



February 21, 2017

Rev. Thomas J. Reese, S.J. - Chairman  
Dr. Daniel Mark - Vice Chairman  
United States Commission on International Religious Freedom  
732 N. Capitol Street, N.W., Suite A714  
Washington, D.C. 20401  
(sent via email)

Dear Chairman Reese and Vice Chairman Mark,

We write to you on behalf of the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), a non-partisan and non-profit advocacy organization serving as a voice for the Hindu American community, to express our deep concerns regarding the report, [Constitutional and Legal Challenges Faced by Religious Minorities in India](#), published on February 3, 2017 by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

After a thorough review of the report, we have found that the assertions made by the author, Dr. Iqtidar Karamat Cheema, do not reflect ground realities regarding religious diversity and the status of minorities in the world's largest democracy, a nation deemed as a friend and ally by the current and previous presidents of the United States of America.

We request a full and unequivocal retraction of this report, and additionally request USCIRF Commissioners and staff to engage with HAF leaders in a meaningful dialogue to discuss our grievances regarding the Commission's continued misrepresentations of India's religious diversity, legal system, and political dynamics.

Based on our analysis, we believe the most egregious errors of the report are:

- Erroneous and misleading representation of government support for religious institutions in India;
- The practical effect of personal status laws on all communities;
- The false equivalency of comparing the scale of past and current predatory proselytization to the recent Ghar Wapsi movement;
- The nature and intent of cow protection laws;
- The assumption that Government of India's Foreign Contribution Regulation Act discriminates against minority organizations and favors Hindu organizations, both in India and abroad; and,
- The assertion that caste-based discrimination is a Hindu religious teaching, rather than a pernicious social problem blighting all Indian religious communities today.

While we understand that restrictions prohibiting USCIRF Commissioners and staff from traveling to India creates an inability to study the country's polity and religious diversity firsthand, as is reflected by the misrepresentations of India in your annual reports, we are perplexed by the decision to commission Dr. Cheema to author this latest publication. Dotted by nefarious connections, Dr. Cheema has associated himself publicly with separatist movements active within India, and supported by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, that have launched terrorist attacks on civilian and government targets and fomented communal violence targeting the Hindu community. These causes include the Babbar Khalsa, a Khalistani organization that is declared a terrorist organization by the author's home country.

Dr. Cheema is also known for perpetuating conspiracy theories that India is fomenting unrest in Pakistan on Khalistan-supported media channels, claims that were rebuked by the Obama Administration during Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's visit to Washington, D.C. in October 2015, and has been deemed as paranoia emanating from Pakistan's military establishment by Ambassador Husain Haqqani, former Pakistani Ambassador to the United States, at a recent Hudson Institute event. Dr. Cheema's remarks on Hindu society and his misquoting of Hindu scriptures also reflect a stereotypical and Hinduphobic attitude towards Hinduism.

In recent media reports, USCIRF stood by its decision to utilize Dr. Cheema by citing his affiliation with the Institute for Leadership and Community Development (ILCD), based in London, United Kingdom. Upon examining the website of ILCD, we believe that this organization lacks the credibility and standing to produce scholars capable of examining India's political, legal, and demographic dynamics, let alone Hinduism's vast scriptural and philosophical treatises. As a United States government agency tasked with advising Congress and the President with religious freedom concerns with respect to our nation's foreign policies, we expect USCIRF to source credible authors for its reports, and to examine the totality of India's democratic institutions, rather than publish misleading and inaccurate accusations that can lead to grave strains on U.S.-India relations.

We recommend that you read the following blogs which elaborate on the factual inaccuracies and assertions of the report, as well as the suspect affiliations and motivations of its author (attached and hyperlinked below):

- [\*\*US Religious Freedom Commission Outsources Its Credibility with Attack on Hinduism and India\*\*](#)  
by Suhag Shukla, HAF Executive Director and Legal Counsel
- [\*\*US Religious Freedom Commission's "Alternative Facts" Attack Hinduism and India\*\*](#)  
by Samir Kalra, HAF Senior Director and Human Rights Fellow

We believe upon reading these blogs, the Commissioners and staff will better appreciate and understand our perspective. If not, we are more than happy to provide additional documentation and analysis.

While we are disappointed by this report and the annual barrage of attacks on India—the only major secular democracy in South Asia—we hope that this will bring an opportunity for establishing sustained dialogue between our organization and the Commissioners, who seek to be a voice for the voiceless.

Should you require any additional information, and to establish a time and place to meet with HAF in the near future, please contact Jay Kansara, HAF Director of Government Relations, at [jay@hafsite.org](mailto:jay@hafsite.org) or 202-223-8222.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



**Suhag Shukla, Esq.**  
Executive Director & Legal Counsel



**Samir Kalra, Esq.**  
Senior Director & Human Rights Fellow



**Jay Kansara**  
Director of Government Relations