



HINDUS IN SOUTH ASIA & **THE DIASPORA**

A SURVEY OF HUMAN RIGHTS, 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"All men are brothers; no one is big, no one is small. All are equal."

Rig Veda, 5:60:5

HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION

Board of Directors

Rishi Bhutada, M.B.A.
Pawan Deshpande
Padma Kuppa
Mihir Meghani, M.D.
Rajiv Pandit, M.D.
Aseem R. Shukla, M.D.

Executive Director and Legal Counsel

Suhag A. Shukla, Esq. (Editor)

Senior Director and Human Rights Fellow

Samir Kalra, Esq. (Author)

Senior Director

Sheetal D. Shah (Editor)

Director of Communications

Mat McDermott (Editor)

Director of Education and Curriculum Reform

Murali Balaji, Ph.D.

Director of Government Relations

Jay Kansara

Director of Philanthropic Partnerships

Seetha Aiyer, M.B.A

Associate Director of Membership

Krishna Parmar

Associate Director of Programs

Aesha Mehta

Associate Director, West Coast

Padmavathy Mana

Office Administrator

Deidra Prather

National Leadership Council

Nikhil Joshi, Esq.
Raman Khanna, M.D.
Nicholas O'Connell
Kavita Pallod

Fred Stella

Swaminathan Venkataraman

SriVani Yerramilli

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) is a 501(c)(3) advocacy organization for the Hindu American community. The Foundation educates the public about Hinduism, speaks out about issues affecting Hindus worldwide, and builds bridges with institutions and individuals whose work aligns with HAF's objectives. HAF focuses on human and civil rights, public policy, media, academia, and interfaith relations. Through its advocacy efforts, HAF seeks to cultivate leaders and empower future generations of Hindu Americans.

The Hindu American Foundation is not affiliated with any religious or political organizations or entities. HAF seeks to serve Hindu Americans across all sampradayas (Hindu religious traditions) regardless of race, color, national origin, citizenship, caste, gender, sexual orientation, age, and/or disability.

CONTACT HAF

Hindu American Foundation
910 17th St NW, Suite 316A
Washington, DC 20006
USA

WEB: www.HAFsite.org
SOCIAL MEDIA: @HinduAmerican
EMAIL: info@hafsite.org
PHONE: +1 202 223 9222
FAX: +1 202 223 8004

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article 1

INDEX

Acknowledgements 6

EGREGIOUS VIOLATORS

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 7

Peoples Republic of Bangladesh 8

Malaysia 10

Islamic Republic of Pakistan 12

COUNTRIES OF SERIOUS CONCERN

Kingdom of Bhutan 14

Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir 16

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 17

MONITORED COUNTRIES

Republic of the Fiji Islands 19

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 20

Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 22

HAF Fact Finding, Humanitarian, and Advocacy Projects..... 23

HINDUS ACROSS THE DIASPORA

- Hindus, numbering over one billion (1.03 billion), constitute the third largest religious group in the world.
- Hinduism is one of the oldest surviving religions with its origins tracing back at least five thousand years.
- Hindus are pluralistic in their beliefs and accept the myriad means of worship and prayer available to human beings seeking spiritual enlightenment.
- Hindu minorities living in countries throughout South Asia and other parts of the world are subject to varying degrees of legal and institutional discrimination, restrictions on their religious freedom, social prejudice, violence, social persecution, and economic and political marginalization. Hindu women are especially vulnerable and face kidnappings and forced conversions in countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan. In several countries where Hindus are minorities, non-state actors advance a discriminatory and exclusivist agenda, often with the tacit or explicit support of the state.
- Persecution by state and non-state actors alike has led a growing number of Hindus to flee their country of origin and live as refugees.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As in the past, numerous grassroots organizations were involved in collecting data about the violation of human rights of Hindu minorities, and HAF thanks them for their fact-finding and data collection efforts. Chief among these organizations are Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD), a human rights organization based in the Hague; Bangladesh Minority Watch (BDMW) and Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council USA (BHBCUC-USA), organizations that have been at the forefront of publicizing the plight of Hindus in Bangladesh; the Indo-American Kashmir Forum and the Kashmir Taskforce, which have worked to bring the attention of the United States government and media to the plight of Kashmiri Hindus; Panun Kashmir, advocating tirelessly to resettle Kashmiri Pandits and recover their lost properties and homes in the Kashmir Valley; Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF), also known as Human Rights Party (HRP) Malaysia and Malaysian Hindu Foundation (MHF), working for the human rights of Hindu minorities in Malaysia; Hare Rama Foundation (HRF) and Scheduled Caste Rights Movement (SCRM) Pakistan, which works on behalf of marginalized Hindus in Sindh province and southern Punjab in Pakistan; Pakistan Hindu Sewa Welfare Trust; and Pakistan Hindu Council (PHC), a national advocacy group for Hindus in Pakistan.

HAF further thanks Bhutanese American community leaders and organizations, and Dr. DNS Dhakal, Duke University Fellow for information on the situation facing Bhutanese Hindus in the US and those remaining in Bhutan

HAF acknowledges the work of other human rights organizations, including Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), an independent voice in the struggle for human rights and democratic development in Pakistan; and the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), which keeps track of human rights abuses in Asia. Similarly, the International Crisis Group, Amnesty International, Freedom House, and Human Rights Watch have played a critical role in widely publicizing the denial of human rights around the world. Also, important historical information and contemporary updates were obtained from the US Department of State's annual reports on religious freedom and human rights, as well from a number of think tanks, foreign policy analyst, and historians.

Samir Kalra, Esq.

HAF Senior Director/Human Rights Fellow

Hindus in South Asia and the Diaspora: A Survey of Human Rights, 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The human rights of Hindu citizens are consistently violated in nine countries and one state in India where Hindus constitute a minority: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bhutan, the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Saudi Arabia, and Trinidad and Tobago.

This report documents the ongoing violations of human rights in these countries, as well as those of specific refugee populations.

EGREGIOUS VIOLATORS

Countries designated as Egregious Violators have either engaged in or allowed rampant and systemic human rights violations to take place against their Hindu populations. HAF has categorized the following countries as Egregious Violators in 2016: **Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, People's Republic of Bangladesh, Malaysia, and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.**

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN

Area 652,230 sq km

Population 33,332,025 (July 2016 est.)

Religions Islam 99.7% (Sunni 84–89%, Shia 10–15%), Other 0.3% (includes Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs)

Ethnic Groups Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, other (includes smaller numbers of Baloch, Turkmen, Nuristani, Pamiri, Arab, Gujar, Brahui, Qizilbash, Aimaq, Pashai, and Kyrgyz) Note: current statistical data on the sensitive subject of ethnicity in Afghanistan is not available, and ethnicity data from small samples of respondents to opinion polls are not a reliable alternative.

