



Humanitarian Aid
Relief Trust



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HART VISIT TO ORISSA, INDIA,
OCTOBER 30TH - NOVEMBER 4TH 2008

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Some of the 390 people in the Camp in the YMCA Bhubaneswar – severely overcrowded but much more civilized than the State-run camps in Bandhamal.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE PRESENT CRISIS.

- a) Tensions between the fundamentalist Hindu and Christian communities began to erupt on December 23rd 2007. Christians were putting up Christmas decorations in the main street of the village of Baminigon in Kandhamal District, on the weekly market day. Hindus tried to prohibit the celebrations, angry words were spoken and violence erupted at 10am during which a Christian boy was wounded by gunshot. In the evening, they wanted to close the market and the Christians remonstrated, emphasising the point that the market was used by Hindus as well as Christians. Violence broke out: 11 people were killed, 107 churches were destroyed as well as 37 Christian shops.
- b) 2 days previously, Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati, who had been running an anti-Christian campaign for 40 years, claimed he had been attacked by Christians and was admitted to hospital. However, no medical report has ever confirmed any injuries. Subsequently, several days later, he admitted in various interviews that he had not been injured. While in hospital he telephoned his disciples, asking how many Christians have you killed and how many churches had been destroyed – claiming that, without an uprising, there will be no peace. He also asked how Narendra Modi (Chief Minister of Gujurat State) had started the revolution in Gujurat in 2004 – in which many Muslims were killed.
- c) He made this call in the presence of a journalist from the major Indian news magazine ‘Tehelka’ which subsequently reported this conversation.
- d) Justifications for animosity toward Christians and attacks on their communities include:
 - The claims that people have been forcibly converted to Christianity or subverted by financial inducements;
 - Christianity is a ‘foreign religion’ with the claim that there is no place for a Christian in ‘this land’;
 - Envy based on an alleged relative economic prosperity of Christians.

In answer, the evidence demonstrates the fact the majority of Christians in this region have been born into families which have been Christian for generations. Therefore, the claim that Christians have allegedly been putting pressure on Hindus to convert to Christianity is manifestly untrue. According to the National Commission for Minorities in September 2008, there has not been a single recorded case of forced or fraudulent conversion in the State of Orissa. Even the State Government data has no record of such.

Moreover, the argument that Christianity is a ‘foreign religion’ with the claim that there is no place for a Christian in this land’ is manifestly inappropriate given that Christianity has been well established in this region, before Hinduism and the caste system in its current form were introduced.

- e) There is also widespread concern over perceived exploitation of the people who live in this region by wealthy outsiders who are buying land and using local inhabitants as cheap labour; and who it is alleged are supporting the anti-Christian violence.
- f) The whole situation with regard to religious conflict needs to be seen in the context of the controversial Anti-Conversion legislation which has been introduced in 7 Indian States. This requires anyone wishing to consider conversion from one faith to another to give advance notice and to follow procedures, including police clearance - which may well have an inhibiting effect on their decision. Such requirements represent a serious infringement of the fundamental freedom of religion enshrined in the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights).
- g) Following the well-reported assassination of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati, widespread violence against Christians erupted again in August 23rd 2008. The atrocities were committed despite the claim by Maoists that it was they who had carried out the killing. After the assassination, despite warnings and pleas for caution by church and secular leaders, including representatives of political parties, the VHP arranged for his body to be taken on a 200km. circuit. Violence followed in the wake of the funeral procession. It is widely believed that the fact that the violence erupted so quickly is an indication that it was pre-planned.
- h) The toll of violations of human rights includes:
 - In Orissa State, 65 identified people have been killed and 85 are still unaccounted for. Among those killed were one man buried alive near the village of Rudangla; several people burnt to death and others cut into pieces.
 - 117 churches of all Christian denominations destroyed. Not a single Hindu temple has been destroyed – despite allegations of retaliation by Christians.
 - Approximately 5,000 homes destroyed.
 - An unspecified number of Christian businesses destroyed, with the loss of livelihood for their owners.
 - 54,000 people displaced from their homes, forced to take shelter in 14 State-sponsored Relief Camps in Kandhamal District; together with many hundreds living in non-State camps, including 2 ‘camps’ in densely overcrowded buildings in Cuttsack town.

