is modern India's shame**, *Sunday Herald*, by Andrew Duke, Oct. 11, 2008, http://www.sundayherald.com/life/people/display.var.2459708.0.the_oppression_of_untouchables_is_modern_indias_shame.php

Selected **domestic press coverage** mentioning the aicc:

- **AICC requests Naveen Patnaik to maintain peace in Orissa**, *Zee News*, Aug. 25, 2008, <http://www.zeenews.com/articles.asp?aid=464358&sid=REG>
- **Christians attacked, Orissa's image sullied again**, *CNN-IBN*, by Jajati Karan, Aug. 25, 2008, <http://www.ibnlive.com/news/christians-attacked-orissas-image-sullied-again/72109-3-1.html>
- **Orissa violence: Christian institutes across country to remain close on Friday**, *Times of India*, Aug. 28, 2008, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Orissa_violence_Christian_institutes_across_country_to_remain_close_on_Friday/articleshow/3418067.cms
- **In the name of God**, *Tehelka*, by Vijay Simha, Sept. 13, 2008, http://tehelka.com/story_main40.asp?filename=Ne130908CoverStory.asp
- **VHP, BJP leaders on Maoists' hit-list in Orissa**, *IANS/India Today*, by Farzand Ahmed, Oct. 18, 2008, http://indiatoday.digitaltoday.in/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17998§ionid=&issueid=76&Itemid=1
- **TinderBox of Hatred**, *Hard News*, by Bibhuti Pati, Oct. 2008, <http://www.hardnewsmedia.com/2008/10/2387>

Newsnote: A full list of anti-Christian incidents in 2008 is available upon request. A few sentence summary of each incident is provided along with a link to the story on the aicc website.

Other **press stories of note on Dalit or religious freedom**:

- **Next Stop Orissa**, *Tehelka*, by S. Anand, Jan. 19, 2008, http://tehelka.com/story_main37.asp?filename=Ne190108next_stop.asp
- **Black Christmas**, *Frontline*, by Prafulla Das, Jan. 5-18, 2008, <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2501/stories/20080118509611400.htm>
- **Overcoming Caste: For Those Working to Build an Integrated India, 'Hope Starts and Ends With the Schools'**, *Washington Post*, by Emily Wax, Jan. 20, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2008/01/19/ST2008011902488.html?sid=ST2008011902488> (Note: includes sidebar with aicc partner Prof. Kancha Ilaiah)



- **Orissa Violence: In the name of God**, NDTV, Jan. 9, 2008, NDTV 24x7 Special, <http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/videopod/default.aspx?id=22040>
- **U.N. envoy Asma Jahangir says India risks religious violence**, *Reuters*, by Alistair Scrutton, March 20, 2008, <http://in.reuters.com/article/topNews/idINIndia-32598020080320> (Note: the aicc hosted many of Ms. Jahangir's meetings.)
- **India's Christians: The cross they bear**, *The Economist*, Feb. 7, 2008, http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=10651857 (Note: aicc arranged for Chhattisgarh group to host the reporter.)
- **Bollywood No Longer A Dream Too Far for India's Lower Castes**, *Washington Post*, by Emily Wax, April 27, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/26/AR2008042602200.html?nav=emailpage> (Note: The aicc arranged for the journalist to interview M. Swathy Margaret, a Dalit academic.)
- **Your God or Mine: 30 Minutes**, *CNN-IBN*, by Nilanjana Bose, Sept. 7, 2008, http://www.ibnlive.com/videos/73064/09_2008/30min_your_god1/30-minutes-orissa-asks-your-god-or-mine.html
- **Orissa tribal lands, a factory of Hindu foot soldiers**, *Reuters*, by Kritivas Mukherjee, Sept. 12, 2008, <http://in.news.yahoo.com/137/20080912/736/tnl-orissa-tribal-lands-a-factory-of-hin.html>
- **Project Orissa**, *Frontline*, by Prafulla Das, Sept. 13-26, 2008, <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2519/stories/20080926251900400.htm>
- **Where Bibles are burnt**, *FRANCE 24*, Sept. 19, 2008, <http://www.france24.com/en/20080919-reporters-orissa-india-hindu-christian-religious-violence-extremists-vhp-bjp>
- **Hindu Threat to Christians: Convert or Flee**, *New York Times*, by Somini Sengupta, Oct. 13, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/13/world/asia/13india.html?_r=1&oref=slogin&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=all (Note: The aicc referred this reporter to contacts inside Orissa.)
- **Christians under attack in India**, *BBC*, Oct. 14, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7670747.stm (Note: The aicc consulted the producer of this piece.)
- **10,000 listed guilty in Kandhamal riots**, *The Statesman*, Dec. 1, 2008, <http://www.thestatesman.net/page.news.php?clid=9&theme=&ursess=1&id=233741>
- **EU team meets Orissa home secy on Kandhamal**, *Times of India*, Dec. 14, 2008, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/EU_team_meets_Orissa_home_secy_on_Kandhamal/articleshow/3833503.cms (Note: the aicc hosted the visit of this fact finding team to Orissa.)