



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2006/NGO/68
28 February 2006

ENGLISH ONLY

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sixty-second session
Item 11(e) of the provisional agenda

**CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTIONS OF:
RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE**

**Written statement* submitted by the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC),
a non-governmental organisation in general consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[10 February 2006]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.06-11173

Religious intolerance in Bangladesh

1. The Constitution of Bangladesh asserts that the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (article 28[1]). It also declares that the state religion shall be Islam, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony (article 2A). Despite this declaration, religious minorities, especially Hindus and Ahmadiyyas, face manifold problems. The state is not trying to protect and promote the rights of the religious minorities as per constitutional provisions. Religious minorities are readily attacked by the influential and politically powerful, many of them while performing their rituals. In many places, houses, businesses and religious properties have been taken or destroyed. Girls and women belonging to religious minorities have been raped for reason of their beliefs. In many cases the perpetrators are ruling party members who enjoy absolute impunity. The Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) cites the following cases to illustrate:

a. On 27 March 2005, a group of people belonging to the ruling party grabbed a large area of land from the Hindu community at Chhoto Shanta village under Debhata police station in Satkhira district. The attackers also torched a temple and an image during the incident.

b. On 18 October 2005 a 60-year-old Hindu priest named Mr. Gopal Chandra Barman was kidnapped following a theft in a temple at Noadhia village, under Shibpur police station in Narsingdi district. On October 21 his dead body was found in a river nearby the village with both hands tied behind his back. His killers have not been found.

c. At around 9pm on 30 October 2005 a Hindu woman and her husband were allegedly stopped in Hogolpota village, Bagerhat district by Kachin Munshi, Al Amin and four others who tied her husband to a tree and then forced her into a field where they gang-raped her. The following day, the victim lodged a case with the Sharankhola police station. The police conducted a forensic examination on the same date; however, only one of the six alleged perpetrators has so far been arrested and charged. The alleged perpetrators belong to the ruling political party. The victim has neither been afforded appropriate treatment for the trauma she has suffered nor appropriate protection. She and local witnesses are receiving frequent threats from the absconding alleged perpetrators. As a result, both the victim and the witnesses are living in fear, compounded by stigma caused by the attack. None of these factors have been taken into consideration by the relevant authorities.

d. On 31 October 2005, a group attacked Hindus engaged in a religious programme at Hijlakandi village under Matlab North police station in Chandpur district. The attackers also demanded money from the Hindus for hosting rituals in the village. Twelve people were assaulted, the jewellery of a woman was snatched, and materials being used in the rituals were broken. The victims lodged a case with the local police station but there have been attempts to reconcile the two sides rather than press charges.

e. On 1 November 2005, Hindu devotees in Choarpur village, Naogaon were allegedly prevented from worshipping at their temple, which is under the jurisdiction of Naogaon Sadar police station. It was also alleged that the local police and government agencies have failed to respond to their complaints, and that a Muslim family has claimed possession

over the temple property in a local court and obtained an injunction to prevent use of the premises, which have since been fenced-off by the local police.

2, Members of the Ahmadiyya community have also come under attack in various parts of the country. Islamic leaders have been stated that Ahmadiyyas should be declared "non-Muslims" by the government. They have been mobilising people against the community for a few years. In 2005, Ahmadiyya temples in different places were attacked. On 23 December 2005, the Khatme Nabuaat Movement incited people to attack the main Ahmadiyya temple at the Bakhshibazar area in Dhaka. The police stopped the demonstrators on their way to the temple. However, in general the response of the authorities has been characterised by inaction rather than action.

3. The Asian Legal Resource Centre calls on the Commission to remind the Government of Bangladesh of its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which it is a party, to respect the freedom of belief, worship and the right to redress by victims in case of violations, as envisaged by its article 2. In particular, the government must ensure that investigations and prosecutions follow all cases of religiously-incited violence. The Commission should take all steps necessary to engage the Government of Bangladesh on these concerns and sincerely hopes that a concerted effort in this respect, particularly through the relevant Special Rapporteurs and other special procedures, will bring about a change the present undesirable situation in Bangladesh.

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