- It is estimated that about 20,000 are still living in the jungle or have fled to big cities. Some may be living with relatives elsewhere.
- In addition to the violence in Kandhamal District, 2 other Districts, Japati and Baragras District, have also experienced similar atrocities, including killings, looting and burning of churches and homes. 2 Relief camps have been established for approximately 2,700 people who have had to flee their homes.



A church in Kandhamal – one of 117 destroyed of all denominations. For the attackers, to commit desecration is as important as to loot and destroy; hence the deliberately broken and twisted Cross.

2. SUMMARY.

1. Orissa State Government has manifestly failed to provide protection for the Christian minority population, allowing widespread violations of human rights, including killing, rape, lootings and desecration and destruction of places of worship, homes and other property.
2. Reports of cases of forced conversions of some Christians to Hinduism constitute a serious violation of the right to religious freedom enshrined in the UDHR, to which the Indian Government is a signatory. Such conversions to Hinduism have been imposed on people who neither themselves, nor their families, have ever been Hindu. It is noteworthy that Hinduism and the caste system in their current form have only relatively recently (in the past 50 years) been introduced into this region.
3. See above (Background (d)) for the falsity of the claims regarding forced conversions of Hindus to Christianity.
4. Taken together, the violence inflicted on Christian communities, the reports of forced conversions and the threats of more to come, and the failure to provide enough security to encourage Christians to return home appear to constitute a policy of attempted 'religious cleansing' of the region.
5. Orissa State Government has failed to bring many of the perpetrators of crimes and violence to account: local people have many details of those involved in the mass violence who have still not yet been arrested.
6. This failure to bring those allegedly guilty of crimes creating terror among the local people makes it impossible for them to return to their homes as they fear that the knowledge that violence can be inflicted with impunity will encourage further attacks.
7. The inadequacy of recompense for the destruction of homes is another grave problem: Orissa State Government has offered to provide 40,000 Rupees for 'completely destroyed' properties and 20,000 Rupees for 'partially destroyed' homes. However, the definition of 'partially destroyed' includes buildings with only some walls left standing, but which are completely uninhabitable and which will therefore require complete reconstruction. Also, the entire contents have been burnt. Consequently, the 20,000 offered by the State Government is a totally inadequate

compensation: a realistic estimate is 80,000 Rupees, merely for the building, not covering the contents of a family's looted and destroyed home.

8. The obligation to return looted property is enshrined in Indian Law, and the community, as well as individuals, are subject to this legal obligation.
9. The claim that the violence has been associated with tensions between ethnic groups seems false as the Christians who have been attacked belong to different ethnic groups, including the Kon and Pano. Clearly, it is their Christianity, not their ethnic group, which has been the deciding factor. Hindus of whichever tribe have not been attacked.
10. The viciousness and the scale of the attacks would have been impossible without a sustained hate campaign over many years. This still continues, in the Oriya and Hindi media, targeting both Christians and Muslims.



One tiny corner of the State-run Camp at Nuagam in Bandhamal, holding two and a half thousand; it was many more; and is not the largest. There are 4 pit-latrines; hardly any medicines; no other medical care; and 45 persons are allocated to each 7 x 5 metre tent (i.e. 12 inches width/ person.)

3. RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. Orissa State Government: At present, there are insufficient resources for policing and judicial functions. Recommendation: the establishment of special police desk officers at local levels, to receive and process complaints; and for more police security personnel. These needs should be met by relocating police to Orissa from other Indian States.
2. The composition of the Orissa State police force does not reflect the population. In 2007, there is a serious under-representation of Christians, especially on the ground. There is therefore a need to ensure appropriate representation of different sections of the population at all levels.
3. The establishment of special 'mobile courts' and/or 'fast-track' courts to expedite proceedings against those suspected of involvement in the recent violence. There is a precedent in the recent establishment of special courts to resolve gender disputes.
4. There is an overall need for sufficient police, legal and judicial personnel to receive and process allegations and complaints from victims of violence and crimes. There is also a particular shortage of women police to register and investigate gender crimes and an urgent need to remedy this shortfall.
5. Provision of adequate resources for reconstruction of homes, not based upon inappropriate definitions of 'partial destruction'.
6. Provision of resources for rebuilding places of worship. Although the authorities currently refuse to do so on the grounds that they only have responsibility for secular buildings, there is a strong case for recompense as these places of worship were destroyed in violence which should have been prevented by State authorities, and as the local people have lost all their own resources in this violence, leaving them with nothing with which to carry out any reconstruction themselves.
7. The Orissa State Supreme Court has recently issued an order for the establishment of a Relief Fund for the rebuilding of churches and said that it should be generous. This is to be welcomed. However, so far, no money has been forthcoming. Such funds should be made available as soon as possible.
8. The arrest and trial of culprits responsible for the violence should be undertaken as a matter of great urgency. The State Government has claimed to have arrested 800 people. However, many have been released on bail, having been arrested on relatively trivial charges. It is also said that none of those whose names are recorded in lists, compiled by victims, as

responsible for the violence have yet been arrested. The deep concern over the failure of the authorities to apprehend those known to be implicated has been reflected in a hunger strike in one of the camps for the displaced at Nuagam.

9. The CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) should initiate an enquiry into the official dereliction of duty by the authorities in Orissa State for failing to prevent and control the violence. The Roman Catholic nun, Sister M, who suffered gang rape and torture, has added her voice to this request.
10. Adequate compensation must be provided for looted property or the property, if it can be identified, should be returned to its owners, according to the law of the land.
11. The Peace Committees to promote reconciliation and inter-communal understanding should be made effective and appropriate representation should be ensured (at present, some reportedly have no Christian representation). At present, there is widespread concern that their composition is so biased that they operate against the well-being of minorities.
12. Provision should be made available for Chaplains and Counsellors in the camps for the displaced, to provide pastoral care and to reduce the likelihood of retaliation and revenge. At present there is no such provision despite inevitable post-traumatic stress disorder. There is an additional need to provide psychological therapy for women as violence against them has been widespread.
13. Victims should be encouraged, enabled and given resources to take appropriate legal action for recompense and protection – according to the provisions of Indian law. There is an associated need to address the problem of languages: a two-stage process of translation from Kui to Oriya and then from Oriya to Hindi or English which are the official languages for law courts.
14. Resources should be provided to improve conditions in the camps for the displaced – until provision is made to ensure adequate security to enable all those who had to flee from their homes to return safely. Priorities include better medical care, especially for women (particularly for obstetric and gynaecological care), and paediatric provision for children and infants. There is also an urgent need for food appropriate for babies and children.
15. At present, pressure is being applied to discourage those in the camps from remaining – for example in one camp, we were told, the previous food rations of rice and dhal have been reduced, with the withdrawal of dhal, leaving merely a diet of rice.
16. The State Government has an overall responsibility to provide comprehensive care for the people who have been forced to live in the camps, because it has failed to provide adequate protection to enable them to stay in their own homes. At present, the Government is merely

providing minimal conditions for subsistence – and sometimes failing in this duty. For example, inadequate medical care is promoting illness; inadequate sanitary facilities deny dignity and endanger health; observers have noted that the quality of rice is so poor, below that which the people grow themselves and would consume, that it may be a health risk and is certainly unpalatable; and overcrowding creates an appalling quality of life for everyone.