Languages Afghan Persian or Dari (official language, though much of the population is bilingual) 50%, Pashto (official) 35%, Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen) 11%, 30 minor languages (primarily Balochi and Pashai) 4%

Location Southern Asia, north and west of Pakistan, east of Iran



COUNTRY OVERVIEW

2016 was once again marked by violence, rampant corruption, a lack of governance, and instability in Afghanistan. Human rights continued to deteriorate throughout the year, as government officials, security forces, local militias, and militant groups were all responsible for committing gross human rights abuses in violation of international law.

The Afghan Taliban, which controls nearly 30 percent of the country, attacked civilians with impunity, and the government was unable to protect its citizens from violence or enforce the rule of law in many parts of the country. Islamic State (ISIS) fighters have also established a significant presence in the country exerting control over major parts of four districts in the eastern Nangarhar province, and launching several attacks, including a suicide bombing in Kabul

in July that killed 80 Shiite Hazaras and injured more than 200.

The plight of minorities and women was particularly concerning, as these vulnerable groups remained marginalized and subjected to violence, social prejudice and harassment. Hindus and Sikhs lack cremation rights and are often attacked and humiliated while trying to cremate their dead. Hindu and Sikh children, in particular, are harassed and bullied in school for their religious beliefs. Parents are hesitant to send their daughters out alone due to fear that they may be kidnapped and forcefully married to a Muslim. Hindus and Sikhs have also faced employment discrimination and are both politically marginalized and excluded from most government jobs.

Afghanistan's constitution and legal system further institutionalize discrimination against non-Muslims and firmly establish Islam as the state religion. These conditions continue to lead Hindus and Sikhs to leave the country, with only an estimated 200 families remaining (down from over 200,000 Hindus/Sikhs in the 1970s), according to Afghan Hindu sources. Afghan Hindu and Sikh refugees similarly continue to face struggles in other countries where they have sought refuge, and in some instances, face deportation proceedings.

HAF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Afghan government should work to reform its legal system and constitution to provide greater safeguards for religious freedom and human rights. Legal experts from the US and international bodies, such as the United Nations, should assist with this process.
- The Afghan government must protect the funeral rites of Hindus and Sikhs and prevent non-state actors from interfering in their cremations. Moreover, the government should provide access to suitable land to house crematoriums.
- Greater security and support should be provided for Hindus and Sikhs to allow them to worship freely and without fear of harassment, forced conversions, and societal discrimination.
- Hindu and Sikh places of worship should be

treated equitably and allocated funding on par with mosques.

- Afghanistan's lower house of Parliament should end its opposition to creating a reserved seat for Hindus/Sikhs in the Parliament in order to politically franchise these communities.
- Additional schools for Hindus/Sikhs should be created by the government to allow them to obtain an education free of religious prejudice and harassment.
- The international community, including countries such as the US and India, should continue to invest in developing Afghanistan's civil society, infrastructure, and democratic institutions.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH

Area 148,460 sq km

Population 156,186,882 (July 2016 est.)

Religions Islam (Sunni) 89.1%, Hindus 10% (many current estimates suggest less than 9%), other 0.9% (includes Buddhists and Christians) (2013 est. This constitutes the last official estimate on religious demographics. Many of the statistics provided on country demographics throughout this entire report are based on official estimates from previous years.)

Ethnic Groups Bengali, at least 98%, other ethnic groups 1.1%; Bangladesh's government recognizes 27 ethnic groups under the 2010 Cultural Institution for Small Anthropological Groups Act; other sources estimate there are about 75 ethnic groups; critics of the 2011 census claim that it underestimates the size of Bangladesh's non-Bengali population (2011 est.)

Languages Bangla 98.8% (official, also known as Bengali), other 1.2% (2011 est.)

Location Southern Asia, bordering the Bay of Bengal, between Burma and India

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Diwali day riots in Brahmanbaria that led to the ransacking of more than 15 temples and at least

150 people injured and the November attacks on the Santhal tribal community in Gopalganj, capped off another tumultuous year for Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh. The beheadings of Hindu priests and secular bloggers, abductions and conversions of Hindu girls, and forced occupation of minority owned lands also continued throughout the year unabated.

The plight of religious minorities and atheists has become increasingly precarious as there has been a marked increase in religiously motivated violence over the past few years coinciding with the rise of domestic and international Islamist terror groups. The recent escalation in violence coincides with the growing power of domestic and international extremist groups, such as Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel), Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent (AQIS), and ISIS, among others. While JMB, al-Qaeda, and ISIS are designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), Jel has escaped international censure despite a long history of engaging in mass-violence against Hindus and secular Bangladeshis, dating back to the country's struggle for independence from Pakistan in 1971.

Most notably, ISIS claimed responsibility for a number of attacks in 2016 and coordinated with domestic groups, posing an existential threat to the country's secular democracy. This was highlighted by the attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery in the diplomatic area of Dhaka, where five gunmen were heard shouting "Allahu Akbar" prior to setting off bombs and shooting as they stormed the cafe and took hostages. The attackers asked the hostages to recite versions of the Koran and targeted and killed those that were non-Muslims or those that refused, resulting in the deaths of more than 20 people.

While Islamists were responsible for the majority of violence, the ruling Awami League (AL) has also contributed to deteriorating conditions in the country by suppressing political dissent and basic civil liberties, and refusing to acknowledge and adequately confront the presence of ISIS and other foreign terror groups. It has further imposed restrictions on the freedom of speech and bloggers, harassed journalists, and arrested political



opponents.

Furthermore, religious minorities remain underrepresented in the government bureaucracy, though the Awami League has appointed several minorities to leadership positions.

Bangladeshi security forces, particularly the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), have also been accused of committing extensive abuses, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances, and torture of prisoners.

As a result of the widespread violence and growing intolerance in the country, many Hindus and Buddhists have fled and sought refuge in India. Since 1947, the Hindu population in Bangladesh (former East Pakistan) has drastically declined from 31% to 10% (less than 9% according to some estimates) today. Although many Bangladeshi Hindu refugees have been living in India without formal legal status,

the Indian government recently announced changes to the Citizenship Act, 1955, that would allow them to stay in the country legally and with a pathway to citizenship. The government further granted refugees from Bangladesh living in India on long term visas the right to purchase land.

HAF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) must acknowledge and appropriately confront the growing presence and activities of foreign Islamist terror groups, such as ISIS and al Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent, who are coordinating with local Islamist groups. It must also take immediate steps to enforce the rule of law, prosecute those responsible for anti-minority violence, and ensure that religious minorities receive the necessary protection from further attacks.
- The GoB should continue to conduct the war crimes trials while ensuring that they are consistent with due process of law, in order to achieve closure, justice, and accountability for events that occurred during the 1971 War of Independence.
- GoB must undertake legal and constitutional reforms by removing provisions privileging Islam from the Constitution and institute greater safeguards for religious freedom.
- The government must take immediate steps to return previously confiscated properties under discriminatory property laws to their rightful Hindu owners, under the provisions of the Vested Property Return Bill of 2011.
- The government should strengthen the National Human Rights Commission to support constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and equal protection, and to ensure the protection of minorities.
- The US should work constructively with the GoB to ensure that attacks on Hindus and other minorities cease, past victims of violence are fully rehabilitated, and those responsible for attacks are brought to swift justice. US officials should be unequivocal in their condemnation of violence in all public statements. In addition, human rights and civil society activists should

be supported.

