

Christian Leaders Outraged Over Violence in India

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Christians have been killed in the eastern Indian state of Orissa after a Hindu national group launched an attack on India's Christian community.



[] Unprecedented violence targeting Christians in India has caused international outrage and schools were closed Friday in protest. At least 17 Christians have been killed and 4,000 have been left homeless in the eastern Indian state of Orissa after a Hindu national group launched an attack on India's Christian community.

"Differences over religion cannot be blamed for these crimes," said Joseph D'souza, president of All India Christian Council. "We are distressed at the defiance of law and order by Hindu fundamentalist leaders and their public comments which are spreading lies and hate. Their unpardonable excuse is that followers are uncontrollably angry about Christian conversions in the region."

The school closings this week resulted from many reports of rape, murder and arson in churches, homes and schools. "We want this message to go across to our fellow countrymen and that is why we are closing our educational institutions [on Friday], in deep sorrow and anguish," said a letter from an

Indian church network. "We hope parents become aware of the implications of the incidents in Orissa."

The violence began on Aug. 23 after the murder of Laxmanananda Saraswati, a Hindu swami, and four others by an unknown attacker. Authorities have said that evidence points to a political group called Maoist, but a Hindu nationalist group has alleged publicly that Christians are to blame.

After silence for nearly a week, India's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh said Thursday evening that the violence was a "national shame" and that he would work to restore normalcy, reported the *Times of India*.

International missionaries also expressed sorrow over the tragedy this week.

"I have seen a lot of violence against Christians in my more than 30 years of sharing the Gospel with the people of Asia," said K.P. Yohannan, founder of Gospel for Asia. "I have even been on the receiving end of some of those attacks. But the events in Orissa are by far the most orchestrated and horrifying atrocities I have ever witnessed."

Christian leaders called for a day of prayer and fasting for India on Sept.

7. **-Felicia Mann**