17. As the fear of renewed attacks is preventing people from returning to their homes, they are pleading for the retention of the Central Reserve Police Force on location for as long as necessary to ensure their safety.
18. This fear is exacerbated by widely used threats that the safe return of Christians to their homes is conditional on conversion to Hinduism.
19. An enquiry is needed into the regional (Oriya) language press for complicity in fomenting hatred and the misrepresentation of facts. The State Government should do this; and it is incumbent on the Press Council to investigate.
20. Under the provisions of the Indian Penal Code, 153 and 295, incitement to hatred and communal violence, and the targeting of specific groups, are crimes. This law needs to be invoked.
21. The anti-conversion legislation applies to those who wish to convert from Hinduism to another faith; in practice, it does not prohibit conversion to Hinduism from other faiths. This legislation, which hinders the freedom to choose and change religion, is in violation of the UDHR to which India is a signatory and should be rescinded in every State where it has been implemented.
22. Christianity and Islam are portrayed as ‘foreign religions. Therefore conversion to Hinduism is interpreted as ‘coming home’ (Gharvapasi) and is not considered liable to interpretation as conversion by force or inducement. This denies the claim of being a “secular State”.
23. **The overriding need is for the rule of law to be implemented in Kandhamal.** The State Government of Orissa and the Government of India have not fulfilled their obligations.

4. THE VISIT: MEETINGS AND FINDINGS.

We are indebted to many people who gave their time to provide us with background briefing and detailed information, some of whom are identified in the Acknowledgements. Others have requested anonymity but their contributions are included throughout this report.

4:1) The Rt. Reverend the Archbishop Raphael Cheenath, graciously received us on the day of the funeral of one of his priests, Father Bernard, who had died following a very severe beating during the violence.

The Archbishop described the attacks in December 2007, indicating that they were very well planned and well organised.

'According to my information, they were done with the connivance of the authorities. There was political mileage it for them. They wanted to placate the majority.

About 5.000 people were affected, although not all of these were displaced. They didn't attack people; they attacked institutions. And afterwards, people began to settle down. The Government gave money in compensation – but not for religious buildings, as it is said that we are a secular state.

Then the second attack started on August 23rd. It is well known that the Swamy was killed by Maoists. The Director General of the police said this. And on August 24th all the TV channels also said this.

Then, on August 26th, some TV and radio channels and newspapers reported that some VHP leaders were alleging that the Christians were responsible. It is just like it was in Hitler's time – who had Goebbels spreading lies. Maoists can be people of any or no religion. And the attacks began, with crowds of 2-3,000 – sometimes more, attacking with crowbars, iron rods, acid and petrol. It couldn't be done just by a crowd coming together. It was clearly planned.

We immediately contacted the president and others. They said they would do something. But the attacks just kept going on, non-stop. The State Government did nothing.

The violence went on for more than 2 months. That is why I must say that it was permitted.

In Karnataka last month, the violence was stopped on the third day, by a combination of State and national authorities. According to the Indian Constitution, the President can intervene if there is serious disturbance in a State. We protested to the National Government after 7 days. In Karnataka, within 7 days, a fact-finding team was being sent in.

In Orissa, 39-40% of the population are Dalits and the fundamentalists dislike all that is being done for them.

The State of Orissa is the least developed State in the whole nation.

In spite of all our many efforts in contacting the State Government, they did not stop the violence.

The National Government said it sent support but the State Government said that they did not receive it and when it did come, it came too late.

We have lost about 5,000 or more houses. They say 62 people were killed, but in fact, it was much more. I shouldn't say 'killed' – they were murdered – brutally murdered.

The majority were lay people but only today, we have buried a priest. People who did these things had been deliberately filled with hatred & turned into brutes.

In addition to the gang raping of the Catholic nun, they also gang raped a Hindu girl – because her grandparents are Christians. They said they would do it to her again, until her grandparents converted to Hinduism.