- The US should support the International Crimes Tribunal, despite its flaws, as a means of achieving justice for the victims of genocide and crimes against humanity, and sending a message that war criminals will be held accountable and cannot act with impunity.
- Jel and ICS should be designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) by the US State Department under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under section 1(b) of Executive Order 13224.
- Under section 212(a)(2)(G) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, the US should deny entry to any officials from Jel that have engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom as defined by section 3 of the International Religious Freedom Act.
- Despite the absence of an extradition treaty, the US should repatriate Ashrafuzzaman Khan and Abdul Jabbar to Bangladesh to face justice for war crimes committed during the 1971 War.

MALAYSIA

Area 329, 847 sq km

Population 30,949,962 (July 2016 est.)

Religions Muslim (official) 61.3%, Buddhist 19.8%, Christian 9.2%, Hindu 6.3%, Confucianism, Taoism, other traditional Chinese religions 1.3%, other 0.4%, none 0.8%, unspecified 1% (2010 est.)

Ethnic Groups Malay 50.1%, Chinese 22.6%, indigenous 11.8%, Indian 6.7%, other 0.7%, non-citizens 8.2% (2010 est.)

Languages Bahasa Malaysia (official), English, Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainan, Foochow), Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Punjabi, Thai, several indigenous languages (Iban and Kadazan)

Location Southeastern Asia, peninsula bordering Thailand and northern one-third of the island of Borneo, bordering Indonesia, Brunei and the South China Sea, south of Vietnam

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

The human rights conditions of ethnic and religious minorities continued to deteriorate in 2016 amidst a worsening climate of repression and intolerance. Ethnic Indians continued to face economic and social marginalization due to the persistence of Bumiputra (sons of the soil) policies favoring the majority Malaysian Muslim community.

Malaysia's Federal Constitution gives explicit preference to Muslims and establishes Islam as the official state religion. Islam also increasingly pervaded government policy and Malaysian society, while high ranking government officials made several statements reflective of a climate of escalating religious intolerance. Simultaneously, cumbersome restrictions on the religious rights of non-Muslims and members of minority-Muslims sects remained in place through 2016. Non-Muslim places of worship were subjected to inequitable treatment, marked by the ongoing demolition and forced relocation of Hindu temples, often sanctioned by the government.

Similarly, non-Muslims continued to be forced to adjudicate family law and "moral" matters in the Shariat (Islamic law) courts, where they faced severe disadvantages. There have been a number of cases where minor children were converted to Islam by a Muslim parent without the knowledge or consent of the non-Muslim parent. In these instances, the Shariat courts have typically found in favor of the Muslim parent and sanctioned the conversion, thereby violating the non-Muslim's parental rights. This was best exemplified by the high-profile case of S. Deepa, a Hindu woman who lost custody of her son, Mithran, who was converted to Islam by her ex-husband without her consent.

Despite government crackdowns on extremist groups in recent years, ISIS' ideology has gained traction in Malaysia and other parts of Southeast Asia. And on June 27, 2016, ISIS carried out its first attack on Malaysian soil with a bombing of a bar and nightclub outside of Kuala Lumpur.

Coinciding with the deterioration of religious freedom, there was a sharp decline in respect for basic civil rights and fundamental liberties in Malaysia. This



included the repression of free speech and peaceful assembly, discrimination against LGBT activists, and police abuse and arbitrary detentions without trial.

Rather than reform discriminatory policies and repressive laws, the ruling coalition government under Prime Minister Najib Razak took steps to solidify its hold on political power and appease hardliners and its core Muslim Malay constituency.

HAF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- We support the recommendation of Hindraf Makkal Sakthi to create a Minority Affairs Ministry to examine and address the plight of the marginalized non-Malay population.
- Repressive laws should be rescinded or revised to allow for the free exercise of speech, assembly, and association and to end arbitrary detentions and police abuses.
- Religious freedom should be granted to non-Sunni Muslims consistent with those rights granted to their fellow Muslim citizens, including the rights of minority Muslims sects to register their associations and freely practice their religion in public.
- Non-Muslim places of worship, particularly Hindu temples must be protected from further destruction, desecration, and appropriation by the government and non-state actors. Additionally, non-Muslim religious sites and institutions should be treated on par with Muslim religious institutions.

- The conflict between civil law and Islamic law must be resolved and any matter involving non-Muslims should be subject to the jurisdiction of the civil courts, regardless if it is a family law dispute with a Muslim.
- The ruling government must uphold its prior commitment to reform Bumiputra laws.
- The US and the international community should exert pressure on the Malaysian government to provide religious freedom and equal rights to non-Muslims through constitutional and legal reform and to allow freedom of speech and assembly by amending repressive laws.
- The US should further revisit its trade ties with Malaysia, as the Barisan National government continues to distribute economic entitlements to the majority Muslim Malay population. These policies not only impact minorities, but also affect the country's economy and the viability of foreign investment.

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN

Area 796,095 sq km

Population 201,995,540 (July 2016 est.)

Religions Islam (official) 96.4% (Sunni 85-90%, Shia 10-15%), other (includes Christians, Hindus and Sikhs) 3.6% (2010 est.)

Ethnic Groups Punjabi 44.68%, Pashtun (Pathan) 15.42%, Sindhi 14.1%, Saraiki 8.38%, Muhajirs (immigrants from India at the time of Partition and their descendants) 7.57%, Balochi 3.57%, other 6.28%

Languages Punjabi 48%, Sindhi 12%, Saraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10%, Pashto (alternate name, Pash-tu) 8%, Urdu (official) 8%, Balochi 3%, Hindko 2%, Brahui 1%, English (official; lingua franca of Pakistani elite and most government ministries), Burushaski, and other 8%

Location Southern Asia, bordering the Arabian Sea, between India on the east and Iran and Afghanistan on the west and China in the north



COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Human rights and religious freedom conditions continued to deteriorate at an unprecedented rate in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 2016. Pakistan's widespread violation of human rights and its tolerance of human rights violations by non-state actors demonstrate a blatant disregard for international human rights norms and its obligations under human rights treaties and conventions.

The blasphemy laws, restrictions on the Ahmadiyya Muslim faith, and continued forced conversions of Hindu and Christian girls continued to plague religious minorities. An estimated 1,000 Christian and Hindu women are abducted and forcibly converted to Islam every year. Often, after being abducted, these girls are forcibly married to unknown men, raped, sold off, or forced into prostitution. Moreover, the constitutional preference for Islam, religious identification laws, and depiction of non-Muslims in school textbook institutionalized discrimination and the second-class status of minorities.

