

Radicals Attack Pentecostal Church, Strip Women Naked

International Christian Concern (ICC) has learned that a Pentecostal church in India's Chhattisgarh state was attacked by Hindu radicals as the church was conducting its normal Sunday service. Local police have arrested seven individuals in connection with the attack, but local activists claim that an atmosphere of impunity for Hindu radicals has allowed several attacks like this to take place in Chhattisgarh over the past week. This comes only days after a letter from the U.S. Congress was sent to India's Prime Minister expressing grave concern over increased religious intolerance in India and the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) was again denied access to the country.

On Sunday, March 6, a mob of 25 Hindu radicals attacked a Pentecostal church in Kachana colony, located in Chhattisgarh's state capital of Raipur. According to witnesses, the radicals arrived by motorbike, barged into the church, and began causing chaos. Sixty Christians, who were gathered at the church for normal Sunday worship, were beaten by the radicals who also destroyed musical instruments, chairs and Bibles. The radicals also allegedly beat and forcibly stripped several Christian women.

According to Arun Pannalal, president of the Chhattisgarh Christian Forum, the radicals justified their attack on the church by claiming that forced conversions were taking place. "They began alleging that people were being converted [there]," Pannalal told the media. "[But], they fled before police could reach the spot. This is the sixth attack on churchgoers in Chhattisgarh in the past six week[s]."

In the days leading up to the attack on the church in Raipur, Christians across Chhattisgarh reported to ICC that they had

been attacked by members of Hindu radical groups. On March 4, radicals attacked Pastor Baliram in the Kondagaon District of Chhattisgarh and told him and other local Christians that Christian activities were no longer allowed in the village. On March 5, Christians in the Dantewada District reported being assaulted by members of the Bajrangdal radical group.

“Every day Christians are attacked,” a local Christian wishing to remain unnamed told ICC. “What is reported in the media is like [the] tip of an iceberg.”

“The vandalizing of the church [in Chhattisgarh] comes as the entire nation of India is debating the role of [radical Hindu nationalism] and the government in exacerbating an environment of hate and intolerance against civil society, the intelligentsia, and, above all, religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians,” Dr. John Dayal, spokesman for the United Christian Forum, told ICC.