The Pope has spoken out strongly.

Please put as much pressure on the Government and make as much noise as possible in the outside world, as these might help us.

Our people are still afraid to go home. 50,000 have fled from their homes and are still living in Relief Camps. Others are living in other people's homes. Some have fled to Kerala, Karnataka and Gujurat States.

We are now struggling to get people to go back to their homes but they say 'We are afraid - we fear we will be forced to become Hindus.'

They are afraid of 3 things:

They will be attacked again

They will be forced to convert to Hinduism

They will suffer discrimination and persecution as Christians.

The number in Relief Camps is being reduced. It is claimed that they are settling down again in their homes. This is a blatant lie: they are NOT GOING HOME.

Conversion by force or inducement is forbidden – we all agree on that. The Dalits don't need any additional inducement. They want to convert but they are not being allowed to make a free decision.

The fundamentalists try to stir up hatred against the Christian by saying that every conversion is by force & that in 5 years the whole country will have been taken over by the Christians – but we are only a small minority. They also say that if Pakistan were to attack India, Christians would support Pakistan.

The Anti-conversion laws now operate in [at least] 5 States, but they cannot prevent people from coming to Christ.

The fundamentalists have a hit list – and I am one of those on the hit list, accused of being involved in the Swami’s death.’

4:2) Meetings with people in the ‘Camps’ for the Displaced and in the places affected by the violence.

[Note: In some cases, people were unwilling to give their names or the names of their villages, for fear of retaliation. Therefore, these details will not be available. Where interviewees were willing to give this information, we include it.]

4:2:1) An Urban ‘camp’, run by the Roman Catholic church in a building belonging to the Church of South India.

The conditions here and in another ‘camp’ in a YMCA building were very unpleasant: several hundreds of people crowded into a communal living space, with family groups sitting or lying adjacent to each other on the floor. Sanitation facilities were completely inadequate for the numbers jammed into the premises. The State government provides water and basic food (rice and dhal) but nothing else.

When we arrived at the premises in the church courtyard, the hall was quiet as it was the time for the evening service and the people were praying. Later, we were able to meet and talk with some of these displaced people.

An Interview with some of the women.

They described how Hindu youths had killed their pastor on August 23rd. Then, on August 24th, there was a rally and they heard Hindus advancing on their village chanting slogans:

‘Christianity is a foreign religion. We are Hindus and only Hindus can live here. If you remain Christians, we will kill you, we will burn you, we will kill you.’

Then a huge mob of men, women and children attacked the village of Bhalia Pada. 52 families live there and they burnt 56 houses. We fled to hide on a small hillside and we watched our village and 2 other villages burning. The next day, after we thought they had gone, we came back, because we couldn’t stay in the jungle as there were women with small babies, some only a few days or weeks old. But then they attacked again and we fled to a Relief Camp.

One woman died of a heart attack during the assault on the village.’

Another woman, Suva Simi Nayak, from Tiangia village described how a large mob attacked her village on August 24th, killing 5 people. They cut them to pieces, including the Baptist pastor and the village Headman. 2 children, aged 2-3 years old also died.

In another incident, the mob caught a man called Samuel and asked him if he was a Christian or a Hindu. He replied

'Please wait for 5 minutes, then I will tell you.'

During that time, he prayed to Christ to forgive them. They saw him praying and cut off his hands while he was at prayer and then killed him. They then threw his mother into a burning house while his daughter managed to run away.

An Interview conducted with the men.

There are 62 families here, all from Kandhamal. But they came at different times.

All had been born to Christian parents.

On being asked why they thought that hatred was stirred up against them as Christians, they gave two reasons.

'Firstly, it is resented that we live changed lives. We do not drink heavily; and therefore look after our money more carefully. We seek literacy and make more use of the schooling offered. Although our homes are poor we try to be tidier in appearance. It is for these reasons that these people falsely claim that we are more wealthy.'