Similarly, Hindus and other minorities have been subjected to the bonded labor system, attacks

on religious sites and the illegal occupation of temples, and other acts of intolerance at the hands of non-state actors with the complicit or implicit support of government officials (or failure to act).

In a rare positive step, the Hindu Marriage Bill was passed in Pakistan's National Assembly and promulgated into law by the President in March 2017, legally recognizing Hindu marriages for the first time in the country's history.

The country was also plagued by large-scale sectarian violence as militant groups operated freely and targeted minorities with impunity. A bomb attack targeting Christians celebrating Easter in Lahore on March 27 carried out by Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, an offshoot of Tehreek-e-Taliban, resulted in the deaths of 72 people and over 300 injured, including both Christians and Muslims.

The Pakistani military establishment has long utilized many of the terrorist/militant groups to pursue its perceived foreign policy interests vis-à-vis India and Afghanistan, as well as to pursue its domestic priorities

Commenting on the situation facing religious minorities in Pakistan, analyst and author, Farhanaz Ispahani, recently stated: "Officially mandated textbooks reject pluralism and represent minorities, especially Hindus, in an extremely negative light. In recent years Pakistan has witnessed some of the worst organized violence against religious minorities since Partition. From January 2012 until now, at least 450 incidents of sectarian violence have been reported. These incidents led to 3755 casualties, including 1551 deaths."

As a result, thousands of Hindus continue to seek refuge in India annually to escape religious persecution in Pakistan. These refugees still face challenging socio-economic conditions in India, although the Indian government has taken positive steps to ease restrictions on citizenship and long-term residency requirements for these refugees.

Beyond religious freedom violations, the Pakistani government's suppression of the civil and human rights of ethnic minorities continued unabated. A recent report from the Federal Human Rights

Ministry, for instance, found that close to 1,000 dead bodies of Baloch activists and separatists have been recovered in Balochistan province over the past six years, pointing to a pattern of extrajudicial killings and abuses by security forces.

Moreover, in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, the interim constitution places legal restrictions on political rights and freedom of expression by banning parties that do not explicitly endorse Kashmir's accession to Pakistan. Similarly, government employees are required to express their support for accession.

HAF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Government of Pakistan should transfer control over Hindu temples and crematoriums to representatives of the Hindu community to prevent the illegal sales and encroachment of Hindu religious sites. It should also provide adequate security to places of worship, including full implementation of the plan to hire 2,000 Hindu and Christian policemen to guard religious sites.
- The Government should increase the number of reserved seats for religious minorities in both federal and provincial legislatures to afford them adequate political representation; closely monitor schools to ensure that non-Muslims are not forced to take Islamiyat classes; and enforce current laws prohibiting bonded labor and provide increased training and funding to police at the local level to combat the practice.
- Pakistan must repeal and/or revise discriminatory and inequitable laws and constitutional provisions, and adopt and enforce Hindu marriage laws across the country. Furthermore, create an administrative agency to adjudicate claims of discrimination by state actors and provide legal redress to victims of hate violence.
- Pass the Sindh Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill to criminalize forced conversions and protect the rights of Hindu (and other non-Muslim) girls, without making amendments or watering down its provisions. Train local law enforcement on how to deal with kidnappings, forced conversions, and involuntary marriages

of Hindu and Christian girls. Police must also crack down on mosques that promote such activities and ensure the safety of girls and their families.

- The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and General Assembly should censure Pakistan for its human rights record through resolutions. While these resolutions are non-binding, they would keep attention focused on Pakistan's human rights record.
- The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank should apply economic pressure on Pakistan by placing preconditions on future loans requiring the government to meet certain democratic and human rights indices.
- Those fleeing or those that have fled Pakistan on account of religious persecution and who meet the requirements of the Geneva Convention should be accorded "refugee" status by UNHCR in accordance with international law.
- India should take all necessary steps to provide long-term legal status and ease citizenship requirements for Pakistani Hindus that have fled religious persecution. Accordingly, the government should adopt and implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 to assist refugees from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. The central Indian government and relevant state governments should address the basic socio-economic needs of newly arriving refugees.
- The US Department of State should classify Pakistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) due to its blatant disregard for human rights and religious freedom. This would place international attention on Pakistan's human rights record and enable the US to leverage sanctions on Pakistan, if necessary.
- The US should shift its relationship from a military centric one to one based on supporting civil society, democracy, and human rights. Moreover, military aid should be limited and require strict accounting for every dollar Pakistan receives to prevent funds from being diverted to destabilize India or Afghanistan.
- Civilian assistance should be focused on meaningful constitutional and legal reform

to provide equality and religious freedom for minorities. Alternatively, humanitarian and economic assistance should be provided for the benefit of the country's marginalized minorities.

- Current USAID teacher training programs should incorporate sensitivity training to address discriminatory attitudes towards religious minorities and support for violent extremism among many teachers.

COUNTRIES OF SERIOUS CONCERN

Countries labelled as Serious Concern have committed severe human rights violations against their Hindu minority, but not rising to the level of Egregious Violators. These countries or regions include the following: **Kingdom of Bhutan**, the Indian state of **Jammu and Kashmir** (this designation is based only on the treatment of the Hindu minority in this particular state and is not a comment on the state of human rights in general in India), and the **Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Area 38,394 sq km

Population 750,125 (July 2016 est.)

Religion Lamaistic Buddhist 75.3%, Indian and Nepalese-influenced Hinduism 22.1% (estimates on the number of Hindus vary according to Hindu groups), other 2.6%

Ethnicity Ngalop (also known as Bhote) 50%, ethnic Nepalese 35% (includes Lhotsampas, one of several Nepalese ethnic groups), indigenous or migrant tribes 15%

Languages Sharchhopka 28%, Dzongkha (official) 24%, Lhotshamkha 22%, other 26%

Location Southern Asia, landlocked, between China and India

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Bhutan has undergone significant changes in recent years as it transitions to a democracy, but has made little progress on implementing human rights

reforms. Bhutan's continued use of nationalist policies and discriminatory laws violate basic norms of international law.

Specifically, the government suppresses the civil liberties of its people by placing arbitrary restrictions on religious freedom, creating obstacles for the construction of non-Buddhist places of worship, repressing minority linguistic and cultural rights, denying citizenship rights to thousands of residents, and strictly limiting political activity.

Moreover, contradictory provisions in Bhutan's Constitution have rendered protections for religious freedom and equality under the law largely ineffective. The Constitution specifically provides that "Buddhism is the spiritual heritage of Bhutan," "Bhutanese society is rooted in Buddhism," and that it is "the responsibility of all religious institutions and personalities to promote the spiritual heritage of the country."

