



September 23, 2021

Ms. Sumona Guha
Senior Director for South Asia
National Security Council
White House

RE: Human rights priorities in advance President Biden's Meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Dear Ms. Guha:

In advance of President Biden's upcoming meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we write on behalf of Amnesty International and our ten million members, activists, and supporters worldwide to urge the President to raise the critical human rights issues outlined in this letter.

Crackdowns on civil society including Amnesty International: The Indian government has created a climate of fear and discrimination that threatens the largest democracy in the world. Indian authorities have harassed journalists and obstructed the work of civil society organizations through draconian laws that threaten the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and create an atmosphere of fear and reprisal. We urge President Biden to call on the Prime Minister to ensure an immediate end to the harassment and intimidation of journalists.

In September 2020 Amnesty International India was forced to halt its human rights work and to close operations after its bank accounts were frozen. It was in the wake of two major 2020 human rights reports that Amnesty International India's bank accounts were frozen. The first report covered the February 2020 Delhi riots, documenting police complicity in the deaths of 50 people, many of whom were Muslim. The second report addressed the Indian government's human rights abuses in Jammu and Kashmir, one year after it was stripped of its special status and brought under the direct control of the central government. Amnesty International requests that the Indian authorities lift the freeze on Amnesty International India's bank accounts.

Police violence: India's Ministry of Home Affairs must conduct a prompt, thorough, transparent, independent, and impartial investigation into all allegations of human rights violations committed by Delhi police. The Indian government must end the abusive application of anti-terror and foreign funding laws to harass groups holding dissenting opinions.

Kashmir: We urge President Biden to press Prime Minister Modi to instruct the authorities to restore all forms of communication in Kashmir, release all political leaders, journalists, and activists from administrative detention, and end the crackdown on civil society groups in the territory.

Repressive laws: The Indian government's abuse of legal and political tools to suppress dissent, criminalize free expression, and persecute religious minorities has led to widespread human rights violations. We urge the President to press Prime Minister Modi to repeal and amend laws that jeopardize human rights and reform the overbroad legal frameworks that authorities have used to target activists, opposition leaders, and human rights defenders.

The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) allows Indian authorities to target individual activists, protesters, human rights defenders, and religious minorities. The UAPA compromises the right to a free trial by restricting the right to bail and extending the length of time suspects can be detained without trial. It is a tool of harassment used to target, intimidate, and imprison those who are critical of the government.

Attacks on religious freedom: India has become increasingly hostile towards religious minorities. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) have been used to deny citizenship rights to Muslims and to create a high risk of deportation. Used in tandem, the NRC and CAA have allowed the Indian government to broadly deny citizenship rights and then reinstate them selectively, providing preferential treatment to members of favored religions and institutionalizing discrimination against Muslims.

These human rights violations are of critical concern to Amnesty International and our members worldwide. As the Biden administration seeks to build strong alliances around the world, we urge the President to hold all governments to the same international human rights standards and to call on Prime Minister Modi to end abuses, pursue accountability, and protect the rights, safety, and dignity of all people in India.

We are available to brief you in greater detail on any of the human rights issues mentioned above. Please contact Joanne Lin, National Director for Advocacy and Government Affairs or Carolyn Nash, Advocacy Director for Asia, for further information. We are available to support you and your team as needed.

Thank you for your attention to these urgent matters.

Sincerely,

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