Secondly, the spreaders of hate try to claim that Christianity is a foreign religion. They do not like it when we answer them that the Christian Gospel was in India before it was in Britain and the U.S.; that it is an Indian faith more than Western; and that Christianity was here in Kandhamal before Hinduism came amongst our tribes. They say: 'You do not have a place here in a Hindu country'.

The Chief Minister and the Parties in power in the State are not applying basic human rights.'

Describing the violence, they spoke of all the Christian homes in their villages as having been destroyed; along with churches. They knew in their own villages 10 people who were killed - 8 in one village, and I each in two others. They knew of 87 in all who were killed; 36 of whom were pastors; but these figures were a minimum.

'The big question for us is: How can we go back? And live with them? We are wanting to go back but the culprits are not arrested.'

'None of those whom we know led the violence in our villages have been arrested. But we have heard of arrests in some other villages'.

"And now the trouble continues'.

"We are nearly all farmers. We have lost our harvest. The time is now. Some of us have heard that others have already harvested and taken our crops."

They spoke of how persecution in various forms has gone on every year. And they asked,

'Could the Indian Government help us to settle elsewhere so we can live in peace? Or are they telling us to take up arms and defend ourselves violently? But this is not the way of the Christian life. There does not seem to be a future for us, except in these ways.'

4:2:2) Displaced Persons' Camp situated in the Y.M.C.A. Bhubaneswar – visited on 31/10/08

In this non-State Camp there were 390 men, women and children.

They had all left their village of Rupagaon in Kandhamal on the 28/8 and travelled the 260 Km. to Bhubaneswar; the initial 140 Km. on foot.

They stated that the State Government still provides food: rice, dhal, some vegetables and some medicines.

They claimed their anguish was increased by their feeling that the State Government could have stopped the violence; but did nothing, while they were there.

Amongst those we spoke to we record brief details from the stories of two.

One spoke of how his son, a pastor, had been taken by the attackers (he described them as “the VJP and others”) and killed by beating him with iron rods. The father stated that the family were not recent converts but had been Christians from, at least, the birth of both of his parents to families already Christian.

The police had given no protection; though they knew that trouble would erupt, and had been told the same.

During the violence, when an elderly person was thrown alive in to a burning building, the police were actually present looking on.

The second person, an ex-Serviceman of about 40 yrs of age, described how 37 Christian homes had been burnt – and also his paralysed brother. He could identify each of the leaders of the mob; and had given their names both to the District Magistrate and to the Superintendent of Police. The displaced Christians had been told that they could return to their homes if they converted to Hinduism. His own family had been Christian for several generations. The leaders of the violence had openly claimed,

'We are going to burn your homes. We are going to burn you'.

'There is no place for you here. If you want to be Christians go and live in London – or in the USA. It is only Hindus who live in India.'

As for his brother; being totally paralysed, he could not flee when the attack came. He had insisted to the rest of the family, *'Leave me. I cannot run. They will not harm an invalid.'*

When the attackers came they abused him. And then they burnt down the house with him in it.

Our interviewee concluded, “What is there left for us? My house is burnt. My fields are burnt. My brother is burnt. All my neighbours are here and homeless. A sign was put up on my home. I have a photo of it here. It says, “If you want to be a Christian you will be burnt like this.””

4:3) In Kandhamal.

4:3:1) Gotukia Village.

The wife of a burnt Baptist church described how the people from her village had to hide in the jungle for 15 days, as they were terrified of being attacked on the way to the Relief Camp. They are living in fear, because no arrests have been made, so they are afraid that those who carried out the violence will believe they can do so with impunity. Consequently, the mobs will be likely to return any time. Pressure is being put on people in the camps to return to their homes – for example, the rations of rice and dhal have been reduced to rice alone, as dhal is no longer offered.

4:3:2) A young woman, aged 18-20 who was subjected to a gang rape.