The longstanding refugee issue also remains unresolved as the government continues to refuse to repatriate any of the expelled Nepali Hindu refugees. These ethnic Nepalis, known as Lhotshampas, were exiled and ethnically cleansed from the country in the early 1990s under discriminatory citizenship laws and the "One Nation, One People" policy aimed at forced ethnic and religious cohesion. As a result, more than 100,000 Lhotshampa refugees (mostly Hindu) fled to Nepal and India. In Nepal, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees built refugee camps and in 2007 began to resettle the Bhutanese refugees in third party countries, including approximately 90,000 in the US. There are approximately 10,000 refugees still in the camps who are either not qualified for third-country resettlement or have decided to wait for repatriation to Bhutan.

Though the conditions of the resettled Bhutanese refugees in the US have been slowly improving, the community still faces many challenges, including a high incidence of mental illness and suicide, language barriers, difficulty obtaining employment, and difficulty retaining their cultural and religious traditions in the face of aggressive Christian missionaries.



HAF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- HAF calls on the Bhutanese government to remove or revise any preferential language for Buddhism in Bhutan's constitution and legal framework and for the government to treat all religions equitably. If the government chooses to continue subsidizing religious institutions, it must do so without making any distinction between Buddhist and non-Buddhist religions. Moreover, non-Buddhist communities should be accorded the right to build new places of worship and register religious organizations free of cumbersome and arbitrary restrictions.
- Continued attempts to forcibly homogenize the cultural identity of the country, including limiting minority linguistic rights and other restrictive policies targeting the Lhotshampa community must end.
- Exiled and banned political parties should be allowed to operate freely in Bhutan and participate in elections, while human rights organizations representing the interests of the refugees and the broader Lhotshampa community should similarly be free to operate in the country.
- HAF further urges Bhutan to accept and repatriate all those refugees remaining in the camps or elsewhere who wish to return and are able to prove their nationality through reasonable means, while Nepal should make a similar offer to integrate some refugees. If any refugees are in fact repatriated to Bhutan, they should be

afforded full citizenship rights and basic human rights protections. Finally, Bhutanese refugees should be allowed to visit Bhutan and accorded non-resident Bhutanese status.

- International donors, the United Nations, India, and the United States should work constructively with Bhutan to implement additional democratic reforms, put pressure on Bhutan to accept the return of exiled ethnic Nepali Hindus that wish to return, and ensure that all residents living in Bhutan enjoy equal protection under the law and religious freedom.
- Moreover, those Bhutanese Hindus living in India should be accorded official refugee status and provided with basic government assistance.
- The resettled refugees in the US, should be given greater support in acclimating to their new environment. While government resettlement agencies in the US have provided considerable assistance to the Bhutanese refugees, greater attention needs to be focused on addressing their mental health needs, overcoming linguistic barriers, and job skills training.

INDIAN STATE OF JAMMU & KASHMIR

Area 141,338 sq km (222,237 sq km, including territory occupied by China and Pakistan)

Population 12,541,302 (2011 estimate)

Religions Islam (68.31%), Hinduism (28.44%), Sikhism (1.87%), Buddhism (0.9%), Christianity (0.28%), Not available (0.16%), Jainism (0.02%) and others (0.01%) (2011 estimate); Many forcibly displaced Hindus and Sikhs from Kashmir now live in other parts of India.

Languages Kashmiri, Urdu, Gojri, Dadri, Dogri, Pahari, Balti, Ladakhi, Punjabi

Location Northern India, bordered by Pakistan on the west and China on the east

STATE OVERVIEW

In 2016, violence and unrest returned to the Kashmir Valley in India's state of Jammu and Kashmir, sparked by the death of Hizbul Mujahideen (HM)



commander, Burhan Wahi, who was killed in a gunbattle with Indian security forces on July 8. HM has been designated a terrorist group by the European Union and India and is one of many militant organizations operating in Kashmir sponsored by Pakistan's military and ISI. The unrest left 82 people dead and more than 11,000 (7,000 civilians and 4,000 security personnel) injured in clashes between protesters, led by separatist groups, and security forces. During the unrest, rampaging Muslim mobs also attacked Kashmiri Pandit migrant camps in six cities in the Valley.

The former Princely State of Kashmir legally ceded his kingdom to India in 1947, following an invasion by Pakistani armed forces and Pashtun tribesmen. Pakistan, however, continues to occupy about 35% of the region, India governs approximately half, and China occupies the remainder, including a portion ceded to it by Pakistan.

While media attention has been focused on India's state of Jammu and Kashmir, Kashmiris recently held protests in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) against alleged human rights violations by Pakistan's military and ISI, including the extrajudicial killings of at least 100 Kashmiri activists in the past two years, rigged elections, and the repression of Kashmiri political activists. The US State Department also raised concerns over human rights violations in PoK, which have been occurring for years.

The Pakistani military and ISI continued to sponsor cross-border terrorism in Indian Kashmir (and other parts of the country) throughout 2016, in violation of UN Covenants governing terrorism. Most notably,

on September 18, US designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) attacked an army base in Uri, escalating tensions between India and Pakistan.

Furthermore, Hindus and other minorities faced ongoing challenges throughout Jammu and Kashmir, including discrimination, lack of religious freedom, and ongoing security threats. The unrest following Wani's death led to several suspensions of the Amarnath Yatra (annual pilgrimage to a sacred site dedicated to the Hindu deity Shiva) due to security concerns and violent attacks on the few Kashmiri Pandits living in the Valley.

In addition, thousands of displaced Kashmiri Hindu Pandits still live in squalid refugee camps in Jammu and New Delhi, and are socially, economically, and politically disenfranchised, more than 26 years after more than 300,000 Pandits were ethnically cleansed from their homeland in the Kashmir Valley by militants sponsored by Pakistan's military and ISI. The ethnic cleansing campaign also led to the massacres of hundreds of Pandits, alongside the destruction of nearly 105 educational institutions, hundreds of temples and religious sites (estimates range from 208 to 550), 14,430 Hindu owned businesses and shops, and more than 20,000 Kashmiri Hindu homes, according to Pandit groups.

Many of the Pandits still living in the camps suffer from ongoing mental and emotional trauma, including high rates of dementia, insomnia, depression, and hypertension. Though rehabilitation plans have recently been proposed by the central and state governments, Pandits have largely been unable to safely return to the Valley.

HAF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Indian government must officially recognize Kashmiri Pandits as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to acknowledge their historical experience and provide them with their rights and protections under international law.
- India should abrogate Article 370 of the Constitution, which has allowed the State's residents to live under a separate set of laws

and discriminated against the state's religious minorities.