‘When the riots began, I was at my uncle’s house in Kandhamal District. When the Swamy was killed, I wanted to go back to my own home, but I couldn’t, as there was a bus strike. Then we heard that a mob would be coming to attack us at any time. We removed all our belongings and hid them outside, behind the house. I hid my own possessions, thinking I would return to collect them later – but in my fear, I forgot where I had put them. Then I went to my own village by foot for about 20 km, and then to the Relief Camp at Tikabali.

I stayed there for one or two days. My uncle was there with 2 daughters aged 8 and 6. They stayed there because of rain at the Relief camp. After 5 days, Auntie came and took the little girls away. We then collected our possessions and I went with my grandfather back to my Uncle’s house by car; then walking the last 4 km. We reached his house about 5.30pm, where Grandma had cooked supper – prawns. At about 8pm my Grandpa told me to sleep with Grandma. Then, when Grandpa went outside to urinate, we heard a mob coming shouting the Swami’s name as a slogan. Grandpa told them that we are Hindus – so there is no need to attack us.

But the mob just came and kicked the door of the house down – there were about 25 of them, including young boys and older men. They started to beat Grandpa, so I asked them why they were beating an old man. They replied ‘My Dear, are you here to tell us what do? We will take our revenge on you, instead of your uncle. We told your uncle many times to become a Hindu but he and his family never came to us.’

I was terrified, holding onto the door of the house. Then about 10 men grabbed me and took me onto the veranda. I cried out to Grandpa to save me. The mob said

'You are crying out – we will kill you.' They gagged me with a towel and showed me the weapons they were carrying – knives, guns and sticks, telling me

'We will kill you and throw your body into the river or into the jungle.'

Then they dragged me into the jungle, threw me down and one man said 'I will rape you.' Then 4 of them raped me and they left.

During the night, my Grandma and Grandpa were searching for me. I had lost my senses and was so confused I didn't know what to do. I was unable to walk. Then someone found me, gave me some water and took me by the hand. Then the police came to take me to Tikabali and then to hospital. The men had clawed and scratched me, so I had cuts as well.

After being treated at the hospital I went with my grandfather and brother to our home.

People from the media came but my family would not let them take any pictures as I do not want to show my face.

Until now, the police have only arrested one man. The other three are still in the village and have not been arrested.

I will not, I cannot, return to my village.'



B'ss Cox with the father of the murdered pastor – and the brother of the paralysed man, beaten, then burnt alive in their home.

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE VISIT

When we were in India at the end of August and in early September, reports were coming in of sustained attacks on the Christian minority population in Orissa. Tensions were also growing in other areas, including Karnataka.

HART's mission statement identifies our responsibility to provide aid and advocacy for people who are, or who have recently been, suffering from oppression and persecution.

We are committed to basing our advocacy, wherever possible, on visits to the affected people, in order to give authenticity to our advocacy, basing our reports on first-hand evidence.

We were unable to come to Orissa at that time, as we were committed to a visit to the people of Chin State in Burma, to investigate reports of a famine caused by a massive infestation of rats. This phenomenon occurs every 47-49 years, when the bamboo flowers. The people of Chin State were reportedly suffering and dying, with no help from any major aid agencies, as the ruling SPDC [State Peace and Development Council] regime denied access to aid organisations.

Our visit provided evidence of this famine and served to promote an acknowledgement of the need for food relief by WFP (World Food Programme). We are very relieved that DIFD has made available £600,000 and is committed to ensuring that all in need will receive food.

HART was then in a position to visit Orissa to investigate the reports of violence against the minority Christian communities, including killings, rape, and destruction of homes and churches.

We were also concerned to obtain details of the plight of the tens of thousands who had to flee to safety; the response of the State Government and the Government of India; and the prospects for the future of the victims of the violence.



Father Bernard Digal who died on the 30th October 2008 from injuries received in horrendous beatings. Native born in Kandhamal in to a Christian family.