- The central and state governments should improve basic conditions for Pandits living in camps in Jammu and New Delhi and register all the refugees that fled PoK.
- The central and state governments must implement comprehensive resettlement plans for displaced Pandits that ensure: (1) security for those returning; (2) returning Pandits are integrated into the normal economic development of the state; (3) proper accommodations to resettling Pandits; and (4) basic freedoms for returning Pandits.
- The state government must provide for the protection of vulnerable Hindu shrines and allow Kashmiri Pandits to control their religious sites in the Valley. It must further provide full protection and accommodation to Hindu pilgrims visiting shrines in the state.
- Any dialogue on the political future of the state must include Kashmiri Hindu representatives and promote the views of secular Kashmiri Muslims in the Valley.
- The Kashmir issue must remain a bilateral one between India and Pakistan and between the Indian government and its citizens in the state.
- US policy makers and the international community must exert economic and diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to end its use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy, leveraging the large amount of financial assistance provided to the country.

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA

Area 65,610 sq km

Population 22.235 million (July 2016 est.)

Ethnic Groups Sinhalese 74.9%, Tamil 15.4% (Sri Lankan Tamil 11.2%, Indian Tamil 4.2%) Sri Lankan Moors 9.2%, other 0.5% (2012 est.)

Religions Buddhist (official) 70.2%, Hindu 12.6%, Muslim 9.7%, Roman Catholic 6.1%, other Christian 1.3%, other 0.05% (2012 est.)



Languages Sinhala (official/national language) 74%, Tamil (national language) 18%, other 8%. English, spoken competently by about 10% of the population, is commonly used in government and is referred to as the link language in the constitution.

Location Southern Asia, island in the Indian Ocean, south of India

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Despite promises of reform, there was little significant change in human rights conditions in Sri Lanka in 2016. Most notably, the government failed to take meaningful steps to address alleged war crimes stemming from the civil war between the Sinhalese dominated government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an ethnic Tamil separatist group, that ended in 2009. Specifically, the government attempted to avoid its obligations under a September 2015 United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution that required the Sri Lankan government to implement mechanisms to investigate the civil war and involve international judges.

At a UNHRC meeting in June 2016, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, stated that the Sri Lankan government had not implemented a "comprehensive traditional justice

agenda." The UNHRC's annual report further called on Sri Lanka to "rein in its military forces, prosecute war crimes and win the confidence of the Tamil minority" and reiterated the importance of utilizing international judges in any transitional justice tribunal.

In addition to the lack of post-conflict justice, the military continued to exercise widespread control and commit torture and sexual abuse in high security zones in the north and east. The assertion of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism has led to "cultural and demographic Sinhalisation" in historic Tamil areas and has been accompanied by the destruction of Hindu, Christian, and Muslim religious sites. Tamil sources allege that there have been a series of attacks on Hindu religious sites and priests and the destruction of several temples in the north-east region of the country. The displacement of thousands of Tamils also continued unabated, and Hindus and other religious minorities were denied equal rights under the constitution.

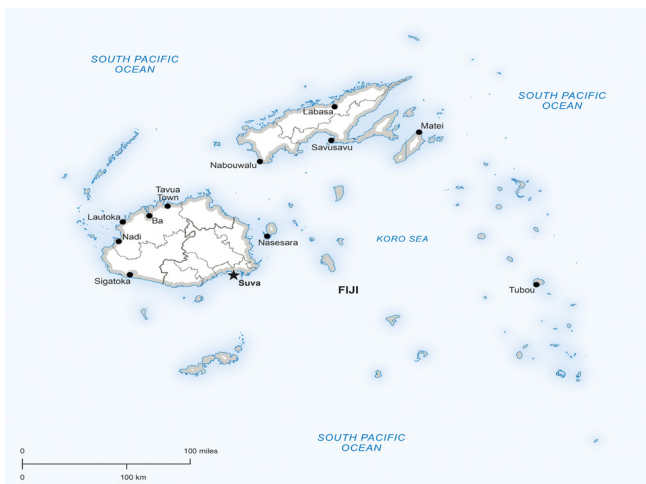
Moreover, the Constitution of Sri Lanka continues to accord Buddhism "the foremost place" and states that "it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana [religion]," while dedicating an entire chapter of the Constitution to Buddhism (Chapter II). This language affords a privileged status to Buddhists and implicitly relegates other religions to an inferior status by demonstrating government preference for one religion over others.

HAF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- HAF calls on the Sri Lankan government to uphold its commitments as outlined in the September 2015 UNHRC resolution to effectively investigate the war crimes committed by all sides during the civil war.
- Demilitarization of the north and eastern sections of the country is necessary to build the trust of the minority Tamil population. The number of military personnel operating in these areas must be reduced to only that which is necessary for the security and protection of civilians, and the arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture, and sexual abuse must end. Additionally, security forces should refrain from

interfering in the daily lives of Tamil civilians, return occupied lands, and respect their freedom of speech and association. Moreover, those civilians still displaced from the war must be resettled and rehabilitated in a timely manner.

- It is further incumbent upon the federal government to remove preference for Buddhism from the Constitution and fully devolve political power to the Northern Provincial Council as guaranteed by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. Finally, the government must confront Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists and do more to protect ethnic and religious minorities and minority places of worship from communal violence.
- The international community, including the UN, India, and the US must continue to support human rights and democratic process in the country, and pressure Sri Lanka to conduct an investigation into the civil war in accordance with the UNHRC resolution in order to achieve political reconciliation and create a stable country.
- At the same time, the Tamil diaspora must play a constructive role in the rehabilitation of Tamils in Sri Lanka, the welfare of the Tamil minority in particular, and the Sri Lankan state in general. The Diaspora must end any attempts to reorganize the LTTE or foment conflict and instead support engagement with the ruling coalition.



MONITORED COUNTRIES

Monitored Countries have a history of violations against the Hindu community, but conditions have improved in recent years. The one exception is Saudi Arabia, which has a small population of Hindu migrant workers and a lack of available data on violations against Hindus. Consequently, Monitored Countries in 2016 are the following: **Republic of the Fiji Islands, Saudi Arabia, and Trinidad and Tobago.**

REPUBLIC OF THE FIJI ISLANDS

Area 18,274 sq km

Population 915,303 (July 2016 est.)

Religions Protestant 45% (Methodist 34.6%, Assembly of God 5.7%, Seventh Day Adventist 3.9%, and Anglican 0.8%), Hindu 27.9%, other Christian 10.4%, Roman Catholic 9.1%, Muslim 6.3%, Sikh 0.3%, other 0.3%, none 0.8% (2007 est.)

Languages English (official), Fijian, Hindustani

Ethnic Groups iTaukei 56.8% (iTaukei is now used to refer to native Fijians and is predominantly Melanesian with a Polynesian admixture), Indian 37.5%, Rotuman 1.2%, other 4.5% (European, part European, other Pacific Islanders, Chinese)

Location Oceania, island group in the South Pacific Ocean, about two-thirds of the way from Hawaii to New Zealand

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Fiji's human rights record continued to come under scrutiny from human rights groups and the international community in 2016 for restrictions on the media and repression of the freedoms of expression, association, and assembly. In September 2016, for instance, opposition party leaders, Biman Prasad (National Federation Party) and Sitiveni Rabuka (Sodelpa), and a high-profile trade union leader, Attar Singh, among others were arrested for organizing a public meeting about the 2013 Constitution without a permit under the Public Order Amendment Decree.

While the Constitution protects basic civil liberties

and supports the free practice of religion, it simultaneously allows for the arbitrary restriction of the freedoms of expression, association, and assembly in the interest of national security.

In addition, concerns over allegations of torture and abuse by security forces, gender-based violence, and the violation of worker's rights persist.

The Indian-Hindu minority faces ongoing racial prejudice and inequitable treatment in many sectors, while longstanding ethnic tensions between the iTaukei (indigenous Fijian) population and Indo-Fijians continues to plague the country. The government, however, has taken several significant steps to confront discrimination and reduce ethnic tensions in recent years. Land ownership regulations, however, remain inequitable and continue to marginalize Indo-Fijian farmers. The majority of land in Fiji is still concentrated in the hands of iTaukei Fijians with restrictions on the ability of Indo-Fijians farmers to purchase land under discriminatory land tenure legislation. While a recent land use decree has increased access to land and extended lease periods to up to 99 years (from 30 years), Indo-Fijian farmers are still dependent on leased lands.

Ethnic and religiously motivated violence targeting the Indian-Hindu minority has also drastically declined, though there were a string of racially and religiously motivated break-ins targeting the Indian-Hindu community in June 2016. The Lovu Sangam School on the outskirts of Lautoka and an adjacent Hindu temple, for instance, were vandalized multiple times and Hindu symbols and sacred items desecrated. The vandals also wrote messages taunting the school that serves 500 Indian students. This followed an incident of vandalism and desecration of religious items at the Nadi Arya Samaj Primary School, a Hindu religious school, in 2014.

HAF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Fijian government should take steps to amend the constitution to provide broader protections for the freedoms of expression, association, and assembly.
- Bainimarama's government should end its suppression of free speech and the right to

assembly by those critical of its policies, while security forces should refrain from the continued use of arbitrary arrests and detentions.

- The government must continue to pursue policies that treat all ethnic and religious groups equally, including further reforming land ownership legislation to provide equal ownership rights to Indo-Fijians. Furthermore, the government must take the necessary steps to stem discrimination and religious intolerance by non-state actors.
- Law enforcement should continue to protect Hindus from violent attacks, closely monitor hate speech, and institute permanent safeguards to protect Hindu temples and institutions.

KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Area 2,149,690 sq km

Population 28,160,273 (July 2016 est.), more than 30% of the population includes non-national immigrants (based on 2015 UN data)

Religions Islam (official; citizens are 85-90% Sunni and 10-15% Shia), other (includes Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh) (2012 est.); Non-Muslims are not accorded Saudi citizenship.

Ethnicity 90% ethnic Arab, 10% Afro-Asian. This does not include migrant workers who are predominantly from Asia.

Languages Arabic (official)

Location Middle East, bordering the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, north of Yemen

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Saudi citizens and non-resident migrant workers continued to be deprived of fundamental freedoms and basic civil liberties throughout 2016. Religious freedom was systematically denied to both Muslims and non-Muslims alike, as the Kingdom continued to enforce its strict interpretation of Sunni Islam, outlawing other public forms of religion. Saudi Arabia's constitution proclaims the kingdom to be



“a sovereign Arab Islamic state with Islam as its religion” and “God’s Book and the Sunnah of His Prophet” to be its “constitution.”

At the same time, religious minorities, including approximately 310,000 Hindu migrant workers, suffered ongoing persecution, slave-like conditions, and severe restrictions on their religious freedom. Similarly, activists from the Shiite minority have been frequently repressed and targeted by security forces, and well known Shiite cleric, Sheikh Nimr Bakir al-Nimr, was executed in early 2016.

Moreover, in November 2016, a Hindu from Telangana, India, Ponnamm Shankar, who was working in Saudi Arabia as an agricultural engineer was arrested and imprisoned for committing blasphemy against a holy Islamic site. Specifically, Shankar was arrested for allegedly creating a facebook post with an image of the Hindu God, Shiva, on top of the Kaaba, considered sacred to Muslims. Subsequently he was beaten up by a mob, who posted a video of the attack and him apologizing for the incident on social media. Shankar denied creating the image, but reportedly shared the image on his social media account.

Despite some minimal advances in women’s rights in recent years, systematic gender discrimination

continued to plague the country. Sharia based laws treat women inequitably and empowered the religious police to enforce the strict segregation of men and women in public (unless a woman was with a male guardian).

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia remains a major exporter of Wahhabi Islam, supporting mosques, madrasas, and Islamic centers abroad. Many of these institutions have radicalized Muslims in various parts of the world and fomented conflict and instability. South Asia, in particular, has witnessed the exportation of an extremist Wahhabi ideology. An extremist Indian preacher, Zakir Naik, who reportedly inspired the July terror attack at a Dhaka café in Bangladesh, was honored with the King Faisal International Prize in 2015 by Saudi King Salman for his “service to Islam.”

HAF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The international community must urge the Saudi government to address fundamental human rights concerns, including the signing and ratification of major international human rights treaties. In particular, Saudi Arabia must revamp its legal system to recognize religious minorities and provide them with basic civil rights and equality under the law, including the right to publicly practice their religion.
- The monarchy should further reign in the religious police and ensure that both Muslims and non-Muslims enjoy the right to worship in private and possess religious material without interference from the state. The Saudi government should also end its criminalization of views that are deemed blasphemous or inconsistent with the State’s official version of Islam.
- Migrant workers must be protected from abusive employers, indentured servitude, and forced prostitution.
- The Saudi regime must reform its intolerant education system domestically and cease funding and providing logistical support to hardline Wahhabi Muslim institutions and organizations in various parts of the world.

REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Area 5,128 sq km

Population 1,220,479 (July 2016 est.)

Religions Protestant 32.1% (Pentecostal/Evangelical/Full Gospel 12%, Baptist 6.9%, Anglican 5.7%, Seventh-Day Adventist 4.1%, Presbyterian/Congregational 2.5%, other Protestant 0.9%), Roman Catholic 21.6%, Hindu 18.2%, Muslim 5%, Jehovah's Witness 1.5%, other 8.4%, none 2.2%, unspecified 11.1% (2011 est.)

Ethnic Groups East Indian 35.4%, African 34.2%, mixed - other 15.3%, mixed African/East Indian 7.7%, other 1.3%, unspecified 6.2% (2011 est.)

Languages English (official), Caribbean Hindustani (a dialect of Hindi), French, Spanish, Chinese

Location Caribbean, islands between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, northeast of Venezuela

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Trinidad and Tobago is a secular democratic state and Hindus generally enjoy fundamental freedoms and basic civil liberties, including equal protection under the law and the freedom to freely and openly practice their faith consistent with constitutional protections and international law.

As in 2014 and 2015, there were no substantial restrictions on religious freedom or attacks on Hindu temples in 2016, although there were reports of state sanctioned discrimination against Indian-Hindus under the new administration.

Although the country's first Indian Hindu female head of state, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, was defeated in general elections by Keith Rowley and the People's National Movement (PNM) in September 2015, the new PNM government made a significant gesture to the Indian-Hindu community, when Prime Minister Rowley held his first official function on Diwali in 2015 and delivered a message of "peace, justice, and unity." Reports of increasing state sponsored racial discrimination have surfaced, however, since the new PNM administration came to power.



The Minister of National Security, for instance, has come under fire for the targeting and mass firings of several Indian origin officers in the Strategic Services Agency. Similarly, the PNM has been criticized for failing to make racially diverse appointments to public offices and state boards.

Moreover, Hindus continued to be disproportionately affected by violence, as the country experienced a high rate of crime and a "public security crisis." It is not clear, however, whether the violence was religiously or racially motivated or simply general criminal activity. According to Freedom House, "The government has struggled in recent years to address violent crime. Many Trinidadians of East Indian descent, who are disproportionately targeted for abduction, blame the increase in violence and kidnapping on government and police corruption." Human rights groups, such as Amnesty International, accused security forces of using excessive force to deal with the high crime rate.

Furthermore, discrimination based on sexual orientation was an ongoing issue, with legislation remaining in place criminalizing same-sex relationships. At the same time, there is increasing support for LGBTQ rights from some quarters, including religious leaders.

Trinidad's human rights record came under review by the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group in May 2016 for several

issues, including: domestic violence; human trafficking, high rates of violent crime; abuses by security officials; access to justice for vulnerable groups; and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender.

HAF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government must take all necessary steps to provide equal protection under the law to all groups.
- The security forces should also act to protect Indians from violence, while refraining from committing abuses.
- Trinidadian leaders of all backgrounds should also discourage racial and religious stereotypes and hate speech to reduce tensions between the country's two largest communities: Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians and continue to work towards a truly multi-religious and multi-ethnic society built on mutual respect and pluralism.
- The US and the international community should leverage their economic relations with the country to encourage an end to abuses by the police and security forces. Similarly, they should urge the current government to ensure that policies are in place that promote equality and protect the rights of all the country's citizens.

HAF FACT-FINDING, HUMANITARIAN & ADVOCACY PROJECTS

FACT-FINDING MISSIONS

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) launched a new phase in its international human rights work in 2012, when two physicians from HAF visited several UNHCR administered Bhutanese refugee camps in the city of Damak, Nepal, in order to assess the current level of care administered to the refugees and explore areas of need. Subsequently, HAF led a fact-finding mission and medical trip in 2013 to Pakistani Hindu refugee camps in Jodhpur in India's western state of Rajasthan. This trip was followed

by a follow-up trip to the Pakistani Hindu refugee camps in 2015 and a fact-finding mission to Bangladesh and Bangladeshi Hindu refugee camps outside the Indian city of Kolkata that same year.

PAKISTAN HINDU SEVA HUMAN RIGHTS TOUR

HAF sponsored a nationwide US tour in 2016 featuring two leaders, Sanjesh Dhanja and Kiran Kumari, from the esteemed organization Pakistan Hindu Seva Welfare Trust (PHS), a non-political, secular, non-profit, non-discriminatory and progressive humanitarian charity organization officially registered with the government of Pakistan. PHS strives for the betterment of deprived communities in Pakistan and also provides legal support for different victims affected by human rights violations throughout the Sindh province. During this tour, Sanjesh and Kiran met with government officials, leaders of NGOs, and members of the Hindu American community throughout the United States to bring awareness of the daily struggles of Hindus living in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Sanjesh and Kiran shared their stories of fending off kidnappers targeting young Hindu girls, advocating for groundbreaking legislation granting enfranchisement to bonded laborers, and joining all religious and social minorities in their quest to be treated as equal citizens of their country.

BHUTANESE AMERICAN REFUGEE PROJECT

In the 1990s, nearly 110,000 ethnic Nepalis (primarily Hindus with smaller numbers of Buddhists) were ethnically cleansed from Bhutan under the "One Nation, One People" policy and sought refuge in United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) camps in Nepal. After Bhutan refused to repatriate any of the refugees, several Western countries, including the US, agreed to resettle these ethnic Nepalis.

Approximately 90,000 Bhutanese refugees have thus far been resettled across the US and struggle to maintain their religion, culture, and traditions. Although resettlement agencies and faith-based organizations have provided rudimentary services to the refugees, they remain in dire need of additional assistance.

In response to their acute needs, HAF launched The Bhutanese American Project in March 2014 in support of the resettled Bhutanese Hindus across the country. In 2016, HAF distributed \$12,000 in grants to several Bhutanese community organizations to support Bhutanese community-led efforts to procure space for religious gatherings and social services, transportation to Hindu temples and other cultural institutions, or youth mentorship programs and field trips. Moreover, through the project, HAF hosted its first Bhutanese Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill in 2014 to generate awareness of the plight of the Bhutanese American community and human rights in Bhutan.

SRI LANKA HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY PROJECT

In 2015, HAF led an initiative seeking justice for war crimes victims in Sri Lanka. Specifically, HAF provided Nobel Prize nominee and award-winning filmmaker, Callum Macrae, with a human rights grant to create an updated version of his acclaimed documentary film, *No Fire Zone: The Killing Fields of Sri Lanka* and a new shorter 30 minute advocacy video for an international tour and screenings for policy makers and the public.

The project was aimed at advocating for an independent international inquiry and judicial process for war crimes committed by all side during Sri Lanka's 26 year civil war, ahead of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) session in Geneva in September 2015. Although the UNHRC ultimately allowed the Sri Lankan government to pursue a domestic inquiry into the civil war, the project shed light on the war crimes committed during the civil war and the need to provide justice to the victims.

PAKISTAN HINDU REFUGEE REHABILITATION PROJECTS

HAF in conjunction with Sindhi American organizations and Universal Just Action Society (UJAS), the primary NGO assisting Pakistani Hindu refugees in Jodhpur, launched the Pakistan Refugee Medical Seva and Health Initiative project to protect and maintain the physical and mental health of approximately 3,000 Pakistani Hindus living in refugee

camps and settlements in and around Jodhpur, India. Through the project, HAF will provide an annual grant to UJAS for the provision of mobile medical services, health education and prevention awareness programs, and the creation of a medical clinic.

HAF previously supported projects that addressed the refugees' needs in the following areas: (1) Education; (2) Shelter; (3) Warm Blankets; and (4) Lighting/Electricity.



PROMOTING DIGNITY, MUTUAL RESPECT,
AND PLURALISM

www.HAFsite.org